NEGOTIATED SPACES AND *KYUKYAW* LIMINALITIES

Life and Community in the Informal Settlements of Mandalay's Ayeyarwady Riverbank

Moe Moe Hlaing

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International Development Research Centre
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Negotiated Spaces and *Kyukyaw* Liminalities: Ruptured Villages and Widened Inequalities in Life and Community in the Informal Settlements of Mandalay's Ayeyarwady Riverbank

Moe Moe Hlaing

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Foreword

Since 2012, the Understanding Myanmar's Development (UMD) series, supported by the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, has sought to enhance knowledge of Myanmar's development processes, strengthen the capacity of Burmese researchers, and encourage them to actively engage the study of development policy and practice. In this first phase of the series, fellowships were given to midcareer researchers to support their work and publication in their respective areas of expertise. In the second phase, though we are continuing to publish under the UMD series banner, the research outputs have emerged directly from a long-term capacity building initiative held at the University of Mandalay, still under the support of IDRC.

In this research, Moe Moe Hlaing looks at the strategies of negotiation used by two informal communities in urban Mandalay. These communities, though contrasting in their livelihoods and their patterns of social organization, have both found ways to survive and sometimes thrive in these challenging spatial settings. This is despite enormous challenges from the outside, including a landscape prone to flooding and local officials who are not always accommodating. The way the communities find opportunity amid these dynamics, particularly the contested dynamics of space, shows the skills of negotiation which have perhaps been picked up on their journey from the rural to the urban.

Moe Moe's tactful approach is a testament to the value in capacity building among Myanmar university academics, as well her own dedication and her improved ability to think critically. As a geographer by training, she already had an ability to understand

landscapes and physical spaces, but through her commitment to our program and a willingness to learn, she has added to this an ethnographic lens in her ability to spend long periods in a community to analyze how patterns, practices and experiences emerge. This monograph showcases these skills in tandem by regularly searching for how people and space are interconnected. Through this approach, the research is a valuable contribution to understanding the lives and strategies of people on the margins of Myanmar's second-largest city, which reveals the need for inclusive urban policies which engage closely with these lived realities.

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, PhD
Director, RCSD

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I would like to express my special thanks to Elliot Lodge, who led the the capacity building project. He helped me in through countless support workshops, directly in my field study, and in developing this research throughout. I received his variable experience and regular hands-on assistance. Even during the time of Covid-19, he helped to work continuously on my project. Together, we were able to carry this project from fieldwork all the way to publication.

In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Edgard Rodriguez from IDRC for placing trust in us to conduct research for improving knowledge for democracy in our country, and IDRC and Canada for supporting this. I would like to thank Kanchana Kulpisithicharoen and RCSD at Chiang Mai University for essential

support to be a research fellow in this program. Dr Thida Htwe Win, Head of Department of Anthropology, University of Mandalay gave me the motivation to participate even as a geographer. Dr Zin Mar Latt, Pro Rector, University of Mandalay helped me throughout work and sometimes accompanied me to the field. Zar Chi Oo supported me with her translation skills and sometimes as a research assistant.

Of most importance, I would like to give thanks to the all the people who participated in this study, especially U Tin Moe Swe and Daw Thein Tin, who first opened their communities to me. They gave me essential information and access to these tight knit communities and took great care of me during my time there.

About the Series

Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar

Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar is a five-year partnership that nurtures a new generation of young actors to promote inclusion, gender equality, respect for diversity, and prosperity for all in Myanmar.

Capacity Building in Knowledge Production

Since 2018, RCSD at Chiang Mai University has coordinated an intensive research and teaching capacity building project with the University of Mandalay. The project was conceived as part of IDRC's larger Knowledge For Democracy Myanmar initiative, and our goal is to support the long-term professional development of researchers at the university through regular critical engagement. We have provided exposure to ideas, methods and research processes in the social sciences, and given them practical tools and opportunities to put learning into action. The project has successfully emerged from a foundation of shared experience and knowledge between the participants and our diverse team of mentors and support staff affiliated with RCSD. It has also been built on the legacy of Ajarn Chayan's long and continuing commitment to empowering young Myanmar researchers, providing a strong case for potential benefits of academic collaboration across the 'global south'.

The first phase of the project focused on the building blocks of qualitative research, with workshops introducing selected concepts in the social sciences which are applicable to the changing

development context of Myanmar and Southeast Asia. We then worked on improving their ability to build towards conducting research by targeting capacity in fundamental skills in research design and methods. This was achieved through specific workshops on several tools, such as writing a literature review and conducting ethnography in the field. RCSD invited this larger group of participants to submit research proposals by harnessing their growth in these research tools. Eight projects were then chosen by a committee to receive research grants and intensive academic support through the second phase of the programme.

These eight projects involve seventeen researchers from a range of academic backgrounds and disciplines, all of whom are women. Throughout 2019 and 2020 the researchers were closely mentored through their data collection and analysis, with RCSD's team in frequent contact to help shape their skills and approach as they worked, including visits to their field sites, workshops in Mandalay and Chiang Mai, and regular online engagement.

Their research covers a range of important academic endeavors across urban and rural settings—from the dry zone to highland ethnic areas—seeking to give thorough accounts of local people's and communities' experiences amid Myanmar's social, economic and environmental challenges. While the program will produce tangible outputs in the form of eight research reports published in the Understanding Myanmar's Development series, we are more proud of the growth we have seen in the research skills of our irrepressible group of committed *sayama*, and the small contribution we have made to restoring Myanmar's university research culture.

In 2021, in spite of the dual challenges of Covid-19 and the tyranny of the Myanmar coup, we have continued to work closely to finish putting together these monographs. RCSD remains committed to continued engagement and collaboration with our colleagues in Myanmar's universities, civil society, and beyond.

Abstract

This monograph focuses on the entangled relationships between physical space and social and economic systems in the slum communities of Myanmar's second-largest city. Centering on two adjacent communities, which have quite drastically different geographies and forms of materiality, it attempts to show how their livelihoods and community organization are shaped by these spaces, and yet also shape the space. The study traces the origins of these communities and the mobilities that brought rural families to settle by the riverbank, and the mobilities that continue today. Based on extensive fieldwork among the communities, the study then calls upon approaches from both human geography and anthropology to analyze of how forms of human agency by actors inside and outside the communities interact and relate to these liminal spaces. Vibrant social dynamics and a constant ability to negotiate a more viable existence are a constant feature.

Though the study is primarily interested in how people and communities negotiate their livelihoods and the spaces which they find themselves in after moving to the big city, it also attempts to remain cognizant of how hostile external factors – such as public discourse towards kyu, state directives against informal communities, natural challenges such as flooding, and the uncompromising urban economy – are a unremitting threat. By providing enlightening case studies into the diversity of slum experiences, the lived realities of these people present a challenge to dominant assumptions and forms of discourse constructed around them.

Keywords: hydropower, slums, informal settlements, urban space, liminality, livelihoods, Mandalay

စာတမ်းအကျဉ်းချုပ်

ဆွေးနွေးညှိနှိုင်းရာနေရာနှင့် ကျူးကျော်မှုများ၏ ကျော်လွန်စည်းအတွင်း ရုန်းကန်လှုပ်ရှားမှုများ၊ မန္တလေးဇော်ဝတီမြစ်ကမ်းဘေးရှိ တရားဝင်အသိအမှတ်ပြုခြင်းမခံရသော အခြေချနေထိုင်သူများ၏ ဘဝနှင့် စုဝေးနေထိုင်ခြင်း။

ဤလေ့လာမှုသည် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏ ဒုတိယအကြီးဆုံးဖြစ်သော မန္တလေးမြို့တော်ရှိ ဆင်းရဲသားအိမ်ခြေမဲ့များ၏ နေထိုင်ရာ နေရာအသွင်အပြင်၊ လူမှုရေးနှင့် စီးပွားရေးစနစ်တွေအကြား ဖြစ်ပေါ်လျက်ရှိသော ရှုပ်ထွေးဆက်နွယ်မှုများအပေါ်မှာ အဓိကထား လေ့လာထားပါသည်။ ၎င်းတို့နေရာ၏ ပထဝီဝင်အခြေအနေနှင့် အသုံးပြုသော ရုပ်ဝတ္ထုပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာ အခြေအနေများ ကွဲပြားခြားနားပြီး နီးကပ်စွာ တည်ရှိနေသော အုပ်စုနှစ်စု အကြောင်းကို ဗဟို ပြုလေ့လာထားသည်။ ထိုသို့ လေ့လာခြင်းအားဖြင့် သူတို့နေထိုင်ရာ နေရာများသည် သူတို့၏ အသက်မွေး ဝမ်းကျောင်းမှုပုံစံနှင့် လူမှုအသိုင်းအဝိုင်းဖွဲ့စည်းမှုပုံစံတွေကို မည်သို့ ပုံဖော်သည်ကို ပြသရန်နှင့် အပြန်အလှန်အားဖြင့်လည်း ၎င်းနေရာအပေါ်မှာ သူတို့၏ပုံစံချမှုကို ပြသရန် ရည်ရွယ်ပါသည်။ ဤအုပ်စုများ၏ မူလဇစ်မြစ်များကို လိုက်လံရှာဖွေခြင်းမှတဆင့် ၎င်းတို့၏ ကျေးရွာဇာတိမှ မြစ်ကမ်းဘေးသို့ ယနေ့ထိတိုင်အောင် အခြေချနေထိုင်ရန် ပြောင်းရွှေ့နေမှုများကိုလည်း ရှာဖွေထားပါသည်။ ဤသုတေသနမှာ ၎င်းအုပ်စု နှစ်စုအတွင်း ထဲဝင်ကျယ်ပြန့်စွာ ကွင်းဆင်းလေ့လာမှုအပေါ် အခြေခံထားပြီး မနုဿဗေဒနှင့် မနုဿပထဝီဝင် ပညာရပ်များမှ လေ့လာနည်းများကို ပူးတွဲအသုံးပြု၍ ထိုအုပ်စုနှစ်စု၏ လူမှုအသိုင်းအဝိုင်းများထဲရှိ အတွင်းနှင့် ပြင်ပ၏ အမျိုးမျိုးသော လုပ်ဆောင်ချက်များနှင့် ၎င်းတို့နှင့် ကျော်လွန်စည်းနယ်မြေများအကြား မည်သို့သော ဆက်စပ်မှုများ ဖြစ်ပေါ်နေသည်ကို သိရှိ

နားလည်ရန် လေ့လာဆန်းစစ်ထားသည်။ သက်ဝင်လှုပ်ရှားမှုများနှင့် ပြည့်နက်နေသော လူမှုဆက်ဆံရေး အသွင်သဏ္ဌာန်များနှင့် ပိုမိုကောင်းမွန်စွာ တည်ရှိရှင်သန်နိုင်ရေးအတွက် အစဉ်မပြတ် ညှိနှိုင်းနိုင်စွမ်းတို့သည် ၎င်းတို့၏ အနာဂတ်ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

ဤသုတေသနသည် မြို့ကြီးတစ်မြို့သို့ ပြောင်းရွှေ့လာပြီးနောက် လူတစ်ဦးချင်းဖြစ်စေ၊ လူအစုအဝေးများအနေနှင့်ဖြစ်စေ၊ စာဝတ်နေရေးနှင့် နေထိုင်ရာမြေနေရာများအတွက် ညှိနှိုင်းဆောင်ရွက်သွားရပုံတို့ကို အဓိက လေ့လာထားသော်လည်း ထိုသို့ပြောင်းရွှေ့နေထိုင်သူများကို အစဉ်အမြဲ အန္တရယ်ပြုလျက်ရှိနေသည့် ပြင်ပအကြောင်းအရာများကိုလည်း ထည့်သွင်းရေးသားထားသည်။ ဥပမာအားဖြင့် ကျူးများအပေါ် အများပြည်သူထားရှိသောအမြင်နှင့် သဘောထားများ၊ တရားဝင် အသိအမှတ်ပြုခြင်းမရှိသော အခြေချနေထိုင်သူများအပေါ် ချမှတ်လျက် ရှိသော အစိုးရမူဝါဒများ၊ ရေကြီးခြင်းကဲ့သို့ သဘာဝဘေးအန္တရာယ်များနှင့် မြို့ပြစီးပွားရေးစနစ် တို့ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ဤသို့ဖြင့် ဆင်းရဲသားအိမ်ခြေမဲ့များ၏ အတွေ့အကြုံမျိုးစုံနှင့် ၎င်းတို့ ရှင်သန်နေသော လက်တွေ့ဘဝများကို အထူးပြုလေ့လာမှုများဖြင့် ၎င်းတို့အပေါ် လွှမ်းမိုး တည်ဆောက်ထားသော အမြင်သဘောထားများနှင့် ယူဆချက်များကို စိန်ခေါ်မှု တစ်ခုအနေဖြင့် ဖော်ပြထားပါသည်။

အဓိကစကားစုများ (Keywords)

ဆင်းရဲသားအိမ်ခြေမဲ့များ၊ တရားဝင်အသိအမှတ်ပြုခြင်း မခံရသော အခြေချနေထိုင်မှုများ၊ မြို့ပြအဖြစ်သတ်မှတ်ထားသောနေရာများ၊ ကျော်လွန်စည်းအတွင်း ရုန်းကန်လှုပ်ရှားမှု၊ အသက်မွေးဝမ်းကျောင်းမှုများ၊ မန္တလေးမြို့တော်။

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INTRODUCTION

This is a study of two adjacent *kyukyaw* communities straddling the Ayeyarwady River in urban Mandalay. At first glance, these communities appear in stark contrast to each other. On the riverbank side of the road is a space crammed full of temporary-looking shelters put together with stray, randomly cobbled together materials, while across the road is a neatly formed area of sturdy urban housing lined up either side of a central path. Despite these differences, both the communities - from the highest levels of government to the people in Mandalay's bustling markets - are collectively defined as *kyukyaw*. The term best translates as a slum or a homeless area, representing an all-encompassing phrasing used throughout Myanmar to refer to people (*kyu*) and communities on the fringes. This language connotes a certain otherness in relation to the regular residents of the city. The informal settlements whose homes form these communities are as equally as diverse in their social and economic lives and relations as they are in their physical manifestations. When viewed together, these two neighboring communities can provide an illuminating picture of these negotiated urban spaces and the forms of liminality they entail.

The people in these communities are a part of a nationwide pattern where large numbers of rural households in Myanmar have left behind their declining, insecure livelihoods in agriculture in pursuit of higher incomes in urban informal labor sectors. Upon arriving in the city, however, their hopes of stable and secure employment are

met only with perhaps even greater challenges, as people are unable to find affordable housing near their places of work and so are forced into seeking different solutions to help negotiate life around their new livelihoods (Forbes, 2014). In Mandalay, this has led to the forming of settlements in often vaguely-defined liminal spaces, such as roadsides, the edges of train tracks, and small sections of sandy riverbank. These spaces are often chosen because of their proximity to community services and places in the city, such as monasteries and schools, but also because they are convenient for dwellers to engage in various livelihood activities, such as informal labor and small-scale trading.

The Myanmar state has consistently been hostile to these communities, backed in their antagonism by local authorities and a popular media which has perpetuated state-led discourses. In recent years laws have been enacted which have had the effect of making it illegal for people to stay in any urban space which is not privately owned. Policy directives have reflected these laws with a stated emphasis on the need "beatify" and develop the cities by "cleaning" them of these people who are seen to dirty the public spaces. Some grander policies aimed at this beautification have been tried and have promptly failed, including a large scheme to offer affordable apartment housing to slum dwellers, relocating them to the outskirts of the city far from their employment. Along with these failed policies, local administration has often been tasked with forcibly removing people from particular sites. In Mandalay, the Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC) has carried out these evictions, which vary in nature from permanently removing communities from their land to short term evictions where people can still return after a short period of time.

Though all the groups are targeted and excluded through connotations attached to *kyukyaw* terminology, the different appearances of the communities seem to strongly indicate the relative degree to which they have been able to negotiate an ability to stay in the space without facing harassment or the threat of removal by state actors. The more permanent appearing community described here, referred to as the Red Cross Kyu (named after their settlement on land formally owned by the Red Cross Foundation), have been able to build their dwellings because

they face no immediate threat of removal from their land, primarily because they have carved out a situation where they occupy space which is privately owned by an uninvolved third party.

Meanwhile, the more disheveled community, Oh Tan Kyu (meaning the pot selling slum community - named after their main form of livelihood), faces a regular and constant threat of removal. But because the space they occupy falls under the purview of two different parts of the state bureaucracy, and because of their skill in negotiating with government actors, attempts to remove them have only ever been temporary. This type of removals is almost performative in nature, where both the community and the authorities play their role in staging a removal for around three days each time. For other communities, however, they have not been able to negotiate such an arrangement as they face forced and permanent removal from their areas of residence.

These spatial dimensions, where communities are constantly negotiating their own liminal positioning, are not only relevant for grasping physical security, but are also central to understanding the varied livelihoods which dominate the communities. Whereas people in the Red Cross Kyu are mainly involved as informal laborers in the nearby sand excavation and transportation industry, the pot selling community is eponymously named after the industry which involves just about all their households. The pot sellers are able to use the vaguely defined liminal space to their advantage, using their position between the river where pots are unloaded and their access to the main road which they regularly encroach upon. The space is a central part of economic life.

In turn, these economic forms are tightly interwoven with forms of social organization in the communities. The semi-collectivized economic system which has been formed through the pot selling industry has led to a tight-knit and cohesive community, which is built upon deep kinship patterns and a leadership structure which reflects the shape of the industry. Meanwhile, the Red Cross Kyu has more diffuse leadership patterns and social systems in a greater state of flux, reflecting the insecurity of sand labor, where workers are subject to the whims and exploitation of far-removed business owners. The materiality of slum communities may provide some

indication, then, of the stability of so-called informal dwellings, but it provides much less of an indication – and perhaps even reflects an inverted relationship – to social and economic security.

These interwoven relationships between physical space and social and economic systems are thus the focus of this monograph. The study calls upon approaches from both human geography and anthropology to provide an analysis of how forms of human agency by actors inside and outside the communities interact and relate to these liminal spaces. These two adjacent communities provide enlightening case studies into the diversity of slum experiences which often challenge assumptions about them. The study is primarily interested in how people and communities negotiate their livelihoods and the spaces which they find themselves in after moving to the big city, yet it attempts to remain cognizant of how hostile external factors – such as public discourse towards *kyu*, state directives against informal communities, natural challenges such as flooding, and the uncompromising urban economy – are a constant threat.

To explore these relationships, the monograph is divided into three main sections. Chapter two provides a more thorough account of the broader context in which these communities are situated, exploring Myanmar's rural decline and associated migration, the history and patterns of settlement of slum communities in Mandalay, a viewpoint on how these communities are locally categorized, and an overview of the forms of discourse and policy which has created the hostile environment. Chapter three compares the physical natures of the two communities at the center of this study, tracing their histories of settlement, investigating how they have managed to variously negotiate the liminal spaces to achieve respective degrees of security, and how they continue to conceive of their present-day spatial reality.

Finally, chapter four explores the livelihoods and economic systems of both communities, how these are interconnected to social structures, kinship and leadership structures, before the conclusion attempts to tie together the threads connecting physical space with economic and social relations. More immediately, the research questions here indicate the direction of enquiry that this

research set out on, and the literature review that follows it introduces some key context and concepts which help inform the analysis, enabling the in-depth local accounts contained in this monograph to relate to questions on the nature of liminal space and urban livelihoods in a changing Myanmar.

Research Questions

- How have the two communities settled in their respective areas, and how do they continue to negotiate aspects of liminality present in both the physical space and in the framing of them by the state and external forms of discourse?
- How are the livelihood activities and economic structures of these adjacent communities tied to these liminal spaces, and how have these dynamics shaped the community's respective levels of social cohesion and leadership structures?

Literature Review

Slums and urban transformations in Myanmar

There is a relative lack of literature looking at the experiences of people in informal setttlements in Myanmar, particularly in the Mandalay context, which highlights the need for a thorough account of these lived experiences. The work of Forbes (2014) on informal settlements in Yangon provides some interesting context on the factors pushing rural dwellers towards the city, including the poor economic conditions of landless farmers in the countryside who have faced stagnating wages and seasonal unemployment. Similar to what this study found, migrants come to Yangon seeking more stable, year-around employment, citing the perceived demand for factory labor and their improved ability to use technology to communicate back to their villages. Some migrants have also fled drought or environmental disasters back home, while others note the improved healthcare and education in the city.

The parallels of this study with Forbes' (2019) findings in Yangon also extend to both the nature of why migrants settle in these central areas, and the process by which the state prioritizes eviction. Forbes shows how urban centers and sub-centers are the major places for informal laborers to find work, but yet the only form of affordable housing is on the periphery. Workers find themselves unable to bear the cost of commuting on a daily basis, and so are forced to find informal places to settle nearer to their place of work. In both Yangon and Mandalay, the reality of people being unable to afford urban life leads to the formation of these major slum settlement areas in these vaguely defined urban spaces. The instinct of the state to resort to eviction, meanwhile, is founded on a misguided understanding of how people live, and, over time, it leads to a breakdown of trust in the relationship between the state and these communities. State land use planning has also failed to place any priority on affordable urban housing, Forbes noted. Of further interest here is how Rhoads (2018) traces how the policies used by the Myanmar state today, in evicting people and creating forms of illegality in urban settings, closely echo precedents set under British colonial administration.

Striking a similar tone, Win Myint Oo (2010) contributes a broad account on the livelihoods and the prevalence of poverty in Yangon slums, focusing on households living in the expanse of slum settlements in Hlaing Thayar Township, a now densely populated area home to migrant workers mainly employed in garment factories. A range of poverty indicators show that the community faces large challenges in different aspects of human development, with the authors particularly highlighting poor access to education and family planning as key areas for intervention to support youth and younger households. In response to these challenges however, some authors have seemed to advocate for housing projects which claim to be participatory, but which seem to be advocating for a paternalistic model of resettlement (Myint Naing & Nitivattananon, 2020). This perspective echoes the failed policy of the past, which failed to fully engage with lives and perspectives of people in these communities which are represented in this monograph.

Elsewhere, another study based in Yangon slums centered on debt relations in these communities, situating informal labor as a form of capitalist extraction of value in these communities (Campbell, 2020). This view of these diverse economic models in the informal sector as an inherent part of local capitalist structures echoes the experiences in the sand extraction economy detailed here.

In the Mandalay context, the research on informal settlements is even more limited than those investigating these spaces in Yangon, but there has been some recent work more broadly covering the changing urban spaces and governance in Myanmar's second-largest city. One paper looks at the politics of local government and control in the city, arguing that the General Administrative Department serves a function linking state and society by exercising power in ways that are both informal as well as governmentalized (Sanchez & Su Su Myat, 2021). This analysis could no doubt be extrapolated to slum areas, where these forms of negotiated governance are likewise observed and are described in this research in my analysis of the performative nature of state eviction efforts, for example.

Another paper based in Mandalay's urban landscapes used the methodology of photo routes to analyze the subjective gazes of young people in how they viewed the city's urban transformation (Puttilli, 2020). Here, the photo route tool was effective in stimulating the students to form their own critical view towards the everyday geography of the city, and its inherent forms of inclusion and exclusion.

There are parts of this growing literature on Myanmar's urban geography which are tangentially of help in situating this study, particularly in placing it within the contested context of state efforts to control and enclose public spaces and "clean" these areas of *kyukyaw*. But there are also parts of the more recent literature which closely resemble the negotiated community life in the two communities studied here, such as Campbell's (2020) description of the nature of informal economic models, and Sanchez and Su Su Myat's (2021) description of local governance dynamics. A recently published thesis on livelihood recovery and community belonging in relocated Yangon communities highlights the need to

restore these essential components for people to feel settled (Cornish, 2020). Beyond this, the accounts of Forbes (2014, 2019) reflect the only real efforts to research how the dynamic lives of people in these communities and how their social and economic structures relate to the physical space. This monograph then, provides an essential contribution to complement this existing work through its deep, nuanced ethnographic accounts of everyday life in these negotiated spaces.

However, one final piece of research is of great use in situating this research within this distinctly Myanmar discursive context, Roberts (2020) recently investigated the language of *kyukyaw* and its connotations. The term, notes Roberts, can both be a verb meaning to occupy or encroach, or a noun referring directly to squatters or slum areas – in both uses it evokes strong negative sentiments, closely reflecting perceptions towards these people which are investigated here in chapter two. Interestingly, Roberts notes that the use of the term in everyday settings is a relatively recent phenomena, as she traces how broader perceptions towards newcomers shifted from viewing them as *doche*, meaning a natural process of urban expansion, to the connotation behind *kyukyaw* of an encroachment taking place. Something has changed, notes Roberts, from the former perception of shared suffering under years of the junta, to a recent feeling of otherness towards people deemed to be living outside the structured community, which has been weaponized by state actors. This monograph further explores these themes in the Mandalay context, although interestingly observes some potential movement back towards inclusive language during the Myanmar Spring of 2021 in response to the military coup.

Liminality and negotiating urban spaces

The analysis of the social and economic relations of these communities, and the interconnectedness of these patterns with particular spatial dynamics, calls upon two closely related concepts which, it should be noted, merely serve as guidance to the author in this research endeavor. The first is liminality, which refers to both the social phenomenon of being 'in-between' stages or categories of social life, as well as spatial liminality in tangible yet

vaguely defined urban spaces. The second conceptual field concerns patterns of negotiation, meaning the often carefully considered strategies used by people and communities to negotiate the limitations of their external, contested urban environments. This approach tends to suggest a degree of agency is present in their actions, the nature of which at times may extend to patterns which are helpfully conceptualized as *"everyday resistance"*. These two concepts will be briefly explored here alongside a discussion of their use in the field sites.

The concept of liminality was popularized, and endures, through the work of Victor Turner. While Turner (1967) was primarily interested in the *"betwixt and between"* period between people occupying different identities, and the larger possibilities this entailed as the suspension of 'normal' modes of social action could bring about changed understandings or even social structures, the concept has since been used more generally to describe physical spaces which form transitional zones, and how people within these spaces occupy them and negotiate identities. Bhabha (1994, p.4) is prominent in developing this approach to liminality, where the *"interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibilities of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy"*. Other scholars have approached different physical spaces, often vaguely defined public areas or borders of different types, to investigate how identities are negotiated, discourses are reshaped and hierarches potentially reexamined.

One of these is Sletto & Palmer (2017), who explored the liminality of open urban spaces in Jallah, Liberia, which serve multiple social functions, both public and private. They describe, through rigorous observation, how these spaces facilitate movement and encounters of bodies in the manifold rhythms of the everyday. The paper is helpful in its description of urbanity in flux, which closely echoes the liminal urban spaces of this study. It describes boundaries as both porous and malleable, which allows social functions to shift across spatial typology, producing mobilities and rhythms which reflect these settings, much like the forms of movement, trade and social activity which occur along Mandalay's riverbanks.

Cocker (2012) explores how border areas become sites of *"suspended identity"* allowing the presence of *"momentary lawlessness"*. The liminal context of border crossings, where contemporary forms of mobility are present, provide this state of constant flux. Their analysis gives insights which can be adopted with regards to other contexts which are similarly "transient, shifting, disconcerting, and ambiguous," such as these liminal urban boundaries with their own governmental borders. With more direct reference to the physical characteristics of natural spaces and how this forms liminalities, Meethan (2012) studies beaches as an interface between dry land and the sea. As is the case on the riverbanks, the study gives insight on how they are not only a place of work but also function as human habitats, and how this dynamic between physical and social function is at the essence of liminal understandings.

Another piece of work looks at Omonia Square in Athens, Greece, and how it serves as a liminal space for internal migrants. What first emerged as a settlement area in the 1970s, is still now a prominent gathering point for migrants coming to the city. Despite efforts to renovate the space for the 2004 Olympic Games, the space continues to be central to the lives of migrants, both in a practical sense for its closeness to forms of employment, and in how it brings meaning through its spatial mosaic which provides for liminal identities (Noussia & Lyons, 2009).

This research does not attempt to wade deeply into any conceptual territory concerning the nature of such liminalities, but, building on the conceptual work discussed here, it merely attempts to use this tool to understand the temporal and spatial dynamics of the riverbanks, the roadsides and the everything in-between which are occupied by these informal settlers. As a chaotic urban hub, Mandalay is full of these liminal, hybrid spaces which embody different identities and agencies by those who negotiate them and pass through them. It is conceivable to view these spaces as not only opportunities for actors on the fringes of cities to take advantage of these vagaries, but as also having the potential to bring about changed social understandings and realities.

The community of pot sellers embodies such liminal possibilities in its positioning as a transitional zone between the river and the

road, between the public and the private, and between the formal and the informal. It is a transitional zone which can be governed and managed by different two governmental departments at disparate levels of the state infrastructure, defined through its stages of transition on the boundary line between these two departments. The physical landscape is itself open to change and is very much part of this transition, as the water level and seasonality manifestly changes the way the space is viewed, governed and negotiated by different actors. The Red Cross Kyu, meanwhile, is caught between possessing aspects of liminality in its status as a space which is not quite private, yet not quite public, and the points of classification, differentiation and discourse which this brings. Both of these communities, as earlier alluded to, are also caught up in the liminal discourse of *kyukyaw* and the changing social reality this entails.

The need to also engage closely with the agencies of the people in these communities warrants a further focus on patterns of negotiation in informal settlements. Of great use as a reference point for engaging with how communities negotiate their own urban surroundings is Ockey's (1997) study of how informal communities in Bangkok form political structures depending on their particular local forms of social organisation, to pursue their right to stay in their homes. In Bangkok's Trok Tai and Ban Khrua, Ockey (2004) identified how the communities grew to learn democratic values, developing new tactics for negotiating the fragile parliamentary structure in Thailand at the time. He traced how they developed practical knowledge for dealing with bureaucrats and upper-class policymakers, forming leadership structures which were more representative of the community, which effectively coordinated their patterns of resistance.

Ockey analyses these patterns in parallel with a discussion around James Scott's analysis of the everyday resistance of the peasantry. These "weapons of the weak" were Scott's (1985) attempt to illuminate the less visible strategies of resistance by the lower classes. Where dominant power relations exist to make overt forms of large-scale resistance or political movements less possible, he argues that in reality defiant behaviors are more common and more effective than is generally acknowledged. These patterns of everyday

resistance are described as “foot-dragging, evasion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander and sabotag," and some of them can be seen in the patterns of Mandalay’s slum dwellers.

For example, during the cleaning period, they are seen to be complying with the law and respecting the government workers who come to move them. But in reality they are just performing their role, and day by day they will move back, and they will feign ignorance when they are approached again. Ockey (1996), for his part, seemingly concludes that the negotiating patterns of Bangkok’s informal settlers, while possessing characteristics of these actions, also rely heavily on both conventional resistance as well as carefully managed relationships with those holding more political influence. Likewise, Mandalay’s slum dwellers are not always engaging in patterns of resistance but are also carefully forming effective leadership structures and forging relationships with those in power. At times this may extend to resistance, but ‘patterns of negotiation’ is perhaps the more accurate descriptor as it acknowledges their capacity to understand their external environment and navigate their existence around it.

To understand how these patterns of negotiation are formed, it is helpful to look at how community strategies are often under-recognized, or even targeted, by external policy and discourse. There are a number of interesting studies that contribute to a conceptual understanding of how public discourse construct ‘slum’ communities and how this is reflected in government policy towards them. Simon (2011) argues that discursive practices have a way of ensuring urban dynamics of cities are often lost in the process of planning and policy, and the depersonalization of slums through language and practice, with the result that their diversity and vibrancy are neglected. Lacerda (2014) provides an interesting example of how the Brazilian government creates a discourse of *favelas* in order to justify their policies towards them, with favelas evoking something in the public imagination that is far removed from the reality of the social lives present there.

The failure by states, in Myanmar and elsewhere, to fully engage with the lived experiences of people in these communities, how they negotiate the limitations of space and livelihood, is the is a

central cause of failed urban planning policy. As Sattherthwaite, Mitlin and Patea (2011) argue, state actors have struggled to engage with the informal economic patterns of these communities and how these are tied up in the urban spaces in which they occupy, while the state has also inadequately engaged in local forms of urban governance and democratization to understand the pressures and demands of these communities. Research, such as this, can at least help contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences, livelihoods and patterns of negotiation by people in these communities. These patterns engaged in by so-called slum dwellers reflect dynamic forms of agency which at times resemble resistance, yet at other times resemble mere adaptive strategies. An approach to understanding negotiated lives and livelihoods amid these liminal spaces can hopefully contribute to building policy which is more locally engaged and holistic, to overcome the divisive rhetoric of othering which is so commonly associated with slum dwellers. This monograph, while providing these thorough accounts of social and economic reality, frequently reflects back on the ideas of liminality and strategies of negotiation.

Research Methods

This research is primarily based in the two communities referenced in this introduction. The first is the pot selling community, locally called Oh Tan Kyu, and the second is the sand worker community, locally called the Red Cross Kyu. These two communities were selected because of their distinctly different livelihood characteristics, community formations and forms of identity provided interesting potential for a comparative study.

Figure 1.1 Satellite image of Mandalay urban area and the Ayeyarwady River running to its west. The red box shows the area comprising the two study areas *Source: Google Maps*

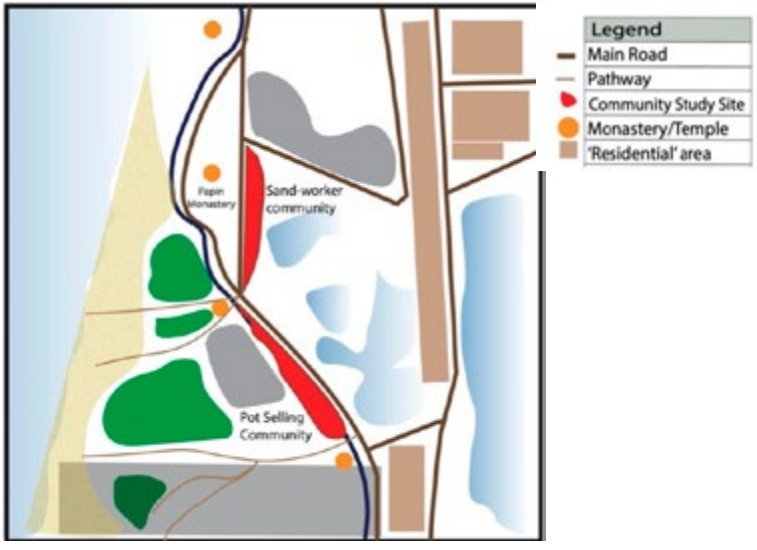

Figure 1.2 The two study areas, shown in red, either side of the main road running north to south

As shown in the map above in red, Oh Tan Kyu comprises 150 simply constructed temporary huts near the riverbank, with most of the community engaging in the mobile pot selling economy as their main livelihood. The Red Cross Kyu is made up of around 100 more permanent houses in a fixed space inside the urban area on the other side of the road, with most of the community involved in the sand extraction industry. These descriptions are kept very brief here to avoid repetition as they are a main focus of chapter three. The relationship between these physical dynamics and their identities and livelihoods is a key part of this monograph. Further, chapter two provides detailed context to situate these communities within the broader urban space and dynamics of Mandalay's, Myanmar's second largest city and northern hub.

This research was conducted primarily using ethnographic methods, supplemented with some techniques from human geography. Over a period of around two and a half years, I built up relationships of trust in the community which enabled me to spend significant, albeit sporadic, time there. While I was not able to stay in the community due to safety concerns, between my own teaching duties I visited the community and spent lengthy and regular time with families. In the beginning there was some apprehension both from me and from them. In engaging with the pot sellers, for instance, I had to begin as a buyer of pots. Gradually these barriers broke down, people welcomed me into their lives and their homes and enabled me to form a holistic understanding.

From this initial introduction, I identified several key informants who were able to provide me some overall insights into the forms of social organisation that are present in the community, and a basic understanding of the types of livelihoods, strategies and challenges here. I spoke to community leaders; both those in formal political positions as well as informal kinship or business leaders. This was important for understanding processes of governance, and they also introduced me to those at the local government office who had engagements with the communities. I interviewed five of them across various levels of administration. Monks at the local monastery were also important key informants for their different perspective across the informal space.

These key informants remained important throughout the study, and I kept coming back to them as new questions and dynamics emerged. From this beginning I was able to safely, ethically and effectively becoming immersed in the community. I conducted in-depth interviews through snowball sampling, moving from house to house while also being cognizant of the need to gain perspectives from a diverse range of community people – young and old, male and female, and different kinship and social groups. In total, I interviewed 36 people who were members of the pot selling community and the sand worker community, as well as others adjacent to the community in different ways.

But beyond these more in-depth interviews, other ethnographic tools were used throughout my time in and around the communities. I had countless informal conversations with people as they went about their lives, and also regularly observed, and sometimes participated in community activities, such as small and informal work tasks, community meetings, gambling and game playing. Forms of observation were particularly important for understanding how their livelihoods, as pot sellers and sand workers respectively, played a role in how the communities functioned.

As it became apparent that their respective interactions with the urban spaces, boundaries and liminal areas became central to this research, I used tools from my own profession as a geographer to study this. I looked at how the various government actors mapped and defined these spaces, how the boundaries were formally drawn, then I asked some villagers to draw mental maps of the space around them, eliciting a picture from them of how space was used and how space shifted seasonally, and I used my own technical skills to map these various interpretations into cross-sections. It was helpful to use these maps and viewpoints alongside the ethnographic material.

Elsewhere, I was frequently monitoring local sources referring to these communities, in order to gain a dynamic image of how 'kyu' discourse is socially constructed. I use news articles, policy documents produced by national and local governments, and social media postings, as well as everyday vernacular around Mandalay to look at how the communities relate to these outside constructions.

With such regular, ongoing interactions with these communities in different forms, I systematically compiled this data, fully transcribing both interview transcripts and field notes, and translating them into English. This methodical approach enabled frequent analysis and an iterative process whereby I would always return with more questions and constantly seek a more rounded understanding.

2

INTERNAL MIGRATION IN MYANMAR AND THE LIMINAL SPACES OF URBANIZATION IN MANDALAY

Over recent decades Myanmar has seen an increase in migratory flows from rural areas to large cities, particularly Yangon and Mandalay. This has been the result of broader changes in the country's political landscape, and accompanying shifts in law, the economy and society. The cronyism and ineptitude at the national level has particularly weakened the economic potential for people working in the country's agricultural sectors. The slum communities that have emerged in Mandalay (and Yangon) which are often mobile in nature, are a consequence of these trends, as former farmers seek to establish a better livelihood in the cities and yet face continued forms of insecurity after moving. What has subsequently been forged can be described as types of liminal spaces in these expanding and urbanizing cities, with people straddled between notions of permanence and temporariness, often at once a part of the city life and landscape, yet always being seen as living on the fringe of local notions of society at-large.

This chapter first traces how the decline in Myanmar's rural economy led to a surge in the migration of people to Mandalay in search of better opportunities, particularly highlighting the impact of isolationist economic policies, and unfavorable land laws. Next, the chapter explores the patterns of settlement of slum dwellers and communities across Mandalay, paying close attention to the

emergence of them into different categories which variously entail particular connotations of how and why they stay in certain spaces. Based on these notions, it then explores how social and state discourses have evolved to describe, categorize and attempt to limit these communities, and how government policy at local and national levels reflects such discourses. The chapter will provide context and backdrop for the discussions that follow which more explicitly reference the lives of people in the two adjacent communities of study.

Decline in the Rural Economy and the Post 1988 Surge in Urban Migration in Myanmar

During Myanmar's 'socialist period' from 1962-1988, under strict nationalist military rule, the economy was largely based on agriculture. According to Yadana Soe (2018), on 26th December 1963 a government policy came into effect which mandated that "all big enterprises and businesses were to be nationalized and managed by the state. This included businesses that involved trade, and the price of rice and paddy were also put under the control of the government". Farmers were prohibited from managing their crops on their own, instead forced to sell paddy outputs to co-operatives at a set price determined by the state. Even when crop yields were not as high as the targeted amount, farmers were still obliged to sell that amount to the co-operatives, which left farmers cash-poor and devastated by the policy.

Dubbed the "Burmese way to socialism", this involved implementing both short and long-term projects, particularly in the agricultural sector. Factories were built across specified parts of the country, with farmers forced to grow designated crops for these factories. The debilitating consequences of these policies were neglected in this context of mandated production targets, exacerbated by climactic factors, plant disease, deteriorating soil conditions, and obscured market rates of output and pricing. Even when crops were exported abroad, the price was still set by the state. Many rural Burmese, including my own grandparents' generation, feel that the situation reached its lowest point in 1985 as agricultural productivity, along with agricultural exports to foreign countries

- stifled by state restrictions - declined further. This period led to a prolonged deterioration in the rural economy and great hardship for farming communities.

After taking over the reins of government in September 1988, the SLORC shifted tack on economic reform, beginning with lifting of some parts of the so-called socialist economic system. According to Myat Thein (2004), in November 1988 the foreign investment law was introduced, and in March 1989, market oriented economic policies were officially adopted by the state. The SLORC government's market liberalization policies theoretically lifted restrictions on activities in the private sector and allowed business to engage in external trade. In reality, however, state-led development and resource concessions prevailed in an environment of increased wealth concentration and cronyism. Further, it was clear to most observers that the government was increasingly prioritizing urban economic growth above rural development.

The urbanization of Myanmar's cities is closely linked to the political processes in this era and the relationship with urban economic growth. According to Findlay et al. (2016), while there was improved GDP growth, both nationally and in the agricultural sector, poor administration at the national level led to distorted patterns of growth and far less equal income distribution. Myanmar cities grew much more rapidly during the 1990s than over the previous decades as investment increased in Yangon and Mandalay in particular. The increase of urban growth and sprawl in these cities after the period of economic liberalization in particular was clear, and Tin Moe Lin (2010) argues that the social and economic fabric of Mandalay has been heavily influenced by the significant political changes in that period.

As a result, it was largely the period after 1988 which led to the large movement of people to urban areas. People in communities along Mandalay's riverbank cite social and economic rupture during this era as determining their decision to move to the city, as the gap between rural and urban incomes grew. A 45-year-old man who lives in Oh Tan Kyu and works as a pot seller, recalled how he was formerly a laborer in Myan Chan Township, around 60 miles from Mandalay, and his wife worked in harvesting in the groundnut field. Back in those days they only had seasonal work

during periods of planting and harvesting. Sometimes they had no regular income and even while farming they could only earn wages of 1300-1400 kyat per day[1]. This income wasn't even enough for food for their family, he and his wife said, so they thought they could escape poverty by moving to the city.

Another resident of Mandalay riverbank settlements was U Maung Nyein, who was previously a soldier during the socialist era and is now a respected elder in the community. After leaving the army following the political crisis of 1988, he decided not to return to his native rural village because of the lack of gainful agricultural employment. Instead, he began selling betel nuts in Mandalay as a mobile seller living in temporary shelters.

U Maung Nyein also cited the lack of available land in rural areas, which was closely associated with the post-1988 dictatorship, as farmers lost land in the crony-dominated economy. During this era, the military government notoriously dominated Myanmar's landscape, grabbing land from villages and distorting the agricultural sector. Most notably, the 1991 Management Law of the Vacant, Fallow and Virgins Lands and the Foreign Investment Law of 1988 allowed the large scale land appropriation in favor of government cronies and businesses (McCarthy, 2016), as cooperatives, joint venture businesses and private businesses were invited to make crony investments in the agricultural sector at the expense of small-scale landholders. Reflecting this, one early settler in the pot selling community, U Kyaw Oo, said "during the military government era, they built dams and grabbed my farmland in the process. The land that was leftover was so small that I could no longer grow paddy rice."

Moreover, environmental factors were also prominently cited among people who moved from rural areas to the big city. Farmers who migrated to Mandalay felt that decades of government

1. Currently 1400 kyat is roughly equivalent to around 1 USD per day, and although this may have been worth more in the 1980s and 1990s than now, it was very much a poverty wage. The value of the kyat fluctuated significantly during this era (and still does to a degree today), so it is difficult to accurately estimate its previous value.

mandated crop production since the 1960s had played a role in worsening soil quality. They also observed that a lack of rainfall and prolonged periods of drought in Myanmar's Dry Zone[2] was occurring during this period, perhaps as a result of broader climatic patterns, but also perhaps because of the result of the damaging forestry policies of the military government. A 45-year-old man who previously owned five acres of land in his native village, said that crop production and his income gradually suffered during Ne Win's reign as a result of devastating weather patterns and drought.

Under the successive transitional governments of U Thein Sein (Prime Minister 2007-2010 and President 2011-2016), land prices including the farmland price increased dramatically, particularly in the period after 2012. One reason was that farmlands were often not used to grow crops, but instead sold to land investors for large-scale use. With the boom in the real estate market, there were more cases of homelessness as landless dwellers searched for opportunities further afield. As the government could not solve the problems pertaining to land rights and land use, the number of squatters continued to rise.

Rural people who formerly relied upon agriculture through these successive decades, especially in the central Dry Zone, faced immense hardship in their agricultural activities because of the overwhelming absence of good governance. Most notably, agricultural laborers who didn't own farmland were left jobless. The pot selling community's leader, U Tin Moe Shwe, whose family is from Yatapo Village where jobs became gravely scarce, told of the hard times faced as a farm worker in this period. When the village farmers planted paddy rice he would work as a daily wage laborer in their farms. He cleared the weeds in the paddy field and during the harvest time he worked as hard as he could, but still only received between 1,000 to 2,000 kyat per day. The job

2. The Dry Zone is a large area in Central Myanmar comprising most of Bago, Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay Divisions. It has a relatively flat topography, is deforested and has a dry climate prone to drought and flash flooding. The area faces increasingly severe food security issues.

was seasonal and irregular, meaning the money he earned wasn't enough for food throughout the year. Therefore, he and his wife went to Lat Pan Kone, where there were plenty of jobs in the upper part of Myanmar. However, they both contracted malaria and so returned to their village, before finally coming to Gaw Wein Jetty in Mandalay in 2002, where his sister had been previously staying.

Another local woman, Daw Thein Kyi, originally from Kyauk Yit village, Myaung Township, Sagaing Division, also used to work on a farm earning around 1,000 kyat per day. Like many, work was available only in particular seasons and the wage was not enough. "At the village, there is not much work to do because in the rainy season all the river water comes in. There is a job for us only when the villagers grow crops or in the growing season," she said.

During the same period, the urban morphology of Mandalay has witnessed significant changes. The construction of modern residential and commercial buildings has proliferated across the city, with new urban infrastructure and construction industries extending and expanding the urban area of Mandalay, also increasing the demand for labor in the city. This demand has increased opportunities for improved incomes in urban areas. Some large companies not only provide daily wages of 5000 to 10000 kyat per day—much higher than in the rural economy—but also give temporary shelter for workers and their families to live in during the construction period. Higher daily wages in various construction projects has been one major 'pull' cause of rural to urban migration.

Daw Thein Kyi's situation is one example of the emerging construction industry leading to urban migration. Her family neither owned farmland nor their own house in her native village, and so her and her children had to live in her parents' house. Some of her friends gradually moved to Mandalay and other cities to find a more well-paying job. She uses a common Myanmar proverb *ye kyi ya myat nu ya* to describe her predicament, which translates as the idea of people needing to become more mobile to get a better job. When workers came to the city they were given permission to build their own huts in the company's area, she said.

However, when construction projects are completed, most manual laborers become unemployed and entire families are left without a

place to stay. These unemployed people are generally not willing to go back to their native rural villages, and instead seek employment in the informal sectors and as unskilled laborers. The daily wage of a manual laborer is considered just enough for daily food and expenses, but not for a shelter to live together with their family. Because the land value and rental fees are very high in Mandalay and the cost of food is high compared to rural areas, many of the workers become landless. In reality, although a small proportion of these laborers can live in rental houses that are close to their employment, most of them cannot. They therefore squat in the liminal spaces beside railway lines, near markets, around bus stop and along the banks of the mighty Ayeyarwady River.

Emergence of Slum Communities in Mandalay's Liminal Spaces

Distribution patterns and mobility

A large number of the informal slum groups moved to the Mandalay from villages in the surrounding areas of Myin Chan Township, Taung Thar Township, Myaung Township, Sagaing Township, and other nearby areas. They were mostly landless and made a living as wage laborers on the landowners' plantations/ farms in the village. As the previous section explained, these people have taken the risk of moving to the city because the incomes in rural villages are extremely low and they could find employment only during the planting and harvesting seasons.

Figure 2.1 Upon arriving in the city, migrants build temporary shelters in unused spaces

Figure 2.2 Clothes out to dry on the riverbank, reflecting the temporary lives of informal settlers *Source: Stephen Lahpai*

Figure 2.3 Major flow of migrants from villages in Central Myanmar to Mandalay's informal settlements *Source: Google Maps*

Some of these people have existing connections with those who have already moved to the city, so they come with the help of their friends or relatives. As they settle, in many cases they invite and support other villagers to come and work in the city alongside

them. It is clear across these communities that those who come to Mandalay tend to form social, and often economic, groupings or support systems with those who come from villages near to their own, or with those have shared experiences working on the same construction sites.

These people all work in all different workplaces and sectors depending on their specific skills. Some become masonry workers at the construction sites, while others become sand workers (loading and unloading the sand on the trucks and construction sites), with some involved in the sand industry even working on large ships on the river. Other members of these communities became sellers of earthen pots, while others partake in different forms of informal employment such as selling traditional Burmese snacks and drinks at Mandalay's bus stations. They are generally categorized and understood collectively as basic wage laborers of the city, with their skills and labor filling the evolving needs of the city as Mandalay continues to spread and develop.

Mandalay is the primary choice for many internal migrants because it is the nearest large city within fifty miles of many smaller rural towns in central Myanmar, and it is also accessible by water transportation. According to local government data provided by MCDC, in the Mandalay urban area there are 17,772 informal households. They can be found across several of Mandalay's urban areas: vacant land under electric towers, at the bus stops, along the railway line and along the riverbank. The MCDC collects slum housing data and counts the numbers of households and population – though the most recent comprehensive data comes from 2016. The local government defines informal settlements as a group of at least five households occupying a specific space. In accounting for a total of 59 informal settlements in the city, the groupings vary in size from 5 houses to over 200 houses. While this number infers a large number of differentiated settlements, in reality these dwellers are generally isolated in particular parts of Mandalay.

According to local sources and my own observations, these settlements are almost exclusively found in five specific areas of the city, as shown in the figure below; the Taung Myo slum area

along long the Sagaing-Mandalay Road in Amarapura Township, a section of the eastern part of Mandalay in Mya Yi Nanda Ward, settlements along the railway line in the boundary between Chan Mya Thazi Township and Pyi Gyi Tagun Township, and two differentiated areas along the Ayeyarwady riverbank.

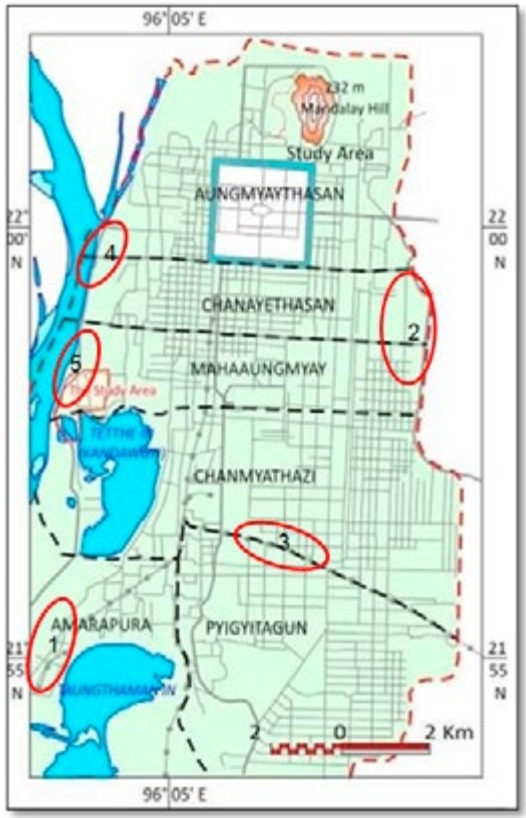

Figure 2.4 The distribution of the five main slum areas in Mandalay

The first of these settlements are known as the Taung Myo Kyu, situated along the Sagaing-Mandalay roadside in the south-western part of Mandalay. Households there can be understood as rural dwellers who regularly experience flooding during the monsoon season. Their homes are located in an oxbow lake and form part of the Ayeyarwady seasonal flooding zone. During the rainy season, when their homes and land are flooded by the rising level of the Ayeyarwady river, they leave their homes and move to

the roadside. A member of this community, U Mg, said that they generally stay there for four or five months, often bringing their cows and pigs with them. When the river level retreats, they return to their original homes for a period.

The second group of slum settlements are on the eastern side of Mandalay in the Mya Yi Nanda ward. This group was 'cleaned' (evicted) by the local government in February 2017, but has since returned to live in the same space. They are mainly manual workers and mobile hawkers and sellers, and live in the marginal spaces between a predominantly rural area and an urban administrative ward area. U Than, one of the dwellers there, told what seemed like a familiar story among this group; "I got a plot and my daughter also got a plot next to me in the new urban extension area when the government tried to deal with informal settlements". He described how he sold that land and then lived with his daughter, but he quickly went through all his money and his daughter's husband had alcohol and gambling problems, leading to him pawning-off his daughter's land. The whole family became landless and homeless again and returned back to the same area.

The third group lives on the space managed by the local railway department along the Madaya railway line. This space can be considered a form of liminal space, located between the railway line and the road, and straddling the boundary line between two townships - Chanmyathazi and Pyi Gyi Tagun. The community members work in various kinds of informal jobs, some selling fried vermicelli noodles, snacks, and seasonal fruits. Some are street vendors who travel across Mandalay's different wards to find customers. Some are vendors called "se nait pawe zay the" - a local term describing someone who moves from one seasonal festival to the next to sell traditional snacks and toys. Most of them leave school at Grade 5 because family pressures force them to become essential income earners. Thandar, a 30-year-old woman who lives close to this area, says:

"In fact, even some people from this ward who have their own houses sell their houses and move and live among the 'slum' group. This community is big and strong, although Burmese people and the Kalar (a vague, perhaps derogatory, word for people seen as of Indian or Muslim appearance) people live separately"

She sells clothes to them with a system of payment through small instalments. If they buy one longyi (traditional sarong-style worn by both men and women) from her, they can pay 100 or 200 kyat per day until they have paid the total price including interest. “Some of them are good customers and they pay regularly. They are real fighters, though their character can be a bit harsh” she said. Their houses have brick foundations and appear to be quite strong. Although they live along the railway line as informal settlers, they seem to have a degree of stability on their own land, with them each having semi-permanent dwellings. Some families have even built two-story buildings with electric meter boxes installed, while many households beside the stream have been able to attain official land slips. In many ways their livelihoods are considered more formal and permanent compared to other slums.

Figure 2.5 Mobile street vendors selling fruit; a common occupation for those living around the railway tracks

Figure 2.6 Across Myanmar, railway lines are active spaces of habitation, trade and mobility

Of the two main groupings of dwellers along the Ayeyarwady riverbank, one is located across 19th and 22nd streets. For the most part, their homes are boats and rafts on the river, but at times conditions mean they occupy space on the adjacent land. They sleep there and work on the banks of the river during the day. As with the previous group, there were attempts by police to remove them in early 2017, but because they are mobile settlements on the water this proved to be difficult. Some of them have attempted to move to other parts of urban Mandalay, renting housing in nearby wards and trying to join other slum areas. From the perspective of many people in Mandalay, there is a dominant perception that this group is more dangerous and 'rough' than the others, with a preponderance to engage in petty crime. Daw Thein Kyi, a member of the pot selling community, reflected perceptions of this group even among other informal dwellers.

"Now the slum people on 19th street have been asked to move. We are afraid of them coming here and staying because we have heard they are bad people taking part in all sorts of crime. If they come here, our place will also become a bad place full of crime."

Figure 2.7 Slum dwellers living on boats and rafts on the river between 19th and 22nd street

The final group are five communities around the Papin Monastery, who likewise live on and near the Ayeyarwady riverbank, including many people who have lived around this space for up to 30 years. Across these communities, there is a wide diversity in backgrounds, livelihoods and living arrangements. This broader group includes the pot selling Oh Tan Kyu and the sand workers in the Red Cross Kyu, who are the focus of this study, along with the Titan Kyu, the Kyat Khaing Ye Kyu, and the Thae Saik community. Three of these communities, including the Red Cross Kyu, live in the eastern ward of Myopart road and are deemed to be *kyukyaw* (the more general term for squatters). However, as the pot selling and Thae Saik community live on the bank of the river, they are also referred to as *kyu*, but are also sometimes more specifically referred to as *lame bay kyu*, which infers that they are more mobile squatters.

Figure 2.8 Up and down the river, the Ayeyarwady is often lined with temporary structures and mobile communities

The Kyat Khaing Ye Kyu is stationed on the land owned by the Union Solidarity and Development political party, immediately adjacent to the sand worker community, and some of this group are involved in the local political organization. The Titan Kyu community lives in vacant land between apartment blocks and are generally seen more as urban settlers or members of the town. They had lived in this ward as tenants for the last three decades, but they have now become illegal tenants or squatters due to economic struggles which limited their ability to pay rent. The Thae Saik community is the smallest, comprising just a few households who are mainly engaged in the sand industry.

The pot selling community and the red cross community are the two largest communities in this broader slum area, and their different living arrangements and history reflects the diversity of experience among this population. The pot selling community mostly come from Nyaung Kar Yar village in Sagaing region, while the red cross community mainly moved from Yandapo village in Mandalay regions. The history of their settlement and the contrasting natures of the communities are detailed in chapter three.

Local categorization of slum dweller types in Mandalay

In conceiving of these five main slum settlement areas, the dominant local understanding revealed above is that there are two main types of informal dwellers in Mandalay, which are attached the respective labels of *kyukyaw* and *lame bay kyu*, as identified above. The first type is those who tend to settle in a fixed place and travel and from their place of work each day, while the second type is those who are always moving and tend to stay wherever they may find work. They live in temporary shelters and do not have a fixed place.

Households in first type of slum dwellers usually choose to live in a specific place where they can stay longer than those in more temporary situations. In general, places beside the railway lines, or places owned by social organizations are ideal for these groups, as it is difficult for the local government to evict them. In Mandalay, the informal settlers who live in the land plots along the Madaya railway line in the outskirts of the city are one example, with them exploiting an unclaimed area to stake their claim on a section of land which falls outside the explicit control of government departments. The Red Cross Kyu, who live in a land plot owned by the social organization, are another example of a relatively fixed area. Though the sand extraction industry which employs most of the community moves, they continue to reside in the same place commuting to and from work.

They therefore generally have stronger, more permanent houses and have organized themselves into what externally appears to be stronger community structures. Often, after identifying a spot, they will go to work and come back to the same place every day, trying to establish their permanent settlement in the area. Despite this, even after many years they still cannot register their land and they are not recognized by the government as landowners, with the local government likewise defining them as *kyukyaw*, which implies the illegality of their living arrangement. One officer from the department of urban planning said that they are more difficult to 'clean' than the mobile slums because they have organized themselves into a strong community and they have fixed settlements.

The second type are the mobile slum dwellers who are moving around to wherever employment opportunities become available. "Chei tha lone hame taing" is another term used to refer to these communities, which implies both mobility of settlement and homelessness. Their living arrangements are entirely dependent on their work type. Mostly they live along the bank of the river and in public spaces, often on the shoulders of Mandalay's main roads. They are generally manual laborers or mobile sellers. MCDC officials have regularly ordered them to move out and dismantle their temporary tents. But then they will simply come back, rebuild their huts, and after a few days stay as they were before. The local government defines them very clearly as mobile slum communities or temporary settlers.

This type also includes the Oh Tan Kyu community who sell earthen pots. The ships which carry these pots stop at the jetty where they unload the pots. As it is not easy to trade the pots by trucks or with road transportation, the pot business functions well through a physical presence on the riverbank and along the main road (or in the liminal space between the two), with direct access to the river and the roadside to facilitate the trade. In essence, their mobile work dictates the place where they set up their living arrangements. Another example are the mobile slum dwellers who are engaged in a form of bamboo business in another settlement on the riverbank, with workers living near the bank in temporary tents.

Other slum dwellers who would broadly be considered mobile dwellers are families engaged in mobile selling or hawking of goods around the city. Coming from rural villages, they bring the products from their hometowns, carrying them with shoulder yokes, moving across the city and into various crowded areas to sell. During the night, they sleep in public spaces and often have a presence along the riverside, in car parking places and around bus stations. Another way these mobile sellers try to make a living is by reselling goods from stall holders. They receive seasonal fruits from roadside stalls and move around selling them in busy parts of the city, earning small commission directly from the stallholders This way of selling is accessible to many migrant workers as it has no real barriers to entry. Other mobile dwellers work as motorbike taxi drivers, where they stay around the bus station and wait for

customers. This group is generally single men of a younger age, and they stay together in small temporary rooms.

Although the mobile slum workers don't have permanent employment, they still have the obligation to send money back to their families in the villages. They regularly return to their home villages at times of religious festivities. Some of them also visit their villages quite often to strengthen their work connections with their fellow villagers. One informant argued that it was through these networks that these informal, mobile slum groups grow in size and their spatial footprint on Mandalay continues to expand.

Figure 2.9 A man who would be considered a "mobile seller"

Figure 2.10 In contrast is the "fixed community"

"Slums that Need to be Cleaned": Discourses, Policy and Representations of Informal Settlers

National law and attempts to remove informal settlers in Yangon and Mandalay

As these urban informal settlements have emerged in Myanmar's cities, the government has often responded directly to public

perceptions towards these groups, yet state actors have also helped shape public perceptions through their own statements and policies. These forms of discourses have helped problematize these communities, creating assumptions about their livelihoods and communities. This research shows most of these assumptions to not be reflected in any of their lived realities. This section briefly traces some examples of how these policies emerged, before going into the constructions of these communities in the local media and in everyday language used in the public sphere.

In 2002, the SPDC national government enacted the City of Mandalay Development Law, which explicitly sought to "demolish and resettle squatter housing, squatter buildings and squatter wards", with the MCDC assigned this responsibility. The law was significant in enshrining the label *kyukyaw*, translating as slum people, in government policy and plans. The term has since been frequently used by government officials to refer to 'slum dwellers' that supposedly lived in either in public spaces or on land owned by social or political organizations, which as Roberts (2020) describes, this is a relatively recent phenomenon. In announcing this law, the government also referred to the slum area as *du sa yei knae myay*, which infers that informal settlements are areas where certain 'undesirable behaviors' take place - including drug use, gambling and sex work - which should used as a justification to "clean" (a translation of the term *shin lin lite*) these areas of supposed problems (Yadanabon Daily News, 2018). Following the announcement of the national level law, the MCDC formed structures in six of the city's townships to clear squatters inside the municipal area.

Some punitive actions towards slum dwellers in Mandalay seems to predate that announcement, however. According to development papers held by the city's urban administration, communities on the west of Kandawgyi lake, as well as squatters along the Thingazar Chaung canal, were "cleaned" and replaced right back to the year of 1992 - in order to make way for plans to "improve urban spaces". Nevertheless, policies of removing slums dwellers from their communities became much more frequent after 2002, in line with these central government mandates.

In Yangon, the history of attempted slum outlawing even predates the 1988 political crisis, with scholars detailing a history of

government ineptitude in this area, with no effective solution to problems of homelessness or informal settlements. (May Myat Thu & Soe Soe Khin, 2019). After 1988, there was a greater emphasis on removing people under the pretense of "beautification" of the city, materialized in the forced and voluntary relocation of residents to new satellite towns from 1989, to give way to infrastructure initiatives and other attempts to supposedly sanitize urban spaces.

From 1988 to 1989, 260,000 urban dwellers were evicted from in and around Yangon, provided with new plots and some essential services at new sites on the urban periphery (Leckie & Simperingham, 1990). This continued through the years that followed. For example, in 1994 at least 500 families were evicted from their homes in Yangon for a government tourism initiative, "Visit Myanmar Year." According to one observer, Yangon communities had to be moved regularly because of supposed congestion created by squatters who had been given their own land and help to build their own houses in the new areas outside the center (Aung Thein Lin, 2003).

These policies in Mandalay and Yangon no doubt contributed to a discourse of slums as a problem for the city, which had to be cleaned up by administrators, which in some cases also came to be enshrined in law. In Myanmar, informal settlers are defined as squatters by law in that being landless or homeless and making attempts to find a space to stay is deemed to be trespassing on either public or privately-owned space. The law provides scope for punishment depending on the type of land and its ownership. The legal infrastructure, as with governance of these areas, is vague and overlapping. The legal status of informal settlements are impacted by legal statutes, including the Roads Law of 1994, and the much-maligned 2012 Farmland Law.[3] Communities who live near waterways – like the pot sellers– also sometimes come into conflict with the Conservation and Water Resources and River Law (2006).

A summary of the various national laws often used to claim informal settlers are trespassing on various types of land is contained here:

3. This law has been the subject of much criticism by legal scholars and land experts, providing large scope for land to be deemed "vacant, fallow or virgin" and therefore able to be taken by state or corrupt business interests.

Table 2.1 The array of different legal statutes which have been used to ban settlers from particular spaces

If they trespass and dwell on grazing land they will be punished according to the Land and Revenue Act of Lower Myanmar (1876).	စားကျက်မြေပေါ်မှာ ကျူးကျော်ရင် ၁၈၇၆ အောက် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ မြေနှင့် အခွန်ဥပဒေ၊
If they trespass and dwell on the land of government buildings, they will be punished according to the 1955 Government Housing (Eviction) Act.	ဌာနဆိုင်ရာ အဆောက်အအုံ မြေပေါ်မှာ ကျူးကျော်ရင် ၁၉၅၅ အစိုးရ အိမ်ဥပစာနှင် ထုတ်ခြင်း ဥပဒေ၊
If they trespass and dwell on the farmlands they will be punished according to the 2012 Farmland law.	လယ်ယာမြေပေါ်မှာ ကျူးကျော်ရင် ၂၀၁၂ လယ်ယာမြေ ဥပဒေ၊
If they trespass and dwell on the forest area they will be punished according to the Forest Law.	သစ်တောကြီးဝိုင်းမြေပေါ် ကျူးကျော်ရင်သစ်တော ဥပဒေနဲ့အရေးယူမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်
If they trespass and dwell on land designated for forestry conservation, they will be punished according to the Forest Policy.	ကြိုတင်ကာကွယ် တောမြေပေါ်မှာ ကျူးကျော်ရင် သစ်တော နည်းဥပဒေ၊
If they trespass and dwell on the cultural heritage zone they will be punished according to the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions Law.	ရှေးဟောင်းယဉ်ကျေးမှု နယ်မြေပေါ်မှာ ကျူးကျော်ရင် ယဉ်ကျေးမှုအမွေအနှစ် ဒေသများ ကာကွယ် ထိန်းသိမ်းရေး ဥပဒေနဲ့ အရေးယူမယ် လို့သိရ ပါတယ်။
If they trespass and dwell on the land of natural areas they will be punished according to the Protection of Wildlife and Conservation of Natural Areas Law (1994).	သဘာဝနယ်မြေပေါ်မှာ ကျူးကျော်တဲ့သူတွေကို ၁၉၉၄ တောရိုင်း တိရစ္ဆာန် နှင့် သဘာဝ အပင်များ ကာကွယ်ရေး ဥပဒေနဲ့သဘာဝနယ်မြေ ထိန်းသိမ်းရေး ဥပဒေနဲ့ အရေးယူသွား မှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။
If they trespass and dwell on riverbanks and beside creeks they will be punished according to the Conservation and Water Resources and River Law (2006).	မြစ်၊ ချောင်း၊ ကမ်းခြေ၊ မြေတွေပေါ်မှာ ကျူးကျော်ရင်တော့ ၂၀၀၆ ခုနှစ် ရေအရင်းအမြစ်နှင့် မြစ်ချောင်းများ ထိန်းသိမ်းရေးဥပဒေ
If they trespass and dwell around the mining areas they will be punished according to the 1994 Myanmar Mines Law.	သတ္ထုတွင်း မြေတွေပေါ်မှာ ကျူးကျော်ရင်တော့ နဲ့ ၁၉၉၄ မြန်မာ့သတ္ထုတွင်းဥပဒေတို့နဲ့ အရေးယူခံရမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။
If they trespass and dwell around the mining areas they will be punished according to the 1994 Roads Law.	လမ်ဦးစီး ဌာနမြေ ပေါ်မှာ ကျူးကျော်ရင် လမ်းမကြီးများ နည်းဥပဒေနဲ့ အရေးယူမှာ ဖြစ်ပြီး

Further, while the 2008 constitution (Chapter VIII, Article 335) states that every citizen shall have the right to settle and reside in

any place within the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in accordance with law, it does not authorize squatting or illegal subdivision, and the squatter is therefore subject to municipal law, road law and farmland law, meaning squatters can be cleared from along roads, railway areas, in public spaces and even from farmlands. Forbes (2019) describes the use of constitutional authority by Yangon administrators, where they placed signs quoting this section on the areas occupied by informal settlers.

While these national level laws provide scope for government agencies to justify the forced removal of people, the implementation of the law is locally dependent on priorities and pressures at different levels of administration. In the context of the communities studied here, chapter three details how the liminality of these spaces create vagaries in the implementation of the policies, due to the overlapping and often contradictory approaches of government agencies.

In a practical sense, it seems that attempts to remove informal settlers from their areas fall into two main categories of action. The first is a genuine effort to remove people, generally emerging from a clearly defined state or private development plan and under order from a higher authority in the administration. The second seems to be more of a performative attempt at removal, through which members of the local government ask a community to move out of the area, but on the unspoken understanding is that within just a few days the community will return. This second type is explained through the experience of the pot seller community in the next chapter.

One recent example of the first type of removal was the Mandalay Port Project. Implemented along the Ayeyarwady River in 2014 by DWRI, along with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), an inland port was constructed south of the city. As the project began, the slum dwellers were forcibly removed by the local government from their original space. Some of these families moved to join the pot sellers, as according to community members they believed they were more secure staying in this area where only the second type of removal seemed to be taking place.

A different approach to these communities can be seen in attempts to provide incentives to move people away from these areas to

other parts of the city. In 2016, the Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC) enacted a policy of urban slum relocation, providing families with new apartments as part of a low-cost rental arrangement where they each had to pay 30,000 kyat a month. Among the Ayeyarwady river slum dwellers, 700 families received the two-bedroom apartments. Some of the pot selling communities were among this group. The policy became popularly known for its slogan "the project to push the slum people from tents up to the apartments". This echoed a similar project that had earlier been carried out in Yangon, where a large urban development project led to the removal of slum residents to East Yangon, which the local government branded the "Hut to Apartment" project (May Myat Thu & Soe Soe Khin, 2019).

In addition to its controversial intention, these projects in both Yangon and Mandalay mostly failed to achieve what the government hoped they would. The vast majority of dwellers simply abandoned the apartments and moved back to their old sites as they were unable to find work nearby and the commute was too costly. Other dwellers cited safety concerns and fear over community wellbeing for their refusal to continue living there.

In 2018, the law further enshrined efforts to exclude dwellers from areas deemed as public land. The City Planning and Urban Land Management Law (2018) was a national law which initially empowered the YCDC to ban the building of any temporary or permanent buildings in public roads area without their prior permission. This law has further been used by the committee to justify actions against mobile slum dwellers living along the shoulder of busy roads in the city. The law also directly affects Mandalay mobile slums by providing further justification for actions taken by MCDC. In recent years the pot selling community has had this particular law cited against them, but their removal has only been temporary.

There are several further recent examples of the MCDC successfully moving *kyukyaw* communities out of their informal settlements, using this and other legal powers. In January 2011, the MCDC cleaned Myayi Nanda Kyu Kyaw, a community living on the land of a government housing project area, using law 53 to remove them. In

July 2019, a community living east of the old airport was cleaned by the committee of MCDC. This issue became contentious and there was conflict involving the police and the community, though eventually the authorities succeeded in their efforts to move them to other places. Not long after that incident, a community in Zee Oak Ward was cleaned by the MCDC and local officials. Reports detailed that the community, called Koe Ahin Tan Kyu, was cleaned under the public road law which likewise caused conflict with officials, resulting in three people being detained.

Figure 2.11 A poster signals urban areas as off-limits to *kyukyaw*

Figure 2.12 Near the riverbank, similar signs are found

As seen here, the MCDC fixes signs to these areas to demarcate them as off-limits to people seeking shelter and to mobile slum communities. These particular signs were found at the Gaw Wun Port by the Ayeyarwady River, and in a public area on the corner of 79th and 26th street in the city near the railway line. In both of these cases, slum communities had been pushed out under the authority of the local administrators.

The six local committees which have been established to deal with informal settlements within the different urban areas of the city are a continual presence and visible manifestation of the state's desire to exclude. The national laws have certainly contributed to an environment of hostility towards informal communities, though recent experiences show the large degree to which local politics and administration vary greatly in their implementation, which often takes on more a performative dynamic. Nonetheless, while the two communities studied here seem to have forged a situation where they can stay on their land (as detailed in the next chapter), it is clear that for other communities the threat of eviction remains very real. But while this situation cuts across different levels of government, its ambiguities leave open opportunities for communities to assert their livelihoods in spite of it.

Recent discourse towards *kyukyaw* by the state, across media and in local dialogue

Beyond these legal frameworks, informal communities - in Mandalay city and in Myanmar more broadly - are socially constructed in various ways which seek to dehumanize them and turn them into a social problem supposedly in need of some sort of solution. It seems that, in much of the public consciousness, the government is justified in taking action to remove these people from their homes. In the local context, as observed by the author in her movements across the city, the language used towards these communities and the people in them seem to be accusatory in nature. There is a tendency to scapegoat them and apportion blame for broader perceived social ills. However, much of this public perception has filtered down through representations of these communities by state actors, the portrayal of them and the supposed need to move them by large parts of the mass media - both online and in regular print journals. The legal frameworks discussed above may be a reaction to this discursive context, but in other ways the law itself might have helped form these perceptions too.

Aung San Suu Kyi's own words have reflected an increasingly hardline tone emerging from figures in the central authority since the NLD government took power in 2015. She has repeatedly warned slum dwellers, herself referring to them as *kyukyaw*, that their settlements are deemed illegal, and the government has the authority to remove them. In April 2019, for example, while opening a power facility in Mon state she spoke at a public meeting on the issue (Seven Day News, 2019).

> Now let me warn the state government not to accept any new *kyukyaw* at all. And if they do, take immediate action against them. The whole country has been instructed to take immediate action for new *kyukyaw*. If there is no place to live, the government will help them but we don't accept the Sepwarphit *kyukyaw* at all. We will not accept anything that is not in line with the law.

Most notably, she drew a distinction between regular *kyukyaw* and *sepwarphit kyukyaw* who she said were not really homeless, but

had just used these spaces to stay near places of economic opportunity. She continued in blaming them for incidents on public transports, and generally reflecting a need for the state to be hostile towards informal settlers.

Figure 2.13 Aung San Suu Kyi's statements gained considerable traction through social media

This language is also reflected in the words of other actors within the state structure. The Yangon Chief Minister, while implementing the urban resettlement scheme, framed those living in Yangon slums as people who were causing problems in the urban area. In justifying the plan, U Phyo Min Thein described the necessity of limiting the options of the dwellers to eventually sell the apartments or to engage in business activities in them (Mizzima News, 2018). The sentiment expressed reflects the state's labelling of these communities as fundamentally unable to be trusted, and therefore in need of intervention.

The government officials tasked with implementing policy in relation to these communities in Mandalay, attempted to represent these communities using similar language. In our interviews, one official from the revenue department was insistent on labelling them as temporary and in desperate need of the government's clearing project, extolling the notion that they weren't considered actual residents of the city. Another official from a separate part of the MCDC used similar language to describe their temporary way of living and the need for removal, and also discussed how the

government housing project supposedly showed the extent to which these communities acted in strategic and so-called opportunistic ways.

At the local level in urban Mandalay, people most commonly refer to people living in informal settlements as simply kyu, literally translating as a squatter or someone occupying land without the right to do so, and is a shortened version of *kyukyaw* as used by Aung San Suu Kyi and others. As Roberts (2020) describes, kyu is both a noun referring to people, and a verb which seems to imply a certain encroachment into public space. *Sein ye thar*, translating as poor man, is another common word to directly refer to people in these communities, which implies someone without a permanent income, who doesn't have enough money for daily needs and is unable to send their kids to school. *Kyae tha lone aein tein* is another term, meaning someone who is homeless or landless, who has no fixed abode or permanent work. In the neighboring community to the field sites, I also heard slum dwellers referred to as *sa yetk yeinn thu*, meaning someone of bad character who might cause regular problems, disruption and fighting. Even the monks and the donors to the monastery in the field site refer to these people *athie ma sheit*, meaning someone who doesn't know the difference between right and wrong.

When I would take the bus back to my hometown on the weekend, we would pass these communities on the side of the road. The driver would refer to them as *min sa*, which is like a small evil spirit, meaning if the children were hit by the car their bad spirit would go far away. In the driver's eyes, the parents of the children allowed them to run on the road, because if they were hit by the car, they would get compensation from the driver, so these evil spirits were a threat to the driver. Recently, when we passed this community, a fellow passenger said that he saw children defecating on the side of the road, which he exclaimed was a public health danger. He said that often saw fighting and violence around this community. He remarked that the people there were of fundamentally bad character and the government should intervene to solve the homelessness problem across Mandalay. He thought the Ayeyarwady riverbank should be kept clean and be developed to form part of the beautiful landscape of the city.

Similar sentiments were expressed from residents living near these communities, and across the city at large. I spoke to a 62-year-old lawyer who lives in a community immediately adjacent to the red cross community. He had watched these communities grow from what he described as being just a few huts fifteen years ago, to being fully-fledged communities and hubs of human activity. He was full of disdain for people living there - "They are very dirty, they are rude people and they have bad character," he said, "they are always fighting, gambling and causing trouble".

Figure 2.14 Graphic showing some of the language and descriptions targeting these groups from parts of the public

One professor at a university sought to make a distinction, however, between those who were victims of a declining rural economy, and those who he labelled as mere opportunists taking advantage of vacant land, reflecting similar language to the government figures. The state was to blame for the general rise in the slums due to their failure to support agriculture, he said, but in other cases the settlers weren't really poor but instead sough to claim these locations as they were ideal for running their businesses.

Daw Yi Htay works as a wholesaler at Mandalay's large produce market near the informal settlements. While some from the communities work at the market, she says the workers mostly come from other areas. She is unsympathetic to people in these communities, labelling them as troublesome and untrustworthy. She believes they are thieves, particularly the young, as they stand by the market ready to snatch phones and purses of shoppers.

Across Myanmar media, issues pertaining to *kyukyaw* are heavily reported on and tend to generate significant public interest. Both state and private media tend to present the government line, showing efforts to legitimately clear the informal settlements. It seems clear that this media infrastructure lends credibility to the actions of authorities and helps their actions garner significant public support. Across the national media, large outlets such as Seven Day and Mizzima News generate lots of traffic in their posts towards these communities, using language which tends to imply support of the government's intent to remove these communities, placing an emphasis on the need to "clean" urban areas. As these articles gain traction across Facebook[4], which generates huge amounts of usage across the country, users take the chance to post opinions which are even more inflammatory towards informal settlers.

Figure 2.15 A newspaper cutout of police "searching and cleaning *kyukyaw* huts"—and looking for drugs—on the riverbanks in Mandalay

4. Facebook use in Myanmar is very high and it is a major source of information (and disinformation) for large parts of the population. Hate speech has been a problem, with some believing the platform increased the spread of anti-Muslim campaigns and helped grow public support for ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya. Similar trends are observable in regard to informal settlers.

Figure 2.16 A cutout shows police "cleaning" *kyukyaw* huts along Kannan Road in urban Mandalay

On a news story posted by BBC Burmese, for instance, one user commented "We must clean all kyu living across Mandalay!" The open nature of social media in Myanmar, while often proving very problematic in its ease of spreading fake news and state propaganda, does however provide some opportunities for supporters of these communities to contest the dominant narrative. On the Mandalay In-depth Facebook page, one user gained support in claiming that one of these communities had an established right to use the land and had paid for the right to be there over many years, accusing the government of failing to recognize their rights as settlers.

But in the local Mandalay media, the Mandalay Daily (2018), similar enthusiastic support of state efforts is seen in reporting of the "cleaning of 365 small huts" near the Shwe Lan Bo monastic compound. In nearby Yadarnabon, another local paper used similar language to justify the removal of people from their space near the riverbank. The police searched and checked their spaces, accusing the community of being involved in selling drugs and prostitution, before they too were removed by authorities (Yadanarbon Daily News, 2018). However, the English language

media is generally more moderate in its tone towards these communities, with the Myanmar Times (2016) generally reporting from a more impartial perspective and terming residents "unofficial tenants" - language which is less loaded than the Myanmar-language *kyukyaw*.

However, as an interesting late addition to this section, it was interesting to observe the change in the public discourse towards slum dwellers during the Myanmar Spring Revolution, following the coup on February 1, 2021. In the swell of public spirit and unity which emerged in the months following the military takeover, previously maligned slum dwellers were hailed for their courage and involvement in the protest movement, to the extent that slum dwellers came to be labelled brave and heroic among the community and online.

On February 20th, Tatmadaw soldiers and police came to arrest government shipyard workers, who had been participating in the public service strike – known as the Civil Disobedience Movement - near 41th Night Bazaar at Kanar road on the river bank. The slum dwellers living on the riverbank helped the workers and large numbers decided to join in the strike. The soldiers opened fire on the workers and the local slum dwellers, with many wounded while two protesters were tragically killed. One of those who died was a slum dweller called Mg Way Yan Tun, and he was hailed as one the protesting heroes of Mandalay. That evening, the soldiers also destroyed the homes of around 230 slum dwellers near the bazaar along the riverbank. Accounts on social media showed many becoming homeless and forced to seek refuge as the soldiers led a path of destruction. Many ran to stay in the nearby monastery.

This particular event seemed to have changed the attitudes of many people in Mandalay towards informal settlers. Across social media, negative perceptions of slum dwellers have transformed as they are now seen as part of the broader community, facing the same struggles as formal residents. Similarly, in Yangon people have hailed migrant laborers and informal settlers in Hlaing Tharyar for their bravery in standing up to Tatmadaw brutality. One day after the attack in Mandalay, the local people changed the name of the Bazaar from 41st Night Bazaar to Way Yan Tun

Bazaar, paying homage to the slum dweller who lost his life. Time will tell as to how lasting these shifts in perceptions prove to be.

This chapter has attempted to illuminate the migratory patterns of informal communities, their positioning in particular liminal spaces which straddle boundaries and make use of the vague allocation of land use and the reality of urban chaos. Their diverse physical manifestations are perhaps closely connected to the forms of policy and discourse used towards them. Their strategic use of space and flexibility in relation to state efforts to control them could be conceived as a form of everyday resistance, which is often labelled 'opportunistic' by those seeking to vilify them and undermine their right to existence. Within this context of contested meanings, communities are constantly grappling with the use of these liminal spaces, and so the following chapter explores these spatial dynamics - vis a vis state attempts to enclose - through two contrasting examples.

3

THE EMERGENCE OF TWO COMMUNITIES WITH VARIED, CONTESTED SPATIAL DIMENSIONS

With reference to the context of Mandalay's slum communities from the previous chapter, chapter three will focus on two particular communities, their spatial strategies and the surrounding support networks. Firstly, the chapter will examine the history of settlement and the emergence of the pot selling community on the riverbank, showing how they understand and engage with the physical space around them and how they interpret their liminality with respect to the broader social dynamic. The chapter will then compare this to the adjacent Red Cross community, whose conceptions of space appear to be more materially obvious. While these communities are very different in their livelihood characteristics and their physical space, they have some social support spaces which, to an extent, bring them together. This investigation of spatial conceptions, and the conflicting definitions of external actors such as the state and the surrounding 'formal' communities, will help inform the analysis that later follows on the intersection of their respective economic lives with forms of social organization.

Oh Tan Kyu

Phases of settlement in the area

In the early 1990s, what is now the pot selling area was a temporary jetty where boats containing firewood were anchored, with workers unloading the firewood when the river level rose. Boats came from the upper part of Myanmar, stopped at the jetty and put the firewood on the riverbank to sell. Workers built temporary tents around the area and stayed until all the firewood had been sold. According to Daw Thein Gyi, an early settler here, there were usually five family boats who did this. But she also heard that there were once ten boats staying here, for a period of usually 4 months per year until all the wood was sold.

Over the following few years it evolved into a temporary place for people who struggled to find a more permanent or established livelihoods or places of residence elsewhere in Mandalay. U Aye Lin is identified as the first temporary settler who remains in the area to this day. When he first moved here in 1996, there were only five or six temporary shelters resembling tents or huts. He said that the local ward administrator's office, run by U Khin Hlaing, asked them to report as visitors, not as formal residents of the area. Each family had to pay 50 kyats for every three days that they stayed there, which was recorded in a book giving them permission to stay. However, during the period of U Thein Sein's government, he said they no longer needed to report as guests but could instead reside as "temporary settlers" in the area. U Aye Lin worked on ship repairs, and so for him it was an ideal place to have some temporary shelter near the river.

> For me, I repaired the boats and ships when the water level went down. But during times of flooding, I had to move up here because I had so many tools and things. As I repaired the ships, I built a tent and stayed here.

Another member of the initial group of people who temporarily settled in the pot seller community, said that he also spent several months every year away on the boat. He said that despite not

originally knowing the rest of the community who later settled there, after the influx of people he too became a pot seller and lived permanently in the community.

Before the main group arrived, Daw Thein Kyi's family also came to the area and are thought to be the first group to settle more permanently. She had been moving around different parts of Mandalay trying to establish a life in the city. Her husband and her son had a job at Moe construction site in the city, and the company gave a place for the workers to stay with their family. However, when the construction project was complete, they had to look for another place to live. At first, they rented a hut near another jetty - known as 'Chaw' jetty in front of Aung Chan Thar street. It cost them around 450 or 500 kyat per month to live there. After staying for 4 or 5 months they couldn't afford to continue paying rent and so they built a temporary hut near Paypin Jetty instead.

These temporary settlers, who lived in what is now the pot selling area, tried to help those from the jetty to give them a space to come and live. They invited anyone who could not afford to rent a hut and had nowhere else to go. They told them that if they were not allowed to stay near Chaw jetty anymore, they could come here anytime. While the other settlers were only there temporarily in accordance with the needs of the firewood industry, her family was the first to stay with greater permanence.

In the years that followed, others settled in Oh Tan Kyu seeking a welcoming community near their place of work. U Ohn Maung arrived in the area in early 2001. He was driving a motorboat transporting oil barrels and the area was conveniently positioned for him to load-up the boat. After he lived in the area for a while, he began using a boat to carry the pots from his native village. He now sells his pots across the Mandalay urban area using a three-wheel motorcycle as a distributor under U Moe's trading operation. Another early settler told of how his family initially moved to a sand island in the river where they began partaking in the pot trade, before the flooding of the island led to them coming to the current riverbank area.

From 2002, the community grew towards the sort of numbers who live there today and increasingly became dominated by the pot

selling industry. Initially around 20 families arrived, in what the locals refer to as the second major wave of settlement. This group previously worked and lived in temporary shelters at the Gaw Wein Jetty, which was Mandalay's largest port on the bank of then Ayeyarwady River. As the port underwent development, the local government cleared the area, moving dwellers to the current space, which was supposedly further from the visible center of the city.

One of this group, U Tin Moe Swe, previously lived together with his family at the Gaw Wein Jetty. He first worked on sand trucks, before later working in the transportation of building pebbles by truck. In 2002, as the informal settlers living at the jetty were told to move by the local government, he came to this place as it was near his employment opportunities. After that period, he was able to slowly save money while living there, which also allowed him to be one of the first community members involved in the pot selling trade. He says this business was ideal for him because his village of Nyaung Toe neighboured Yatapo village, which is well-known in Myanmar as a pot producing village. Many of his mother's relatives and friends continued to live in Nyaung Toe, so he used these connections to sell the pots from there back to Mandalay:"At first, I carried the pots with a shoulder-yoke and my wife used a big basket on her head and we went around the city to sell them," said U Moe, "When I came here, the pot selling huts became a small group and we felt more permanently settled".

Several other members of this second group say that their connections from their previous settlement, and kinship relations, supported them to come to the community and participate in the expanding pot trade. The community also continued to expand through generational change. For the most part, it can be observed that, upon marriage, couples stayed in this village and relatives from other areas decided to join them. The area that was originally referred to as Dauk Kyin or Papin Jetty quickly became locally synonymous as a pot selling community - Oh Tan Oak Sa - reflecting the shift from informal labor to the dominance of this particularly local form of economy, the dynamics of which are explored in more depth in chapter four.

Figure 3.1 The spaces where their temporary homes, in the past and in the present, are constructed between the river and the road

Figure 3.2 The type of temporary dwellings, mainly bamboo and tarpaulin, across the community

History of forced mobility and continued temporary removal

While the community became more settled and cohesive, they faced significant physical instability over the ensuing years as they were forced to respond to the dual pressures of a changing physical environment and an increasingly hostile government. The first incident occurred in 2004, when rising river water levels threatened informal settlers on the riverbank, including this community, and

so the local government ordered them to move. Each household shifted to a more secure space between the two roadways. After the water retreated to a normal level they returned to their original place. However, many other informal settlers who lived in other areas of the riverbank decided not to return to their original place, instead preferring to join this fledgling community.

Over the following years, the community was asked to move by local authorities on a semi-regular basis. These removals fall under the second of the two types described in chapter two, in that the process represents something of a performative type of a regular governance action to "clean the road area", rather than being part of an official or intentioned government mandate. One local said they couldn't even count how many times they have had to dismantle their huts, which continued up until two years ago. When they were ordered to move, they had no place to go so they often had to live under trees.

When officials would come, families would rush to dismantle their huts by themselves before the authorities had the chance to destroy their materials. Some of their temporary construction materials were packed away and hidden at the foot of the tree and out of eyesight, while other parts were simply discarded into the river. Even when it rained, they just had to stay under the tree getting wet. After two or three days, the officials returned to their offices and didn't come back to bother them. There was an unspoken understanding that when they left, they could return to their original space. A long-time community member told of how they would then rebuild their tents again, beginning with a simple roof tarpaulin before adding other parts as they could. In the past, their tents were not as strong as they are now, and they simply used bamboo mats for walls. As they forged a habit of dismantling again and again, they needed a repeatable process and materials that could easily be dismantled and rebuilt. These actions, in a sense, reflect their own form of everyday resistance.

Daw Thein Kyi said that the authorities usually informed them ahead of time when they were going to be asked to move, so they had time to dismantle their huts. She noted that the officials would express pleasure at seeing their huts already being dismantled when they came to check:

> When it would rain during those nights under the tree, we were in trouble. We only had plastic to cover ourselves. This is the way we survive here. There is nothing much we can do. We don't want to live like this forever, of course, but we have no choice.

Daw Thein Kyi continued…

> At the beginning, we were very frightened and felt insecure. But we always came back after two or three days. Later, as we knew that we could return, we were no longer scared or depressed about it.

These events were described by local people as though they almost became part of a routine for them. The government did not clean this area permanently as part of a larger project, but only moved them temporarily. Daw Thein Kyi noted that this situation seemed to improve somewhat and was less regular after the NLD assumed office in 2015. Another woman, Daw Lin Lin Nwe, reflected a similar experience:

> For us slum people, life is like that. We have no choice. We are grateful to have a chance to live here, we just dismantle our huts immediately because we are so sure that the officials will allow us to stay here again.

This process came to have a performative nature to it in how everyone came to know that they had a particular role to play, and that after the process of temporary removal had played itself out, normality would simply resume. In time, officials even came to notify the community in advance that on a certain date and time there would be a 'check' where the officials would announce that they could no longer stay there. Likewise, there is also an understanding that community members should not build houses which look strong and permanent, as there have been cases in the past where members have had their homes dismantled for using strong structures. The use of temporary materials not only serves a practical purpose in allowing houses to be shifted with relative ease, but it also forms part of this performative function.

U Tin Moe Shwe reflected this common feeling of acceptance towards this predicament:

> If the government allows us, we want to live here neatly and properly. But now we are living here with a feeling of insecurity because we never know when we will be ordered to move. This is not our own land. We are not allowed to build big strong houses with metal roofs. At present, we are only able to build temporary tents to stay in. If we can live here permanently, we can build good houses and live like regular people. But the local officials also understand our position. They always acknowledge that, in reality we will continue to live here, and they don't seem to ever set out to do us harm.

In 2016, there was a different case of the government attempting to move the community, where most households received an apartment as part of the MCDC's relocation plan, which was widely covered in the local media as described in the previous chapter. However, as the pot industry was based by the river, living across town in a foreign environment was rather impractical for them. For a time, they would cover the pots with plastic at night and the community hired a guard to look after them as they went back to their apartment to sleep. Most of them didn't have motorbikes so daily transportation was also a problem. One of those who moved said he found the other people living in the apartment block to be rude and often violent. After a while, almost all community members moved back, with some leasing their apartment out, and some selling their apartment for capital to reinvest in the pot selling trade.

This government policy was an exception to the norm and part of a much larger state-led resettlement program. But the experiences described here of frequent movement and the subtle tactics of negotiation and the level of common tacit understanding, present a distinct form of everyday resistance by the pot selling community. Though it may not appear so to a casual observer, the community has a degree of power in these negotiations, which they can effectively wield from below. In a certain way they can use their

liminal social space, harnessed through their own community cohesion, to exploit their positioning within an undoubtedly liminal physical space – the contested geography of which is explored here.

Local interpretations of space and place

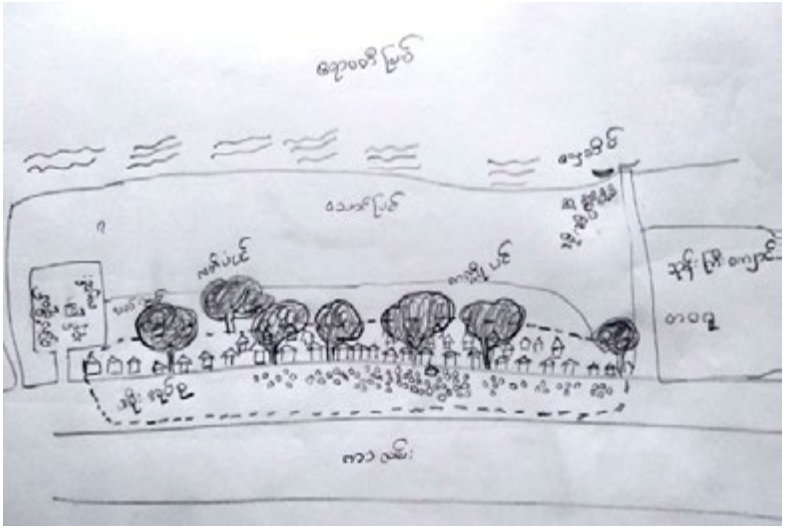

Figure 3.3 A mental map of the slum territory. This was co-produced by the author and a group of villagers, attempting to represent their own ways of viewing their space

The community area is rather elongated in shape, stretching across a section of space between the road and the sandbank. As the mental map shows, their shelters all face in the direction of the main road with their back facing the river. The area where their shelters have been constructed does not directly encroach on the road, but nor do they extend to the sandy banks of the river either. Instead, the households exist in a narrow stretch that straddles both sides. The roughly two hundred shelters which comprise the community are often arranged three rows deep, with those nearest the road generally belonging to the original inhabitants, with the dwellings behind them occupied by those who arrived later. Households with close family ties have often built their shelters next to each other, with several huts placed immediately adjacent to each other. In many cases, the original settler faces directly on the road with their pots in the front. Behind them may be their

children and their families, with brothers or extended relatives also nearby. U Moe describes the way families prefer to live close together using a local proverb *a nwe hnyin ta sin par* which refers to how parts of a plant are all connected to a root, so as one is pulled the rest will follow close behind.

As depicted in cross section below, the community area sits below both the thirty-foot main road which is paved with tar, and a space of flat ground on the side of the main road of around fifteen feet wide. This space, which nearly encroaches upon both the road and the sandbank, is around fifty feet wide, at a slope of approximately 32 degrees with around ten feet of depth to the riverbank. At the foot of the slope is a sandbar which is privately owned. Further past the sandbar is a large sandbank, which is also privately owned by a sand extraction business. At the edge of the shore is the port known as Pae Pin Thae Seike, which is used for loading and unloading pots onto the boats.

Many households display their pots in a rather orderly manner for sale on the ground in an area beside the main road, between the front of their huts and the road. The use of this particular area by the road is tolerated by MCDC on the condition that they each pay 200 kyat per day in tax for that ground area. On the other hand, the shore or sandbank is also used as a storage place for the pots by brokers/agents. They also have an agreement to pay 5,000 kyat per month to use the area to store pots and for trucks to enter.

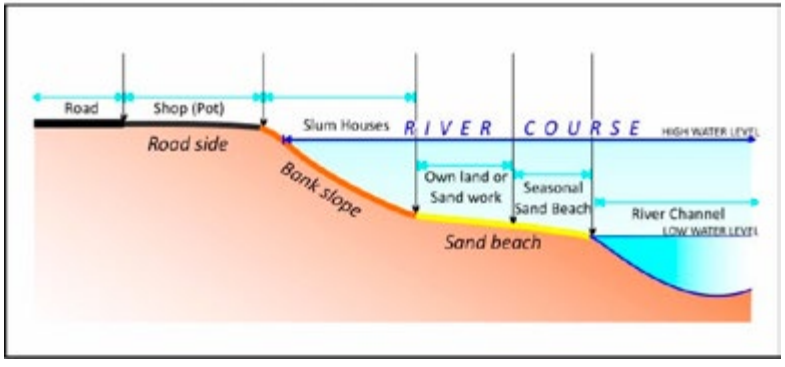

Figure 3.4 Cross-section profile of the Oh Tan Kyu area, with the water level fluctuating seasonally

Figure 3.5 From the road, the land starts to slope down into to the river where their homes are packed together

Figure 3.6 The pots are set up along the roadside

Figure 3.7 Pots sit on the riverbank ready for transit to or from river boats

However, during the wet season, the spatial picture is somewhat different, depending on the level of rain throughout the monsoon period. In June and July in particular, the water level of the river rises to the top of the riverbank, threatening not only the slum dwellers but also other local people across much of Mandalay. During this time, their huts are often flooded by the river water, and so the pot community have to move from the riverbank slope to the shoulder of the road (Kanar Lane). During this time, local people and the local government have more understanding towards them, viewing them more collectively as people experiencing natural flooding, which is a common phenomenon across the city. Community members say that this means they can freely move and stay on the roadside without being hassled or questioned.

Members of the community define and demarcate their territory using quite specific mental boundary lines, attempting to control the space by placing a limit on their housing numbers. In their words, the community and their space is referenced as the pot selling community or the pot selling space "Oh Tan Oak Su", in a way which reflects a sense of pride in their community and the dignity of their profession. Recently, people residing in another of Mandalay's slum communities on 19th street have been asked to move. Their projection of their own community as respectable

infers that they are 'afraid' of those people coming here and trying to stay around their space, because they have heard that they are bad people "involved in all sorts of crime".

By recognizing their territory as contained and clearly demarcated, they openly express a refusal to accept strangers from other communities who may attempt to join the community or occupy their territory. Those that they accept are generally only relatives or people from the same hometown, and relatives of people that they say they know and trust. If someone is closely connected to members of the community, they say they will protect them and welcome them to build a shelter near them. However, if someone deemed a stranger comes in, they will inform the local government. U Khin Maung Lin reflected this sentiment:

> If they come here, our place will also become a bad place full of crime. So our houses are marked with numbers so that we know the exact number of huts. The local government has asked us to inform them if new people come and build tents on their land. They will not allow anyone new to settle.

Across the area, they frequently attest that the community is cohesive, that they all know each other well and get along harmoniously. As they are all from the same area, they liken it to a big family. Their villages are all just on the other side of the Ayeyarwady River - Kyin Yatapo and Nyaung To villages in Myin Chan township, and Nyaung Kar Yar village in Myaung township. Daw Thein Kyi reflects this same sentiment:

> I am really happy living here as my place. I know my neighborhood. We all know each other well. As we come from the same villages, we are familiar, we are all willing to help each other. I can borrow things from neighbors when I need to.'

Buffer zone and negotiated use of the liminal space

Figure 3.8 The vaguely defined space between the dwellings and the road. Here, in the dry season there is more space available

Figure 3.9 In the wet season, as the river level rises, the space for pots is more tight

Lying on the administrative boundary line between the different management of two authorities, while also straddling the somewhat ambiguously defined roadside area down to the river, the space has been formed by its different uses at various times. It is defined

here as 'liminal' in a spatial sense because of its vaguely defined nature, administratively and in local understanding, provides opportunities for transformations to take place through particular usages by the community.

First, however, it is important to explain the functioning of one slice of this area as a buffer zone, and its use as such by pot sellers. This pot selling area lies on the shoulder of the road, forming a buffer area between the road and the river channel. This serves to protect the road from river erosion, but in a cultural and administrative sense it is still referred to as the "road area", which often extends the width of the road. While the area is designated as a buffer zone, as in many similar spaces across the city, it is still able to be used for particular purposes by the adjacent community.

However, the buffer zone can only be used for mobile forms of selling. In the public road area, they are permitted to operate as sellers by day, but MCDC officials prevent them from staying there at night - meaning that when the sun goes down, they shift all their things from the road area to the river slope by their huts. It can be interpreted that the sellers use around half of the total buffer area at any one time. However, often they will attempt to gradually encroach further towards the roadside, only to be told to move back on a regular basis by passing MCDC officials, or by angry truck drivers screaming down the road.

While the buffer zone is a narrow corridor strategically used by community members, when we view the pot selling area more broadly it forms just one aspect of the larger liminal space. Their space lies on the administration boundary line on the western end of the road area. While the entire road area, including the road shoulder, can be managed by MCDC, the slope from the top of the riverbank down to the river channel is under the authority of a national government department, the Directorate of Water Resources and Improvement of River Systems. Therefore, their space is managed by two government departments operating at opposite levels of Myanmar's tangled modern-day bureaucracy. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation also manages some aspects of the Ayeyarwady riverbank. This reflects a common finding that Myanmar's

municipal authorities have often overlapping responsibilities with authorities falling under the national structure, with a lack of clarity in their respective roles (Kyed, 2019).

If the MCDC forces them to move for a particular project, they can move to stay in the area under the national government department area. After two to three days, when the cleaning process has served its bureaucratic purpose, they can simply come back. The extent to which they have to move everything out, including all the pots, depends on the level of force and urgency on the government side - although in all cases concerning this community, the removal action has never persisted for long. Likewise, they have also experienced attempts by the government department to move them as they use the river for particular projects. U Thet Naing, from MCDC's Revenue Department said:

> The MCDC can manage all areas included in the urban boundary. Along the riverbank, the boundary is marked by a line, which is the highest level that the river water reaches. The other side is managed by the national government department. If they lead the cleaning of slum dwellers who stay inside the riverbank, we will happily co-operate with them on this.

Genuine removal to an entirely different area could, it seems, only be possible through coordination between the levels of government. To now, this has never been achieved in relation to this area, and so the liminality in this context is observed as a key feature of the vague nature of bureaucratic authority.

However, the dwellers in the area are also impacted by different laws and their enforcement, which can affect them at any time. While they have found a situation where they can stay by law as mobile sellers, at particular times they cannot stay in the same area because another law affects the community in their riverbank dwellings. They may be able to continue in the pot selling industry, but should they be "cleaned" from their dwellings it will also impact their livelihoods.

The disparity in the approaches and policies of parts of Myanmar's complex and entangled mixture of bureaucracies is also evident in

the extent to which the spaces occupied by these dwellers are respectively recognized. The MCDC, as we have previously established, does not include these communities as part of Mandalay City, and as such their lives and dwellings are, in essence, invisible to the city's urban planners. Meanwhile, the local village tract, which represents the most localized form of governance in Myanmar and the bottom tier of the national government structure, do indeed recognize these people as under their administration. U Nyi Nyi, the head of the local administrative office, clarified that he is the local representative for five informal settlements, including both the Oh Tan Kyu and the Red Cross Kyu.

Such liminality is also evident in the degree to which they are perceived as 'permanent' residents by those looking on from the surrounding community. While they live on the western margin line of the urban area and community members have the right to vote for the hundred-household-leader, the surrounding community of formal residents generally define the area as still being a *kyu* space, specifically the pot selling squatter area. Reflecting the ambiguity here, they say that pot selling area is part of the public road space, but they can still live there as they please.

Red Cross Kyu

Stages of settlement in the area

Around the turn of the century, the area now referred to as the Red Cross compound was occupied by other informal settlers. The local government cleared those settlers from the area and allocated the now vacant plot for use as a castor oil plant plantation to two "associations"; the Red Cross Association (RCA) and the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA - the political party of the then-ruling junta government). The southern part was occupied by the Red Cross and the northern part was occupied by USDA, and it became filled with castor oil plants managed by both organizations. As the government castor oil program was deemed unsuccessful and was brought to an end, the RCA became less active in the community and allowed people fleeing the riverbank to settle - initially on a temporary basis.

First, in July 2004, the rising river water threatened sand workers who were living in huts on the sandy banks of the Irrawaddy River, and so the local government ordered them to move to safer ground. They initially moved to a small vacant space which formed a sort of medium strip between two roads. But given the limited space there, some government officials suggested that they settle in a vacant part of the Red Cross compound. Around fifty households moved in with the permission of the association, and after three months they did not want to return to the riverbank and requested permission to live and stay indefinitely. Rather than making individual arrangements, the community selected a kinship elder, U Maung Nyein, to manage their agreement with the head of the local RCA section, also with the assistance of U Win Tin, who was the first settler in the area. U Win Tin recalled:

> They moved into the Red Cross compound as refugees. At first, people just lived here temporarily. I asked them to move here when the water level was high and there was a flood. I didn't want them to be in trouble in the water. People realized that they would be safe here and they denied moving back to the riverbank when the water level was down.

Now 55 years old, U Win Tin was one of the only residents in the compound prior to the arrival of the fifty households from the sand community. In early 2002, while the bio-oil project was underway, he had migrated to the compound through his son who was a serving member of the RCA in Mandalay. U Win Tin himself had a long history of moving between informal settlement areas and is a typical example of the constant movement faced by those without a permanent home. Him and his parents previously lived in Ote Khyin ward, but when they sold their house in the late 1980s, they had no place to stay. They first built a temporary tent near Win Light Cinema on 84th street, one of the earlier informal areas near the centre of Mandalay, but the MCDC then ordered his family to move. They moved to Baw Di Kone in Maharmyaing Ward where they informally purchased a piece of "squatter's land"

for 5,000 kyat[5]. However, after the upheaval of the political crisis of 1989 they were again told they could no longer stay. They then moved to 'Thae' (sand) jetty on the Ayeyarwady Riverbank before moving into the Red Cross compound many years later.

Before the main arrival of scores of households, Daw Mya Sein and her family were another of the few original settlers in the area, following their relatives to the RCA compound. They initially moved to Ayeyar Tun ward after they were left homeless when their parent's house was sold. Through her brother U Win Tin, they then came to the RCA area and built a small house beside where he had settled. From 2004, she paid 1500 kyats per month to the RCA as a form of rent or payment to use the area.

U Win Tin and Daw Mya Sein were both welcoming to those who fled the flooding, helping them to establish a new community here. "At first people just lived here temporarily. I asked them to move here when the water level was high and there was a flood. I didn't want them to be in trouble in the water," said U Win Tin. After they realized the relative safety of the area compared to the flood-prone riverbank, the newcomers were supported to stay on a more continual, indefinite basis. U Win Tin, along with U Maung Nyein who was chosen to represent several families, negotiated with U Hla Win, the head of the RCA, on behalf of other families. They came to an agreement whereby they could stay on the land while paying a monthly sum to the administrator of the organization, U Hla Win, for plots of 9 foot by 9 foot. At that time the Red Cross legion in this area constituted twenty members, who were generally poorer people under the support of Mandalay's RCA. The sand workers chose their 9x9 foot plots around those who lived there, and for a period of time their money went to support the activities of the RCA.

However, over time the administrator left the area, as did any physical presence of the association, meaning the current residents were able to use the land without any regular payment obligations. U Win Thin remarked that, in any case, most community members avoided paying for use of the land by regularly asking for deferrals.

5. These small parcels of land have no recognized title, and so can be purchased informally for a fraction of the price of titled land, but without any tenure security.

These days, locals refer to the community as more closely resembling a regular urban residential ward, though with some differences. From the initial 50 households who arrived in 2004, there are now around 150 households from north to south making up what is sometimes known as the sand worker community. Some of the initial group already left the community and sold their places, but the numbers have grown as more families arrive through their connections - to the point where the area is now densely packed. For example, one woman, Mi San Myint, said that her children got married here, their spouses moved into the area and they also had children. Similarly, the monk of Pa Pin monastery also brought his relatives to stay here, after which their own relatives followed. Over the years the numbers grew into a crowded, bustling community that now appears short on vacant space.

U Maung Nyein, who supported many families in moving to the area, had a somewhat typical experience of continuous mobility prior to his arrival on the red cross land. Previously a soldier from the army of Kha La Ya in Mandalay, he retired from the army following the 1988 political crisis. Rather than returning to his village, he rented a house near the old airport in Chan Mya Tharzi Township. However, not long after settling he was ordered to move out, with the officials offering him a plot of land in Mya Yi Nandar. As his family struggled to establish a livelihood there that would provide them with enough food, he moved to Thae Jetty at the riverbank where there was a sand extraction mine. He opened a betel nut shop under a big lat pan tree (a large shady tree with bright red flowers). In 2004, as the MCDC ordered the "cleaning" of slum dwellers from the jetty, they were left without land or a place to stay, and so he moved to the Red Cross compound:

> During that time, I led 7 families to move here. First, we were staying there just like refugees, but I was able to negotiate with U Hla Win to allow us to have plots of land for each family by paying monthly to rent the land" U Maung Nyein described. "Then their relatives also came to stay here too and the monk also brought his relatives to stay in the southern part of the area. The place became crowded very quickly.

Another of the earlier arrivals was Daw San Myint and her husband, who worked for the sand business and previously stayed on the boat of the owner of the business before later settling at the sand jetty. She recalls her experience of being subjected to the flooding disaster and facing pressure by the MCDC to move:

> We first asked to stay for just three months, but after those three months we were desperate to stay and not return to the riverbank. I feel that this space saved my life and for the first time we didn't think the government would try to move us. It is close to our work and it gives us more peace of mind.

In the Red Cross Kyu, there are two sorts of distinct social groupings that have been developed, which are connected to their various relations and economic connections. Daw Aye Khaing is a dagama or a temple donor who works for Ta Wa Gu monastery compound and is the de-facto leader of one of these groupings. After growing up in rural Myanmar, in 1995 she moved with her brother to the outskirts of Mandalay, near Taung Tha Man Lake in Amarapura Township. Her brother worked making brick kilns and took care of her for five years. After the sand in that area was used up, they moved to Mandalay to find a new area to live. First, they built their hut on the riverbank in the Gaw Wein Port and worked as dockworkers. After five years the port was cleaned by MCDC and all the hut dwellers were forced to leave.

Daw Aye Khaing and her brother then decided to move to Paypin sand port. While engaging in the sand industry, they each got married and lived in huts adjacent to each other. They too followed their neighbors to the RCA area after the period of intense flooding. She has been a dagama since she lived in Paypin sand port, and she was supported by the monk to request land from the Red Cross Organization. Daw Aye Khaing has played an important role in helping monastery works and also assisting other dagama who live in the same area. Her journey to the RCA community followed the familiar path of extended mobility in search for work, while also seeking a more stable physical environment amid the relative precarity of their livelihoods.

Local interpretations of space

Regarding its material and spatial characteristics, the Red Cross Kyu is tightly bound between a large inland fish pond/reservoir to the east, Myopath Road to the west, the USDA Compound to the north and Tidtan Kyu to the south. The land is categorized into two distinct sections; one part is the mostly flat land owned by the RCA, and the other is the sloping land that is part of the road's shoulder. The slope of the Myopath road is relatively steep and 20 ft wide. The fishpond which is immediately behind the compound is under private local ownership with a form of aquaculture industry taking place there. The compound area extends about 90 ft wide away from the main Myopath road sloping downwards, with a length of around 300 ft running adjacent to the road - giving a total of around 27000 sq ft of community space.

With over 150 houses in the small area, it has an estimated total housing density of around 150,000 people per square mile. The densely populated compound has one narrow path running through it with houses tightly packed either side. It runs from north to south and it serves as a spine connecting the community on either side. While most initially settlers are along this main small thoroughfare, subsequent houses have been built in a narrow section facing the Myopath road on the slope. There are two narrow paths which serve as entry points to the community, one on the southern end and the other towards the middle. The southernmost path is used for residents living in the southern section and for motorbikes, while the path at the middle of the is a narrow 6 foot for dwellers living on the northern side. These physical characteristics, notably the adjoining nature of the housing and the narrow paths, give the community a greater sense of being a fixed, permanent residential area which in many ways is indistinguishable from a regular urban setting in Mandalay - and noticeably different from Oh Tan Kyu.

Likewise, the materials used in housing construction are more solid than in the adjacent kyu community and those seen in most mobile slum areas across other parts of Mandalay. They use wood for the housing frames, pillars and basic foundations. The housing more generally appears similar to those in rural and peri-urban Myanmar. They are generally two stories, with some using bamboo walls and other hardwood. The roofs are framed with bamboo and

some use zinc sheets. Most houses do not have toilets in the home, and need to use communal sanitation and showering arrangements.

U Win Tin, a prominent community leader, has a house which is one of the better constructions in the community, with a strong wooden two-story structure, a bathroom attached to the house and a very narrow earthen terrace path which gives direct access to the main road. Daw Mya Sein, his sister in law, also has a solid-looking two story house next to him. She said that she first built a small hut close to the U Win Tin's house in 2004, but after one year, she rebuilt her hut as a house when she realized she could stay here long-term. She did not have enough money to build the house, so she borrowed 50,000 kyat with interest from a money lender. At the front of U Win Tin' house, U Lay Gyi - a kingship elder - has a slightly larger house with stairs accessing the path. U Lay Gyi said that he built his house as two stories because he has a big family and he wanted to live together with his family and his daughter's family.

Figure 3.10 The main path through the community

Figure 3.11 Sloping paved steps which form one of the entrances into the community from the main road

In terms of the broader context surrounding the area, the community area is limited to the residential space with no obvious efforts to encroach onto the road for commercial means. However, as more settlers arrived, the land occupied by the community has extended beyond the land that was owned by the red cross, into more ambiguously defined areas. While the original part of the

Red Cross compound, where the sand workers primarily moved in and settled is in a clearly demarcated flat area between the road and the fishpond, sand workers who arrived later have settled beyond this area on a steep sloping section off the main road. This is considered by some to be 'free space' between the shoulder of the road (which is clearly public land and under the authority of MCDC) and the RC compound, and is not clearly marked for any usage. This group of around 40 households have moved in over the last seven years and have built houses facing the road. Their houses are generally newer and studier constructions. There is no clear determination as to whether this area belongs to the community compound or the department of roads and bridges, and in the absence of state claims to the area it appears the dwellers are free to claim the space as their own - and they feel it is free from the control of government.

These physical characteristics are a key distinction between the Red Cross and the Oh Tan settlement areas. In the latter, the primary area for residential space is along the road and on the outer space of the pot selling area, while in the sand community, the community has entirely settled on land and built their homes in a distinct inner area with no shopfronts. For the pot sellers, the new informal settlers built across the road and the riverbank territory which is classified under separate government departments, but in the sand community, the new informal settlers build their house on the slope of the road that, while ambiguously defined, seems to be beyond the interests of the state. It may also be the case that, as there is no use of the land for commercial use and the community is engaged in external work, government officials are less interested in claiming control.

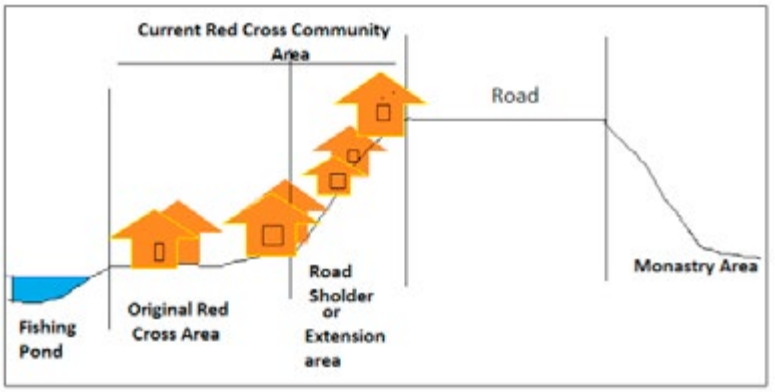

Figure 3.12 A cross-section of the community showing the original area, and the newer encroachment onto the shoulder of the road

Beyond liminality and contested control

While the area, in a material sense, resembles a permanent and established community, the nature of the space and the pattern of settlement in the area have contributed to vague constructions over who has the right to own the land, who can use it, and how various actors contest and perceive their roles. Nonetheless, despite such ambiguities, the community has largely been able to carve out a situation where they are referred to as non-rent-paying "tenants", and in reality face no prospect of having to relocate.

The red cross community and the pot selling community are commonly considered as two parts of the same Papin slum group, divided only by a road and sharing many communal spaces and social aspects. However, the road serves as an administrative boundary line between the Mandalay municipal area and river channel area, meaning the Red Cross compound is included in the administrative area of the West Thahletmaw ward, while the pot selling community is not. The ward administrator can therefore directly oversee this area and impose their authority with regards to certain restrictions on people's activities.

Reflecting this, there are some ways in which the community is treated as part of the ward, but in some other aspects they still are not treated as equally as other parts of the community. The patchy

electricity access is a good example of this. There are six houses who, since 2007, have been able to access electricity through the local government grid, while some other homes have limited access to electricity through private connections in three homes. U Win Tin, who cannot get access in his home, said that this was the result of an incomplete government plan to connect every urban household, where only those six households had the required registration documents at Anauth Thanlyet Maw Ward.

Likewise, for some families, registration documents are processed at Mahaung Myae Township, but these records seem to not be fully in order. On occasion, some officials have come to collect information on how many people are living there in order to make family registration documents for them. U Win Tint suspected, however, that this was done in order for them to vote and support local candidates in the 2015 elections, which was compulsory. He further noted that, whenever there was a donation ceremony in the ward, community members always donated in the same way as 'formal' residents of the ward. The extent to which they are treated and perceived as regular urban residents, is therefore something with no shortage of interest. One local man, U Maung Nyein, reflected that:

> Now, this compound is more like a ward now. We know that this land is under the control of the government, but we also know the ward administrator won't say anything about us. So we will just keep on staying here.

In terms of ongoing land use, the community has been able to carve out a strong degree of stability due to being inside the ward boundary (rather than on ambiguously defined public land), and being on land that technically remains under private ownership. As the community space lies inside the ward administrative boundary and is generally considered to be a part of the ward area, it does not face the same threats as the pot selling community of being 'cleaned' by MCDC or the local government. The community has never been asked to move or threatened by local authorities, and it seems that while they themselves do not officially own the land, they have some degree of power over it.

The present-day role of the Red Cross Association ward, who are still in a formal sense considered the 'owners' of the land, seems increasingly peripheral. The Red Cross Aassociation volunteers who lived in Thanlyetmaw Ahnaut ward were referred to as the "auxiliary forces" of the Red Cross society, which previously comprised of around 20 people in the area. Now these members are not very active, with members mainly having moved to other areas, and the main leader having since passed away.

Although the Red Cross Association still in a formal sense owns the land, community members say they now have no presence and no power to evict the sand workers because their collective strength as a community is greater than the association. Further, the land can't be taken or occupied by the ward administrator without the express desire of the owner, or by the MCDC without the owner's desire and ward administrator's report - meaning that even if the government came to see them as a problem, they would have limited ability to act.

Reflecting this feeling of relative security, one local women, Daw San Mya said:

> There is no way that we would need to move right now. We can sleep very well at night without any worries...this space is safe for me. In this space, I am not under threat by MCDC from all those years ago until now. This gives me good peace of mind and a feeling of security. We are close to our working place and can stay safely.

The community is still referred to as Kyue Myay, a squatter area (as opposed to a regular urban area) primarily because of the journey through which they came to settle in the area from 2004 onwards. While it first began as a temporary refuge for families fleeing the flood, it has now evolved into a more permanent place. The local settlers feel confident and secure in the knowledge they have more power to control the space than those, such as the two levels of government and the RCA, who in a formal sense appear to have more authority. Another factor worth considering is the role of the sand industry itself as a stabilizing force. The sand

business owner, U Myint, was himself influential in carving out the initial rent-free relationship and it remains in the interests of the business for the workers to have a nearby, rent-free place to live, as the next chapter explains.

When reflecting on the degree to which liminality is still an apt description in this more evolved context, we consider this community to have therefore largely moved beyond its previously liminal context, and therefore drawing a stark contrast to the community of pot sellers. While certain vagaries persist, in a spatial sense the community has moved beyond its period of transition, uncertainty and flux to something more stable - at least in a physical sense.

The Monastery as a Central Provider of Education and an Essential Support Network in the Slum Area

While the two communities have distinct differences, Paypin Monastery serves as a central point of connection and commonality for the slum dwellers in this part of Mandalay. Before the chapters that follow delve deeper into the divergent livelihoods and social structures of the two communities, it is helpful to first engage with the monastery as a space of communal use and the support networks that have spread from it, serving all of the 'slum dwellers'.

In essence, the pot selling community area and the sand worker community area meet head-on with the Paypin monastic compound, with the two communities essentially face to face and the compound centrally accessible. At the point where the Myopart road (the main riverside thoroughfare) divides into two roads, the large compound is located in the area between where the two new roads diverge. Although there are three monasteries near the slum area, Papin monastery is the only one giving support to slum dwellers, and importantly the only compound which has provided educational support to slum children.

Pay pin monastery is therefore central to the functioning of the broader community, giving educational opportunities and essential water and sanitation to those who would otherwise be left without either. As throughout Myanmar, the monastery practices

Theravada Buddhism, and it is also classified as Sarthintaki, meaning it is designated as a place for the study of Buddhist literature. At present, U Kay Thu is the head monk of Papin monastery, a 60-year-old Buddhist scholar from Indaw Town in Sagaing Region. He arrived at this monastery fifteen years ago and previously served as the assistant of the monastery, before becoming the head monk six years ago. Currently there are three monks and twenty novices staying at Papin monastery.

The most notable contribution of the monastery to the local slum dwellers has been in providing educational opportunities to children. In Myanmar cities, monastic schools commonly exist to give basic education to children from poor families. However, prior to the year 2000, there was no monastic school in the area, and even young children were forced to work in basic jobs. In 2000, a basic monastic school was opened, which according to locals, helped forge the close relationship between the monks and the slum dwellers that has continued in the years that followed.

Schooling within the Papin monastery developed from a literacy campaign called Ah Thone Lone which was done across the country in March, 2000, aiming to reduce childhood illiteracy. The training took place at the Ta Wa Gu Pagoda Compound, which is located on the land of Paypin monastery. The training began there with thirty students, before the numbers quickly increased to eighty students in the months that followed .The Ah Thone Lone program focused on the poor citizens including informal settlers who couldn't attend school in the Thanlyet Maw Ward, and it created the momentum to create basic monastic education centre on the monastery's compound. The school officially opened in July 2001, and its main donor was the then Myanmar ambassador to the UK, Myeik Win Htin and his wife, with World Vision also giving some support.

The head monk at the time, Shan Pone Gyi, targeted the schools at students within close proximity of the monastery, particularly children in informal settlements, including the sand worker and pot seller communities. It first targeted lower primary, before growing to cover grade one to eight by 2005, and by 2013/2014, the size swelled to 875 students. While the school could not formally teach beyond those years, the monk personally helped

grade nine and ten students to continue studying by teaching them in the evenings.

However, in 2014 the school was abruptly closed down, after the monk refused a teacher's request for a raise in her modest salary. After the issue reached the head monks of the township, the school was closed. According to parents in the two communities, this had a huge impact on the ability to provide their children with an education. Many students in these slum communities stopped or withdrew from study altogether, as other study options were too costly and too far away. Nonetheless, the head monk has continued to provide help to students who wish to continue, and his network of support remains the best chance for slum children to stay in school. Many children transferred to another monastic school which teaches night classes, and others have been supported with the cost of going to government schools.

At first the monk arranged for buses to take the students to their new schools, but as this became too much of an expense, he instead gave bicycles to each student. He has also focused on keeping youth in school even as they become of working age, by providing Grade 10 students with 30,000 kyat per month to support their study, as well as essential learning resources.

While this has been successful in keeping some of them in the education system, many of the younger students did not last long in these new schools, the monk said. They were not happy at the school and they were afraid of going into a new, unfamiliar environment. Meanwhile the pressure on children to earn wages meant that parents expected their children to become sand workers and manual laborers.

Daw Lin Lin Ngwe, from the sand worker community, is a mother with three sons and three daughters. She said that before all her children were able to go to the monastic school, but since it was closed it became too expensive to send them all there, in spite of the monk's support. Her eldest son is now helping at Papin masonry and in construction sites around the city. Her second son doesn't have a regular job, but takes on small work when he can. Her daughter is still studying at the government high school in grade nine and she is really happy to go to school and study;"I have never

been to school. I can't read and write at all. I don't want my daughter to be like her and so I hope she can get a better job in the future."

My first point of contact in the pot selling community was Ma Thin Thin Khaing. Her mother, Daw Thein Gyi said that previously her daughter was in grade seven in the monastic school, but when it closed, she was unable to transfer to the government school, and so she had to leave to help her work selling pots with a trolley and making garlands of seasonal flowers to sell. Her grandson, meanwhile, is now attending grade eight in a government school; "We can't afford to pay for his tuition, so when he comes back home from school, him and his friends have to help making garlands, and then study at night until 10 p.m." She explained that they have to borrow a battery light for 100 kyat per day so they can study. In the morning, they then bring it back to the owner to charge. Some nights they even do their homework using the minimal light from streetlamps.

Another woman in the red cross compound, Daw Aye Khaing, reflected that the opportunities provided through Paypin monastery had given her children a chance to be successful. Her children first went to the monastic school, and then to the government high school, and have since progressed to studying at university:

> My children are the only university students here. Others think that even if they become educated, they will have to work in the same jobs as us, but I believe that my children will have a better job than us. They will work under the shade with a pen, not like my husband working with a shovel under the sun and rain. For others, they say that we should ask our children to work to earn for the family and there is no use in study. I only eat rice with tea leaf salad so I can save as much money as I can to send my children to school and university.

In addition to building the school building, two water tanks for the water storage were installed and ten toilets were built in the compound for the students. Though they were meant for use by the students, as most of the students were informal settlers, their

parents would also use the latrines for washing, which the monk was not concerned about. U Win Tin, from the red cross community, said that though they now have their own tubewell to use, some still go to the monastery to take a bath. The previous monk dug the two tube wells for the informal settlers: one in the red cross area, and the other in the pot selling area. For drinking water, they can access the water tap in the monastery and carry it back for use in the home.

Figure 3.13 The Paypin monastery is one central connecting force between these communities

The monks at Paypin monastery also provide some basic food when they can. When they go around the city to collect donations each morning, there are often surplus donations offered to the monks and the sangha, which are kept for vulnerable communities. The monk brings back some of this food and has set up a daily rice and curry provision at 11:00 am every morning. Daw Thein Gyi said that the monk firstly asks how many family members they have and gives a certain amount of rice according to the number of people staying in each household. He also provides medicine when someone gets ill, she said. Every Sunday, physicians from Mandalay's University of Traditional Medicine come and give medicine to those in need and provide check-ups to patients from across the informal community area.

The monastery has also been central in the formation of a local support organization known as 'Ta Wa Gu' social welfare committee, which has been in operation since (2000). Most members are from the slum communities, with some from residential communities in the ward also involved. There is a leadership committee elected by the organization, but while women make up more of the membership than men, there are no female leaders. The organization accepts donations for its general fund, and collects 5,000 kyat per year from the membership. This enables the organization to provide different forms of essential social support to people in need across the communities. When someone from the slum goes to hospital, the organization can help them. When someone passes away, they provide 80,000 kyat for funeral costs. The organization also offers food to Buddhist monks, and to giving ceremonies and other events arranged by female members. The welfare organization forms just one component of the infrastructure of social cohesion emerging from the monastery, which is a unifying component amid the divergent spatial arrangements and mobilities described in this chapter.

4

DIVERGENT ECONOMIC FORMS, LIVELIHOOD SECURITY AND RELATED SOCIAL DYNAMICS

This chapter extends from the analysis in the previous chapter of the spatial dynamics and the negotiation of certain liminalities, by looking at how livelihoods and predominantly economic networks have largely determined the respective agencies of people in these adjacent communities. Though the Oh Tan Kyu and the Red Cross Kyu are very closely located and are generally defined under a collective group by the local government as Papin Theseik Kyu, their degree of physical permanence does not correspond closely, but rather has something of an inverse relationship to their degree of livelihood permanence, security and community cohesion. The pot sellers have managed to forge livelihoods where community members have a high degree of economic agency, able to work essentially for themselves within a larger beneficial structure. By contrast, the physically more stable red cross community face quite precarious employment prospects, primarily as wage laborers in the sand industry. In both these cases, the social dynamics of the communities are heavily influenced by these respective economic networks.

Pot Selling and Sand Extraction as Contrasting Riverbank Livelihoods

The mobile pot selling economy

The community is one of several main pot selling groups in Mandalay, a significant local industry given the continued domestic demand for earthen pots. The other areas are in Mayanchan Ward along the Ayeyarwady River Bank, Zay Cho market, and small pot retailers in the inner city. In Myanmar, these pots have been used in particular forms and usages for centuries, but the most common use is to store drinking water. The people believe that drinking water from earthen clay pots (*thauk ye oo*) brings prosperity, blessings and joy to family life, meaning that these locally produced pots have evolved into auspicious objects in Myanmar homes. Although bottled water has become more popular in modern society in Myanmar, the culture of earthen pots is still present in most homes. There are many earth pot production villages in Myanmar, but most of the pot making villages are located along the riverbank in central Myanmar. Yantapo, Ngwe Nyein and Sagaing are the most popular and well-recognized of these villages, each with their own eponymous pots of particular quality, design and artwork. Traditionally, Myanmar people change their drinking earth pots two times a year, once at Thingyan (Myanmar New Year), and once at the beginning of Buddhist lent. The old drinking pot is removed and a new one put in its place.

The pots from Yantapo pot, as well as those from nearby, Khatt Thin, are the most commonly used across Mandalay. Yantapo village is located on the eastern bank of Ayeyarwady river around 90 miles from Mandalay, while Khatt Thin village is around 70 miles south of the city. The pot makers distribute their pots all over the country, but the Mandalay market is the most frequent point of trade. Most of the pots are carried up the river by boat, stopping at the riverbank of where the sellers unload them. This docking of ships carrying pots existed before the community settled there, but the situation was quickly used to their advantage as they saw a way to become involved in the trade. It is now estimated that this community is responsible for distributing and selling around half the number of pots in greater Mandalay.

The growth in this informal community is closely tied to the relative strength of pot selling as a livelihood activity. In the present day, the industry continues to dominate the community and shape many of its social dynamics. The work is founded on a strong degree of trust between the pot distributor and most community members who act as resellers, and this has contributed to a strong sense of common identity and community. Before living in this space, most community members worked as laborers unloading goods from the river. This which was physically difficult and poorly paid work. All the community members interviewed expressed that they much prefer pot selling work to other works, with many of them growing into small-scale entrepreneurs who own their own light tract cars and thone bane (three-wheel motorcycles). The spatial situation no doubt provided favorable conditions for this sort of work. The map below shows the community's proximity to both the riverside pot producing communities, and the markets around Mandalay City.

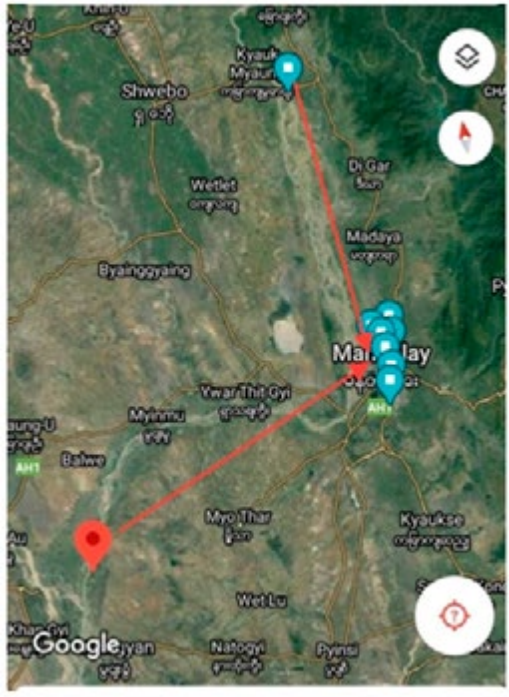

Figure 4.1 Map of the two major pot production villages, and their connecton to sellers in Mandalay

There is estimated to be around a hundred pot selling families in the community, with around 30 households participating in other forms of livelihoods. This community is the only slum community to be involved in the industry. The industry is closely protected by those involved in it. The several families who shifted into the space from south of the area due to being displaced by the Shan Kalay Kyun urban development project are not working in pot selling work, but in other mainly informal sectors, including pony cart driving, rubbish collecting, carpentry, sand excavation, and running small snack shops. These members arrived in this space as the latest group around six years ago, and despite staying in the same space, they are in some ways seen as separate from the rest of the community given their later arrival – both within the community and also in how they are designated by the government.

U Tin Moe Swe (known as 'U Moe') is the central figure in the village pot distribution and selling industry, responsible for establishing a network of trade founded on trust, which has brought opportunity to other residents who over time have come to work themselves as distributors and sellers where can they earn their own income using this well-established network of U Moe. This network begins with the producers in the villages and involves boat owners who transport the pots down the river, pot distributors in this community, sellers in this community, and finally customers across greater Mandalay. Over time, U Moe has reduced his own monopoly on the industry by allowing for six other villagers to act as distributors or brokers with their own seller networks, two of whom work with sellers in this community, with the others working with external networks. He has also created a model whereby sellers have a great deal of autonomy to sell pots and earn their own income, using a system of trust whereby the margins which households can profit from on pot sales are strong enough to make a reasonable living in comparison to other livelihoods.

In the beginning, around sixteen years ago, U Moe and his wife took the pots from the boat, carrying them with shoulder-yoke by foot to sell in the Mandalay urban area. After five years, he sold the pots by carrying them with a pushcart, before eventually earning enough income to sell them from a thonebane. He became known in different areas as a reliable seller, so if someone wanted

to buy the pots he would be contacted by mobile phone. Within a short period, he was distributing pots as far as Taung Pyone village and Tada-U Town to the south, to Kyaukse, Myit Nge and Ohn Chaw to the north, to and Htone Bo Village near Pyin Oo Lwin, and Ohn Ta near Sagaing. Quite quickly, he needed the help of others to meet this demand. He was able to to begin this trade through his village kin relationships, which enabled him to invest in the pots with just a small deposit until he was able to sell the pots for a profit. In time, U Moe grew this network by first allowing his close community contacts to sell the pots themselves, before more and more households became involved with some of them given permission by U Moe to also act as distributors or brokers; two others are brokers within this community, while the others have forged networks with sellers elsewhere. He now takes the pots not only from Yatapo, where he had the existing relationship, but also from Khat Thin.

In its present form, U Moe's trading operation is extensive and relies on his brokerage skills and the initial trust that was forged in the beginning - though he has allowed others to strike the same deals as him. It costs U Moe around 50 lakhs (5 million kyat – around $3,500 USD) to buy all the pots from the pot boats each time, and he makes an initial payment in cash for half the total value of the pots. The remaining half of the cash is given to the pot producers when they next return to sell pots at the port. The main pot distributors also now buy the pots from the boats without this initial capital, and re-distribute the pots in the urban area, either themselves or through sellers. The pot boat owners are also able to trust the brokers from the community as they see them as being Ja Hswei Ja Mjou, meaning they have close kinship ties and recognize each other as being from the same native area. U Moe explains how the number of sellers in the community grew over time:

> Firstly, I shared the pots with my closer kin, then I permitted friends who were close to our kin (Ja Hswei Ja Mjou) and our immediate neighbors. Now, I share the industry with most of the slum dwellers in the community, and they can just take the pots without paying capital. After that, the slum dwellers repay the capital according to the number of pots they have

> sold. If they can't sell any pots in a day, we understand that they can't pay back yet.

For his own distribution operation, U Moe is has created a system where he benefits as a broker, while the seller can still earn a healthy profit without having to invest any capital or take on any risk. If he buys the pots at wholesale from the boat, he is able to pay 1000 kyat per pot. He then gives these to the sellers with the agreement that if they sell the pots for between 1500-2000 kyat, they will return 1200 to him, and so keep they can keep between 300-800 profit per pot. He also has a pushcart lending system which operates in a similar way. In addition to not having to pay anything up-front, one notable benefit of this system for the sellers is the security they receive of an annual income. During the rainy season, the number of pots produced is lower than other seasons and there are fewer pots available for sale. During that season, he uses his network to continue to share these pots with the slum dwellers without limiting the number each can take - essentially guaranteeing a certain regularity of income.

Figure 4.2 One of the local shops set up in the community with a wide range of pots for sale

Figure 4.3 Pots travel far up and down the country

Figure 4.4 Women are able to socialize and take care of their children while selling pots on the roadside

Figure 4.5 Two women proudly show off their pots and bustling trade

His willingness to use the pot selling industry as a profit-sharing system, with the ability for community members to take credit payable at the next purchase, has led to people across the community viewing him as a kind and reliable person who, rather than monopolizing the industry for himself, has provided opportunity to people to earn a stable living. U Moe and his family have no doubt become relatively wealthy over these years, though they have continued to live a modest life in the slum community:

> At first, my wife and I had to carry the pots on shoulders to sell around the city. As we earned profits we could invest more. If we can invest more, we will get more profit. Day by day I get the money as much as I sell the pots. I can get a net profit of 150,000 kyat if we sell 1,000 pots.

This pot selling work is seen as family work, because in most households, not only do men sell the pots by trolley or thone bane into other urban areas, but other family members can also sell the pots near the homes, meaning a family's income is around 10,000 kyat per day. Distributors can earn more than sellers, often around 15,000 kyat per day. While the incomes differ depending on the success of each family, across the community people reflected that their incomes were higher and more reliable than other livelihood alternatives, and they were very happy to be involved in this industry.

Daw Thein Kyi's family is one who has greatly benefited from the initiative of U Moe and their subsequent involvement in the trade. She has divorced her husband, but he lives not far from her tent. She has three daughters and a son but only the youngest daughter lives together with her as the others have since married but still stay nearby. Before, she tried working in the sand business and selling firewood, but these livelihoods were difficult to earn a living and too physically demanding for her and her daughter. Then they both became pot sellers though U Moe. Daw Thein Kyi reflected on her livelihood:

> Pot selling is my preferred livelihood because it means we can be self-employed. I sell the pots at my home, while my daughter sells the pots by the trolley around Mandalay downtown. My daughter can earn a net profit of about 6,000-7,000 kyat per day, which is more than the amount that I can earn, about 3,000. Between the two of us, on a good day my family can earn over 10,000 profit. This is enough for our daily food and expenses, and we usually have some left to save.

Her and her daughter also make Jasmine garlands as a side job to earn extra money. They can get about 500 kyat for ten *kyat thar* (a local weight measurement). If they can do thirty *kyat thar* of jasmine they earn around 1,500 kyat per day. However, this work is seasonal work as the jasmine flowers only bloom from autumn to spring. The owner of the business sends them the jasmine flowers at 11am in the morning, then they make the garlands and at 4:30pm the owner comes back to take the garlands for sale. In the pot selling community, over half of households work making jasmine garlands, mainly housewives and younger daughters who do it as supplementary income.

Across the community, there are many others who are willing to talk positively about the pot selling trade as an improvement to their livelihoods. One example is U Kyaw Oo, who moved in this pot selling area through his daughter's marriage to a community member. As Yatapo was his hometown, he was quickly able to transition from working as a mason to working in pot selling through his friendship and kin networks. For many years, U Kyaw

Oo said he had a difficult life moving across informal areas and struggling to earn sufficient money to stay in any one place while incurring significant debts. He said that, since moving here several years ago, his life has become easier. He has been able to earn a stable living in the pot trade, which helped him pay off his debts and support his family. His wife is the sister of U Moe, and his inclusion in this community network has brought him many benefits. Even if he owned his own formal land and house, he would still work in this industry, he said, such is its stability compared to life in the past. Such stability in livelihoods seems to belie the temporariness of the community's material existence.

Sand extraction and trade

In the red cross community, despite the more permanent appearance, there is no such communal economic network. Almost all the adults in the community work as informal manual laborers in the sand extraction and trade industry. The Ayeyarwady River's sandy banks have, through public-private dealings, become an extractable commodity for wealthy private business owners who can have seemingly unfettered access to the sand - despite the potential environmental and livelihood consequences – while taking advantage of the large number people living in informal communities who can be hired for cheap wages, even paying them sometimes below the formal minimum wage.

Focusing here on the sand business of Mandalay's Paypin Jetty, which employs people in the Red Cross Kyu, there are two types of economic activity taking place; sand extraction and sand trading. In the extraction component, the sand from in the river is excavated, transported by boat and piled at the river's edge, using the machines which are usually used for sand mining. This industry requires not only the machine which extracts the sand from the river but also manpower, such as drivers and workers for loading and unloading sand. The workers dig the sand from the river using machines, and then carry it by ship to the river bank where it is unloaded using manual labor.

Figure 4.6 A sand dredger on the banks of the river *Source: Stephen Lahpai*

Figure 4.7 Sand is pumped onto the riverbank by one of the workers in the excavating industry *Source: Stephen Laphai*

In the extraction business, the business owners pay wages directly to the workers, including many residents from the from the Red Cross Kyu who generally do the physically demanding work of unloading sand from the ship to the jetty. While wages are low for all the workers, there is a gender disparity in pay as the average daily wage of male workers is 4000-7000 kyat per day, whereas women earn on average 3000-4000 kyat per day. Their pay is determined by how many trips on the sand boats they can complete each day (generally around five or six) as the standard payment for each boat is divided by the driver and three or four workers. One of the workers said:

> Although the sand businesses are small companies, the owners have become very rich. They each have three or four boats to carry sand, but they don't share any of their profits with us workers. They give us money which is just enough to survive, but no extra at all.

The second type of business is sand trading, which also involves wealthy business owners who manage the trucks by buying sand from the extraction business and selling to buyers as per their daily orders. Likewise, the sand business employs daily workers in the form of truck drivers and loaders. The sand truck owner does not make contact with the sand workers directly, but instead the driver knows how many workers he needs in his car and decides how many to call – generally around five or six men. The driver and the sand workers get paid according to the number of trips performed each day. Workers are sometimes able to earn around 8000 kyat per day, with drivers often earning a bit more, although the industry is incredible fickle, subject both to the whims of business owners and the seasonality of extraction.

Figure 4.8 A view over the sand extraction industry at Papin Theseik on the Ayeyarwady River *Source: Stephen Lahpai*

Almost all those of working age in the red cross community are involved in both parts of the industry. Daw San Myint and her husband worked on the sand extraction boats many years ago, and now her four sons and two of her daughter's husbands work in the industry. She recalled the hardship faced while working on the boats, where they worked for paltry wages. When it would rain, they didn't even have clothes to change into and would have to wait for the sun to re-emerge. In 2004, they moved to the Red Cross compound, and eventually borrowed money to build a house. By the time it was repaid to a local lender, the house was in a state of disrepair. Still now, she says, the industry exploits its workers just as it does sand. And as before, workers do not earn enough to cover their regular daily costs given the irregular nature of the work.

Work is rare during the rainy season because of the difficultly in extracting sand when the bank sinks into the water as the water surface level rises. During this period, they struggle to provide their families with food and basic necessities, so they are forced to take loans as a means to survive. For the sand workers, interest may be calculated on a daily basis, a twelve day basis, a twenty four day basis, or a one month basis, with the World Vision organization providing a more sustainable alternative for those who can access it.

The personal money lenders come to the community regularly in the knowledge that there are always people in need of urgent, short-term credit. As they come to collect repayments from others, there are always new sand workers in need of cash. My surveys suggest that almost everyone in the community is stuck in some sort of perpetuating debt cycle, not knowing when their reliance on loans for daily subsistence will end.

Further, the sand workers do not have employment every day, and unlike the pot sellers, they have no ability to control when they can work or the autonomy to support themselves as they need. There is only work for them when there are orders for sand. Only a handful of people are involved in other casual work, mainly similar jobs loading goods. The main reason why sand workers cannot take on more employment is because of the requirement that they must be available whenever the owners receive the order and call the driver. If the sand worker is not available when the driver calls, another new person is taken and the previous person becomes unemployed. This forces workers to be reliant on the industry even if they are not getting regular employment. It also makes it harder to seek employment elsewhere, as other businesses generally only want full time workers. One worker reflected how hard this affected him as he has seen his co-workers get fired from the company for doing other work when the driver called upon them; "our life is such that we have to act according to the will of others…" he said with sadness.,"…they don't act with any care for our needs. We don't even have ownership of ourselves or our lives, we are owned by them."

However, the sand industry is only one of a number of industries who treat workers this way, able to take advantage of excess supply in the labor market as more people have moved into Myanmar's cities, driving down wages and eroding working conditions. One worker said that as they are unskilled with only basic level and monastic education, they are forced to stay here feeling resigned to the reality that this will always be their life. Another worker pointed out that all along the Ayeyarwady River there are industries loading and unloading goods, but the number of manual workers exceed the jobs available, meaning it is difficult not only to find regular work, but even temporary work.

In the past few years, even the minimal security afforded by involvement in the sand industry has disappeared through new technology. Daw Aye Khaing said that her husband worked for two prominent businessmen in the industry, who for years had hired teams working both daytime and nighttime shifts. But in last seven years the owners have instead invested in machines such as backhoes and dump trucks, which has eliminated the need for much labor. Though her husband still has some employment, many others including large numbers of women have been left unemployed. For many women, this has left them dependent on their husbands as the sole breadwinners.

The workers are given regular reminders that they are seen as expendable and of no value to their employers. The drivers don't live near the slum communities, but live further away beyond the *kyukyaw* areas. The drivers essentially serve as intermediaries between the owner and the workers, arranging the schedules and divvying out wages each day. When there is work that day, or on the next day, the drivers call the workers and tell them where to be. When we were speaking to Daw Aye Khaing she fielded a call from her husband, relaying to him that tomorrow he was to take the sand to Mattaya town in three separate trips, and he was to be waiting at the riverbank when the truck arrives.

The work is, of course, very physically strenuous as their daily wages depends on how much sand they can carry and how quickly. The workers depend on each member of the team each day, and the amount they can do together affects all of them. Over time, no doubt, this physical pressure places strain on the body and health of the workers. Daw Mi and her husband are another household in the Red Cross Kyu who depend on the sand industry. Job opportunities are scarce, she says, because machines have replaced human labor. They want to work every day, but often they cannot. Sometimes, once they have worked for a five day stretch they have to wait another two weeks for more work. "We didn't chose this life" she reflected, "but it is all we can do".

The Influence of Economic Forms on Community Social Dynamics and Leadership

While sand workers and pot sellers can earn similar daily wages, this fact belies the divergent economic realities which have been laid out here. The pot sellers have managed to forge a livelihood where they can work as much as they need, work to their own schedule essentially run autonomous household businesses. Though while this may appear to reflect a strain of individualism, the nature of the industry seems to actually more closely resemble a collective system, whereby brokers, distributors and sellers are all part of an interdependent economic ecosystem. By contrast, the red cross community and it's workers across the sand industry are subject to all the economic troubles associated with informal wage labour in Myanmar: low wages, insecurity, worker obligation, poor conditions and a general sense of alienation, as workers are detached from their work and the business structures which pay them paltry amounts - on the irregular occasions when they are actually hired.

That, in the local discourse, the pot selling livelihood has become an eponym for the whole community, speaks to the extent to which their physical space and their social dynamics are defined by their trade. The community's leadership and social structures have emerged directly from economic structures explained above. People are tied together through this economy as profits are shared between U Moe, distributors and sellers so that nobody is exploited or left behind, they say. A sense of mutual trust and common faith permeates the area. Some local refer to it as a "big family", though this also means that outsiders may be less than welcome to move or join in their livelihoods. In this section, the relative relationship (or lack thereof) between these community economies and the social and leadership structures are explored, with the diffuse, insecure, incohesive Red Cross Kyu in many ways resembling the unfortunate reality of informal labor and informal settlements across Mandalay, and the pot sellers standing out as an exception to the norm.

Leadership and social dynamics in Oh Tan Kyu

In the pot selling community, the leadership closely reflects the centrality of the industry to the functioning of the community.

This begins at the top, with U Moe assuming the elected position of ten-household leader as well as the informal title of lugyi (village headman). Although community members are represented by both a ward administrator and a hundred household head[6], the ten-household head is the official figure who is more directly involved in the leadership of the community and is elected by the people, while in small communities across Myanmar the lugyi often a central figure in daily operations of community affairs.

While one role of the lugyi is to deal with issues that may arise within the community, the role of the village leader in this particular context is crucial because of the need for the community to have representatives who can negotiate effectively with local government and other external actors. The ten-household leader has to regularly meet with the ward administration office and generally act as the main point of contact between the community and the local government. Often there are projects or issues which affect the community to which U Moe is required represent their position, while the issue of slum removal is one which calls for someone who is sensitive in both handling political tensions and ensuring a degree of peace and stability among the community, regardless of external pressures.

U Nyi Nyi is the current Ward Administrator, working across the larger geographical area which includes both the pot sellers and the red cross area. They ward administration has a wide purview, including programs relating to health, education and criminal justice. For the pot sellers, the administrator is a crucial figure in determining how the community is affected by the local

6. In the Myanmar administrative structure for each ward, the Ward Administrator is the head of the ward administrative office. The ten-household head is the one chosen by the respective ten households group to assist the ward administrator, while he hundred households head is selected by the respective ten household heads to help the ward administrator, who in turn, select the ward administrator. The title of ten-household head, certainly across these informal geographies, generally does not equate with the number of households they represent. These titles are a relic of old bureaucratic systems and the number of households per representative seems largely arbitrary. U Moe, for instance, represents around 150 households in the community.

government's implementation of the slum clearing plan. The role of this figure very much reflects the vagueness and the types of liminalities described in the previous chapter, in that this figure is the 'formal' representative of these 'informal' communities, at once involving them in local government assistance programs, yet also charged with the removal of slum dwellers when the state deems it necessary. The people directly choose him by voting for their ten and hundred household heads, but the extent to which they are representative is questionable. People in the community say they don't know U Nyi Nyi particularly well, but they view him quite positively as he seems to be happy for them to continue living where they are, and U Moe seems to have established a stable collective understanding.

U Moe's position has no doubt been conferred as a result of his fundamental role in the economy of the community. He is viewed as someone who has lifted up the entire community and who therefore makes a fitting representative. No doubt his position is bolstered by his extended network of relatives and village ties, but the high esteem in which he is held is seen by villagers as a product of his kindness and honesty in forming a somewhat collectivized economic system and his success in bringing greater physical stability in recent years by negotiating with U Nyi Nyi and others. In his own view, U Moe says:

> My job is to solve problems here. If I can't solve something I work with the ward administration, but generally I can solve any problems. I need to work closely between the community and the ward, sharing information.

Unlike other communities, there is little sign of discord in the views of people towards their village leader. One pot seller said that the community is "like a huge family" and that leadership was quite straightforward because they generally all feel the same way;"U Moe doesn't go against any of us. We are all the same here and we are strong together". People directly credit him with the improved economic wellbeing of the community, saying that he could have earned more from the pots if he ran it only to benefit himself, but he set up the business in a way that all could benefit. In the wet season,

when there are fewer pots coming from the boat, he shares those he has stored with everyone so that they continue to have an income.

Much of this unity also seems to stem from a collegial leadership style where people feel valued and respected, with U Moe holding meeting to get suggestions, particularly from village elders. He has strong followers, described in Myanmar language as yartmi yartfa, referring to those who came with him from the old villages to the new community. The elder group are all slightly older than U Moe, forming a sort of small village council, where U Moe discusses problems with them, accepts suggestions and forms collective decisions. This group also plays an important part in helping the community react when they are told to move, and they are seen as protecting the larger community from people who they perceive as encroaching onto their community which may compromise the delicate arrangements they have formed with authority. This "follower group" also plays an important role in handling issues of justice within the community, where issues are deliberated on and handled.

Since its establishment less than a generation ago, Oh Tan Kyu has come to have relatively standardized marriage patterns. This process of kinshipization, where the children from different familial clans within the community marry each other, is likely a strong contributing factor in the more unified social and leadership structures described here. The community was formed through a migration of people from the same collection of villages but comprising two main communities of people. The initial migrants broadly came from within the same generation with just some loose kinship ties across those generations. As the children of that generation have grown up, they have tended to marry within the community to those who they have no existing relation. As such, the community has seen the emergence of a strong kinship system which villagers regard as something which has brought unity to the place over recent years. As they describe it, in one way or another they are all linked together through their children.

> In central Myanmar culture, children stay in the house until they marry, after which they generally build houses very close by their parents to form a larger

> family compound made up of tight knit yet separated houses. This pattern is very observable in the community, where children have married within the community and then built small huts next to those of their parents. While new members are not allowed to join the community, the space continues to expand with high birth rates and children intermarrying. The idea that these increased kinship ties have strengthened the community seems to be felt by everyone here. One local recited an old Burmese proverb which translates as "Don't buy cheap! Don't be loud if you have only a few relatives!", meaning that strong kinship is a strength that brings prosperity and pride.

The parents of children from different areas also often end up forming a larger kinship network as their respective children marry. Several locals discussed this phenomenon as a unifying influence, strengthening mutual trust and understanding. There are now two main groupings, which may be considered 'clans', covering almost the whole community. Through marriage, previously distant families have become increasingly intertwined. The pot selling industry is a manifestation of this interconnectedness, with systems of trust and capital-sharing closely overlaying these kinship ties. As the third generation emerges, young people are being more involved with those outside the community in formal urban areas. This might eventually lead to a reversal of these pattens, but in the present it is hard to escape the ideal of a collective local spirit forged through shared experience and relative social isolation from formal residential areas.

Formal leadership and internal power divisions in Red Cross Kyu

In the adjacent red cross community, it is difficult to find the same sense of cohesive community leadership. Instead, the community has a formal leadership which has its roots in the initial formation of the community, which has commanded a certain level of obedience and respect. Yet, the social reality is of a community with complex and more diffuse power dynamics, which closely reflect different social and economic influences and loyalties – among these are land ownership, social welfare, the monastery,

and the sand trade. In contrast to the pot sellers, in many ways the lack of coherent leadership reflects the unstable nature of livelihoods for most households across the community.

On first appearance, U Win Tin is a commanding presence in the community. When I first started being immersed in the community, we were directed by several people to his house. "He knows everything and he has the right to say everything", they said. His house is well presented, two-stories, and has direct access to the main road. He told me that he is a hero and the rescuer of all the slum people living in the Red Cross Kyu, who he was able to bring to this space of relative security. While we spoke, a woman came and asked him to help her son who had been arrested by the police. She seemed to place trust in his wisdom as he explained what she had to do to safely bring him home.

The loyalty still afforded, in some parts, to U Win Tin, is due to his central role in securing the area for the community many years ago. As is described in chapter two, along with U Maung Nyein, he managed to negotiate a situation where households who were previously fleeing river flooding were able to securely stay in the Red Cross compound. As the local influence of the association waned over time, and as U Maung Nyein eventually decided to move to a different area, U Win Tin was able to assume a stronger leadership role. In reality, villagers say, it was U Maung Nyein who was more influential in securing the land for the villagers – negotiating land plots and securing a situation where they were less threatened with removal – but U Win Tin seems to have effectively harnessed his role in this to increase his influence.

Nonetheless, U Win Tin is an influential village figure, respected for being one of the first settlers in the area and for playing some role in the effective land negotiations. He is seen as well educated, able to read and write well, and someone with the capacity to act as a contact person between the community and the local government, notably in how he was able to secure family registrations documents for many in the community. He is in the equivalent formal position to U Moe as the ten-household leader, where he negotiates issues with U Nyi Nyi, and in the eyes of some, he has done this job well – "he has good connections with

the ward administrators. He knows how to write formal letters and he really helps us" said one villager.

In terms of the chain of formal authority, the role of these leaders does in some way reflect the liminal geographies described in the previous chapter. U Moe has more of a direct line to the ward administrator and he himself has to play a very active role in negotiating issues for his community given the vague ways in which the community is variously defined as neither within nor outside the purview of two government departments. U Win Tin, on the other hand, follows a more conventional chain of command, which actually limits his own formal authority. The hundred household head is designated by the administrator to handle most issues directly, with the ten-household head assigned less influential tasks.

While U Win Tin has commanded a degree of respect as well as this limited formal leadership position, the community has other sources of power and authority which are often more important and influential, and in some cases present a competing power dynamic. The most significant factor is undoubtedly the sand economy and the owner of the sand extraction company which has employed many in the community. The industry itself was credited as a key force in negotiating with the Red Cross Association that, after just two or three years of rent, residents noi longer needed to pay to stay there. Through collective negotiation and demands by the workers, who they say was supported by the owner, they secured the present situation in which the land essentially belongs to the people on a continuous, rent-free basis. While the government technically has the authority to evict them and continues to classify them as squatters, in reality their involvement in the sand industry and the minimal presence of the Red Cross means there is little risk of this occurring.

Unlike the pot selling community where the leader is central to the economic functioning of the community, U Win Tin has no involvement in the sand industry. The owners of the industry and the broker-driver middlemen do not stay in the community, but due to their economic power it is observed by locals that their economic weight commands certain informal loyalties which

undermine U Win Tin's authority. Even where this is not the case, there is no economic imperative for residents to be loyal to him. One resident noted that his authority is primarily down to his role in securing this space in the past as well as residence permits, but over time as people feel more secure that there is no need to continue to venerate him. The contrast to U Moe is pronounced. U Moe's continuing economic strength means his authority continues to be cemented, while U Win Tin's absence of economic power and the passing of time since his own influential actions, means his power has continued to diminish.

Beyond the dominance of the sand industry, there are other forces which also contribute to these split loyalties across the community. There are five main kinship groups, which also roughly correspond with sand working groups. These kinship groups include people with long histories of social connection, migrating to Mandalay from the same towns and often featuring close clan ties. They live in distinct parts of the community and congregate together. Another force is the local monk who commands considerable authority. While the monastery is a central place for the whole community, this monk has a daga and a dagama from inside the community who organize events and play influential roles as lay supporters, enabling the monk to engender a degree of indirect authority. The same monk also has his own relatives who live in the southern part of the community staying staunchly loyal to him.

U Win Tin still has some recognized expertise which preserves some authority. His knowledge and access to residency permits, for instance, is well beyond that of any other competing leadership dynamics. For this reason, he continues to play a formal leadership role. But villagers commented that he seldom includes others in decision-making, running more of a closed-shop – another point of stark contrast to U Moe. The social reality and the lack of coherent community leadership seems to closely reflects the instability and insecurity of the sand industry itself, as community members have no real economic loyalties, nor an economic structure which lends itself to cohesion and unity. Fractured livelihoods, in the words of one villager, leads to fractured communities.

5

UNDERSTANDING CONTESTED PHYSICAL SPACES AND THE LIVES OF MANDALAY'S SLUM DWELLERS

This monograph has revealed the complex social and economic realities across two of Mandalay's slum communities. By combining tools from human geography with ethnographic methods, it has helped illuminate both the spatial dimensions of slum communities - particularly how dwellers negotiate these spaces to provide a degree of physical security - and it has examined how the physical space is interconnected with the economic and social lives of people in these communities. When considering these two dimensions together, it is challenging to draw out broad, sweeping conclusions about these spaces or about the nature of informal settlements in Myanmar (although a small attempt will be made to do so) not least because the findings presented here seem to contradict many of the conventional ways of framing these communities in the public discourse.

Early on this in the research process, we found our own assumptions over what is considered 'fixed' or 'stable' to be undermined by the social reality that presented itself. As the research has developed, the contradictions have only become more apparent with time. The discussions entailed here have therefore not set out to make judgements about people, communities and livelihoods, but instead have merely sought to present a grounded picture of these communities, alongside some analysis of how the different human

agencies interact with variously contested physical spaces. In this short conclusion, the monograph will close with an attempt to capture how the livelihoods and social dynamics presented in chapter four relate to the physical dimensions discussed in chapter three. Through both these chapters, human agency plays a complex role in relation to particular social and physical units.

The pot selling settlement can be considered a community in the truest sense. It has emerged to represent almost a self-contained social unit, with a form of collective economy which has allowed households to be interconnected with each other, while yet also being economic agents of their own making. But this framing of a collective, contained community unit belies the history of the community. Over several years, small groups of people, large families and kinship units, traversed across rural and urban spaces before attempting to settle on the riverbank. For many they worked in different industries, attempted to settle in other uncategorized urban spaces, before their own village networks – far away locales where the city is seen as distant - brought them here. This history suggests a perpetually transient, mobile existence would persist, but simply put, that is not the case. While stability in urban life is never something to take for granted, at least in the present, social life in the community meets all reasonable definitions of 'stable' or 'permanent'; with clear, historically developed kinship networks, family structures and housing arrangements, respected and acknowledged leadership and social structures, and a degree of livelihood certainty.

The physical nature of the community represents the ideal type of impermanence. Tarpaulin, bamboo matting and an array of temporary materials form their dwellings and their homes, or 'shelters' as outsiders may describe them. The dwellings are packed tightly next each other in a haphazard manner, and to the untrained eye appear to follow no discernable pattern or structure. The lived reality befits these materials, which have been collected over time precisely because they bring an ease to the frequent need to shift and relocate. The pot sellers have adapted to a way of life of which moving is a part. When the river floods, they pack up their things and move to higher ground until the water level recedes. When local authorities receive a message from above that it is time to

clean the riverbank, they follow an established routine and play their performative role in the same manner as the city's officious bureaucrats.

In fact, such is the appearance of chaos and temporariness, one could easily imagine the community being labelled as a 'homeless' area, full of people in poverty who require an external intervention. Such cynicism certainly isn't meant to say that support programs or forms of welfare are not warranted. To be sure, the pot sellers do still earn modest wages and have significant social problems. Rather, this community, tarpaulins and all, are certainly no worse off than Mandalay's swathes of urban poor, earning more than the majority of the city's informal labor force. The salient point here is that appearances can be deceiving.

In making this argument, the comparison to the Red Cross community seems almost too convenient. This adjacent community is classified as a 'slum' only because it is not classified as a formal residential area, when in reality the community appears no different from the neighboring 'regular' communities characterized by small urban housing. Unlike the pot sellers, it has clearly demarcated plots, neatly lined up next to each other. It has a main thoroughfare which traverses through the area, and the point where the community space ends and the roadside begins is easily identifiable. The houses are well constructed using conventional urban building materials like brick walls and metal roofs - and face out onto the central space. But this research has shown that such permanence in the façade is not matched by permanence in social and economic life. Whereas the pot sellers have respected social structures and cohesion, the sand workers have more diffuse leadership, multiple points of authority and livelihoods which only have the regularity of instability. It may be that this community of sand workers is indeed more typical of the city's urban poor, with lives languishing in exploitative wage labor, debt cycles and constant insecurity.

And yet, we should not make the mistake of assuming that the actions and the forms of agency of these communities and the people in them are the determining factors in their social and economic lives. These communities are no doubt shaped by factors

external to them at least as much as they shape their own realities, with forms of hostility from both the state and the broader community a testament to that. The concept of liminality helps understanding this relational dynamic in which agency interacts with external structure. Chapter two explored how the Oh Tan Kyu negotiate their own spatial liminality, forging their own approaches to dealing with how the state seeks to ambiguously define them and manage them. The Red Cross Kyu, too, is stuck in this liminal space between formal and informal settlement, afforded some rights but not others, facing no immediate threat of removal, yet also aware that they will never not be defined as *kyukyaw*.

Myanmar's state actors, and the community at-large, remain needlessly hostile to these communities, where the politics and discourse of otherness continues to trump efforts at inclusion and communal understanding. As we see across urban landscapes beyond Myanmar, the desire to beautify cities has the effect of problematizing people, demarcating areas, and separating certain classes of people from spaces to which they are attached. The language of *kyukyaw* emerges from the highest of the country's authorities, and variations of the term are seen in the everyday language of people in the city, with such othering often even internalized by the communities themselves who are resigned to the fact that they will never be given the same rights as formal settlers. As Myanmar continues to see large movements of people from rural villages to different urban settings in search of opportunity, we can only hope that increased familiarity will bring about a friendlier tone and more hospitable policy.

The ethnographic accounts which are interwoven throughout this research show the layers of complex humanity which exist beyond what is immediately observable. The contrast between the stable outward appearance of the community of sand workers and the instability of their livelihoods, and the mangled appearance of the pot sellers amid their relatively secure way of life, is a fascinating picture which shows the inherent contradictions in these urban spaces on the fringes. Through these adjacent settings, the people within these communities are united in how they are in a constant state of negotiating with the often-hostile world around them. Whether they are fighting for the right to stay on the land they

have now occupied for a generation, or they are fighting for the right to fair wages and working conditions, these are the lives of Mandalay's resilient *kyukyaw*.

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About the Author

Moe Moe Hlaing is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography, University of Mandalay. She received her bachelor's degree (BA Geography) and her master's degree (MA Geography) from the University of Mandalay in 1992 and 1998 respectively. In 1998, she joined the faculty of Monywa University. She has since also served at East Yangon University, Yadanabon University, Kalay University and the University of Mandalay. In 2015, she received her PhD in Geography from the University of Mandalay, with a dissertation examining wildlife conservation in Mohnyin Township in the area of Indawgyi Lake in Kachin State, Myanmar.

Moe Moe's native town is Monywa. Every weekend she returns there from Mandalay. Seeing the huts along the roadside of this weekly journey, she became interested in the lives and spaces of these roadside sellers, and wanted to understand how these people have negotiated and struggled.

Moe Moe feels she has excelled through the capacity building program, learning new research approaches and producing new research alongside international colleagues. She hopes to continue her research on urban spaces and informal livelihoods to improve the public understanding of people's lives and livelihoods.

NEGOTIATED SPACES AND *KYUKYAW* LIMINALITIES

Life and Community in the Informal Settlements of Mandalay's Ayeyarwady Riverbank Process

Focused on two adjacent riverbank communities in urban Mandalay with drastically different geographies and forms of materiality, this research attempts to show how livelihoods and community are both shaped by and actively shape space. This study follows the communities from their origins and the mobilities that brought rural families to settle by the riverbank, and the mobilities that continue today. The study analyzes how human agency, vibrant social dynamics, and the ability to negotiate a more viable existence constantly face external threats, such as public discourse towards *kyu*, state directives against informal communities, natural challenges such as flooding, and the uncompromising urban economy. The lived realities of these people present a challenge to dominant assumptions and forms of discourse constructed around them.

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