Transforming the Outskirts: Planning, Property and People in Urban Myanmar

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Abstract

This thesis is an urban anthropology of how residents conceptualise and claim citizenship in transitional Myanmar. Based on 11 months of fieldwork in a working-class neighbourhood on Mandalay's outskirts in 2018-2019, this thesis explores the official history of urban planning, as well as residents' practices and struggles in acquiring, maintaining, and building on land far from the city centre. It argues that to comprehend the politics of urban citizenship and urban transformations in the context of Myanmar's transition, we must look beyond central urban areas and instead concentrate on the practices of planning, property, and state-people interaction on the outskirts.

I make three main arguments. First, the outskirts are politically and socially constructed. Even though successive governments in Myanmar have used the outskirts as a solution to urban problems, the outskirts are not merely a product of the state, as the residents of such areas use a variety of tactics to engage with the municipal government in their attempts to gain access to municipal services. This means that urban planning as a form of control is often incomplete, and in practice the state must frequently contend with the populations living on the outskirts.

Second, urban citizenship in Myanmar is an urban land question. Land ownership is seen not as a legal matter but as a practical issue of control. Through my case studies on informal land sales and land subdivision in the abovementioned neighbourhood, I demonstrate that residents view housing as a personal duty, not an obligation of the state. Moreover, looking at urban citizenship through the lens land issues reveals that urban citizenship in Mandalay is highly differentiated into a hierarchy based largely on residents' wealth.

Third, urban transformations are compounded by Myanmar's transition. The political and economic transition has produced new inequalities while maintaining old ones, resulting in displacement, differentiation, and dissatisfaction among residents of Mandalay's outskirts.

By using land as an analytical lens to explore residents' struggles to secure their urban residency and citizenship, this thesis suggests that the core issue facing Myanmar's urban citizenry lies not in rights or entitlements but rather in one's ability to secure a legitimate urban residence. In doing so, this thesis builds on the existing literature concerning property and urban citizenship in order to explore how the two are related in transitional Myanmar. It also touches on issues such as land speculation, spatial segregation, civility, working class aspirations, and belonging in urban Myanmar.

Abstract in Danish

Transformation af ydre områder: planlægning, ejendom og mennesker i urban Myanmar

Denne afhandling er en urban etnografi af, hvordan indbyggere danner sig en forestilling om og gør krav på statsborgerskab i Myanmar. Baseret på 11 måneders feltarbejder i et boligområde for arbejderklassen i udkanten af Mandalay i 2018-2019, udforsker denne afhandling den officielle historie om byplanlægning, såvel som indbyggernes metoder til, og udfordringer med at erhverve, vedligeholde og bygge i områder langt væk fra byens centrum. Den argumenterer for, at for at forstå politikken bag urbant borgerskab og byudvikling i Myanmar, bliver man nødt til at se udover centrale urbane områder og i stedet koncentrere si om praksis for planlægning, ejendom, og interaktion mellem stat og folk i udkanterne.

Jeg fremfører tre hovedargumenter. For det første er udkantsområderne politisk og socialt konstruerede. Selvom skiftende regeringer i Myanmar har brugt udkantsområderne som en løsning på urbane problemer, er udkantsområderne ikke blot et produkt af staten, da indbyggere i disse områder bruger en række forskellige taktikker til at engagere sig med den kommunale regering i deres forsøg på at få adgang til kommunale tjenester. Dette betyder, at urban planlægning som en form for kontrol, ofte er ufuldstændig, og i praksis må staten ofte strides med befolkningen, der bor i udkanten.

For det andet er urbant borgerskab i Myanmar et spørgsmål om by-områder. Ejerskab af jord ses ikke alene som et juridisk spørgsmål, men et praktisk spørgsmål om kontrol. Gennem mine casestudier om uformelle jordsalg og jordudstykninger i det ovennævnte boligområde, demonstrerer jeg at beboere ser boliger som en personlig pligt, ikke en forpligtigelse for staten. Og ser man urbant borgerskab som et spørgsmål om jord, ses det, at urbant borgerskab i Mandalay er yderst differentieret i et hierarki, som i høj grad er baseret på beboernes rigdom.

For det tredje, den urbane udvikling vanskeliggøres af Myanmars politiske situation. Den politiske og økonomiske situation har bragt nye uligheder, samtidig med at den har bevaret de gamle, hvilket resulterer i fordrivelse, differentiering, og utilfredshed blandt beboerne i udkanten af Mandalay.

Ved at bruge jord som en analytisk linse til at udforske beboernes kampe for at sikre deres ret til at bo i byen, udforsker denne afhandling, at det centrale spørgsmål som Myanmars urbane borgerskab ikke omhandler rettigheder, men snarere ens evne til at sikre sig en lovlig bolig. Derved bygger denne afhandling på eksisterende litteratur om ejendom og urban borgerskab,

og udforsker hvordan de to hænger sammen i Myanmar.

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Figures and Tables

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCSD	Building and Central Stores Department (of MCDC)
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
CPLAD	City planning and Land Administration Department (of MCDC)
DALMS	Department of Agriculture Land Management and Statistics (of MOALI)
DUHD	Department of Urban and Housing Development (of MOC)
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
IRD	Internal Revenue Department (of MOPF)
JFPR	Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MCDC	Mandalay City Development Committee
MOALI	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation
MOC	Ministry of Construction
MOPF	Ministry of Planning and Finance
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUG	National Unity Government
SAC	State Administration Council
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
USD	United States Dollar

Burmese Terms

Ah ko	Older brother (respectful prefix)
Ah ma	Older sister (respectful prefix)
Ah tu tu beh	Similar; the same
Bobuapaing	Ancestral land
Daw	Madam; aunt (respectful prefix)
Hin	House; home
Jinkjei	Civility
Kothukotha	Stand on one's own; self-reliance
Lok ah pay	Voluntary labour to accrue merit; used by SLORC and SPDC to refer to most forms of forced labour
Lu hmu ye	Social service
Myothet	New town
Myosun	Outskirts
Nain ngan kyar thar	Foreigner
Nalehmu	An understanding; a trade-off; an agreement
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw	National Parliament
Pyithu Hluttaw	Lower House
Pweza	Broker
Saya	Teacher (male, respectful prefix)
Sayama	Teacher (female, respectful prefix)
Tarwan	Responsibility
Tha mi	Daughter
U	Sir; uncle (respectful prefix)
Amarapura-Urban Aungmyaytharzan Chanayetharzan Mahaaungmyay Chanmyatharsi Pyigyidagon	Townships of Mandalay

A Note on Translation and Names

The junta changed the country's official English name from "Burma" to "Myanmar" in 1989. Exile organisations and activists, as well as the US government, have continued to refer to the country as "Burma" due to disagreements regarding the legality of military rule and the junta's right to change the name. The UK government, on the other hand, has used the terms "Myanmar" and "Burma" to refer to the country. I will use the words "Burma" and "Rangoon" until 1989, then "Myanmar" and "Yangon" after that point to reflect the name changes without any political connotations. Mandalay's name has not been altered.

In this thesis, the name of the ward, Tagyi, and all the residents' names are pseudonyms for confidentiality.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Mandalay, Myanmar, March 1995. A soldier visited U Bhant's neighbourhood on the Irrawaddy riverbank and told everyone they had to move to a new ward[1] – Tagyi – to make way for a road expansion project. Before leaving the Irrawaddy riverbank, a general told U Bhant and the other household heads in the area that moving to the resettlement ward would be good for them, because they would receive land for their troubles. "But I didn't believe him [the general], because how could life be better if we'd been moved to a remote part of town?" asked U Bhant—and he was right. Life was tough in Tagyi: there was no power, no water, and no public transport. To compensate, U Bhant shared an electricity meter with his neighbours, built his own well, and bought a second-hand motorbike. But he could not save himself from the ward's struggling economy. He sold his original plot of land and began renting a smaller plot facing a side road even further away from the city centre so that he could support his family. Even after moving, U Bhant struggled to hold onto his land, as did many of his neighbours. "I was outsmarted by the rich people and the brokers," U Bhant told me. "If I could have held onto my land longer, I could be rich by now. The land prices have increased a lot in Mandalay because everyone's buying land in the city."

Ma Shine was yet another resident struggling to hold onto her plot in Tagyi. As a widow, Ma Shine bought a plot of land in Tagyi hoping to secure a place to stay in Mandalay for her son and his family. But due to her son's unemployment, Ma Shine had to sell half of her land to help him get by. In Tagyi, it became common for residents to sell or rent out part of their plots – although only the very desperate would sell the whole thing, since land prices in the ward kept rising. For Ma Shine, selling part of her plot meant she would have even less to sell the next time she needed money. "The economy hasn't been good, you know, our country is still developing. We're changing," Ma Shine said. Selling land was supposed to make one feel rich, but it only made Ma Shine feel poorer and one step closer to living in the nearby slums. "I don't like selling [my land] or living in a subdivided plot, but that's what I have to do if I want to keep living in Mandalay," she said, echoing a common sentiment among many of the residents I interviewed.

Elsewhere in the ward lived Daw Den, who spent her childhood years on the Irrawaddy

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[1] A ward is the lowest administrative unit in Myanmar's cities. Mandalay has 96 wards scattered throughout the city's six townships.

riverbank until she was forcibly relocated. Ever since the resettlement, Daw Den's goal had been to build a concrete house where she could live with her sons, and which she could leave to them when she passed away. After saving for many years, Daw Den had finally started construction on her dream house. But her dream was soon crushed by an official letter from the civilian-led municipal government, which she had supported in the most recent election. It accused her of illegal construction and levied a heavy fine she could not afford, and which forced her to leave the house unfinished. "I thought with the political change our lives would be better, but now I'm not sure anymore," Daw Den said while sitting in her unfinished house. Looking at the fine letter in her hands, Daw Den said she had no idea when her family might be able to finish construction and move into the new house. If a finished house represents "desires to live and to be seen as living legitimate lives" (Elinoff 2016, 22), then Daw Den's unfinished house symbolised her unrealised aspirations, interrupted by the social and political changes in Myanmar.

While U Bhant, Ma Shine and Daw Den were just three of the many people I talked to in Tagyi, their stories highlighted the struggles that many of the ward's residents had to endure to continue living as urban citizens in Mandalay. Their experiences illustrated not only the limits of the government's efforts to provide basic amenities, but also their struggles to secure a place to stay in the city, and citizens' limited ability to respond to newly imposed rules and regulations during the political transition. U Bhant, Ma Shine and Daw Den were among the many people affected by the urbanisation of Mandalay, a process which is often accompanied by displacement and uncertainty.

Land determines whether a person is considered an urban citizen, and is therefore an unavoidable issue for Tagyi's residents. It also serves as an important lens for observing urban problems in Myanmar and comprehending the struggles of urban citizenship in the context of the country's political transition. Land ownership is a ticket to urban citizenship—after all, how can you claim to be an urban citizen if you don't have a place to live in the city? When compared to Henri Lefebvre's (1996) formulation of the right to the city as the right to participation and appropriation, this definition of urban citizenship is far narrower. But as the preceding examples indicate, finding a place to dwell in the city is already difficult enough for Mandalay's working-class residents.

However, land is not the only factor that connects these stories. Residents' struggles are also connected to the broader transitional process in Myanmar that had been ongoing since 2011, when the country was transformed from a military regime to a civilian-led state. While

international organisations[2] have tended to share a positive outlook on the country's transition, believing that it would bring positive changes to the country that can benefit all, the experiences of U Bhant, Ma Shine, and Daw Den paint an alarming picture of the struggles faced by working-class residents on the outskirts of Mandalay. Despite a shift in the political and economic landscape of the country since 2011, these residents had yet to see the improvements that they anticipated would accompany regime change, and their stories raise many questions regarding life in urban Myanmar. What are the common elements of the struggles faced by residents like U Bhant, Ma Shine and Daw Den that are also prevalent in urban Myanmar as a whole? How have the historical, legal, socioeconomic and political changes in Myanmar impacted land ownership and urban citizenship in Tagyi? Does the political transition in Myanmar benefit residents living in urban wards such as Tagyi? How can we understand urban citizenship in the context of Myanmar's transition?

This thesis presents a two-fold invitation to readers. First, it invites readers to comprehend the complex realities that working-class residents such as U Bhant, Ma Shine, and Daw Den face, as well as the hardships they have to endure to secure both urban residence and citizenship on the outskirts. Second, it is also an attempt to use this complexity of urban housing and citizenship as a lens to examine the broader processes of historical, legal, socioeconomic, and political change that combine to foment Mandalay's urban transformation in the context of the country's political transition. This thesis, thus, is an attempt to understand "the making of the urban in Myanmar" (Roberts 2017, 64), and to understand urban citizenship in the context of Myanmar's transition by looking at residents' everyday struggles.

My research focuses on land and housing issues in Tagyi, a working-class ward in Mandalay. It is a critical inquiry into understanding the struggles of the ward's residents with regard to land and housing, and how these struggles are connected to the broader process of Myanmar's political transition. Using Tagyi as a case study, I examine the dynamics of land and housing in the context of urban transformation, and explore how these dynamics shape urban citizenship in contemporary Myanmar.

The three stories that I began this chapter with establish key themes of the urban question, a topic that has spawned decades of scholarly debate on the meaning of the urban and its function in mobilising people, but has not been investigated in the context of Myanmar. The contemporary urban question is fundamentally a land question (Doshi 2019; Levien 2012; Roy

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[2] For example, see Asian Development Bank (2014) and World Bank (2014).

2016), which Roy (2017, A2) formulates as "who owns land and on what terms, who profits from land and on what terms, and how the ownership, use, and financialisaton of land is governed and regulated by the state". I would also argue that land is a crucial analytical lens through which we might perceive Myanmar's urban issues and associated problems. The preceding narratives demonstrate how residents on the urban outskirts of Myanmar strive to obtain, retain, and build on land. Thus, the urban land question is about claiming land and citizenship (Hammar 2017; Lund 2016), and as I will show later, the question of urban citizenship in Myanmar is also fundamentally a land question.

This chapter serves as the thesis's introduction and is organised as follows. To offer a background for my research, Section 1.1 presents an overview of Tagyi, the principal field site of this study, where my journey to investigate the question of urban citizenship began. Section 1.2 then analyses the issue of urban citizenship and attempts to incorporate the case of Myanmar into existing discussions. Section 1.3 engages with the transition narratives in Myanmar to provide a broader framework for how academic arguments on political analysis in the country have been framed. Section 1.4 investigates the current literature on urban studies in Myanmar to identify a study space for this thesis on urban citizenship in transitional Myanmar. Section 1.5 concludes these arguments, and section 1.6 closes by outlining the remaining chapters.

1.1 Contextualising the urban from its outskirts

Mandalay, a city of approximately 1.3 million people, has seen steady population growth over the years. Yet this steady growth (see figures 1 and 2), and the continued urbanisation, have increased demand for land and driven up prices (MacGregor 2014). Furthermore, existing land use policies have failed to consider the effects of previously imposed forced resettlements, and generally ignore the urban poor, implying that the urbanisation process and urban policies are implemented unevenly (Puttilli 2020; Sanchez 2019, 2020). As the story of Tagyi suggests, the act of forcing urban dwellers out of their original residences and relocating them to a remote part of the city is nothing new.
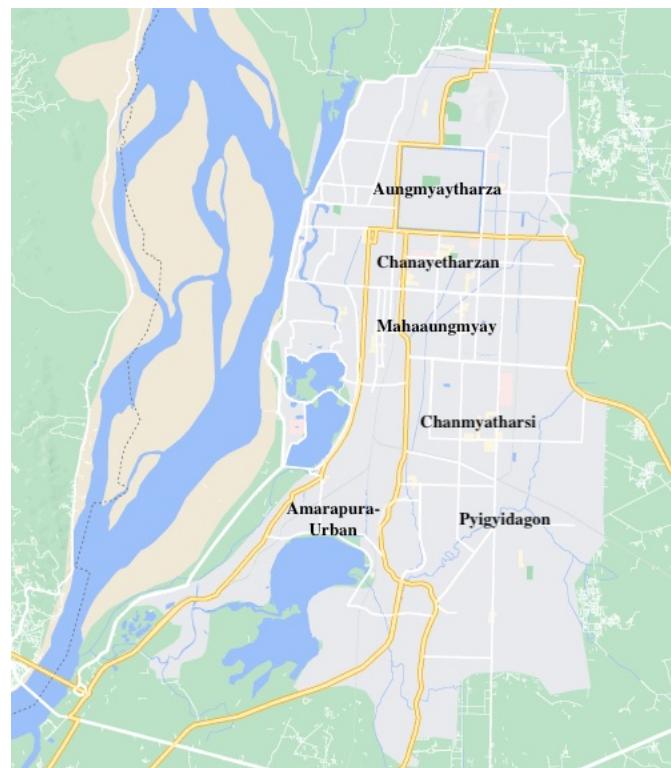
Figure 1 Map of Mandalay (as of 2022)
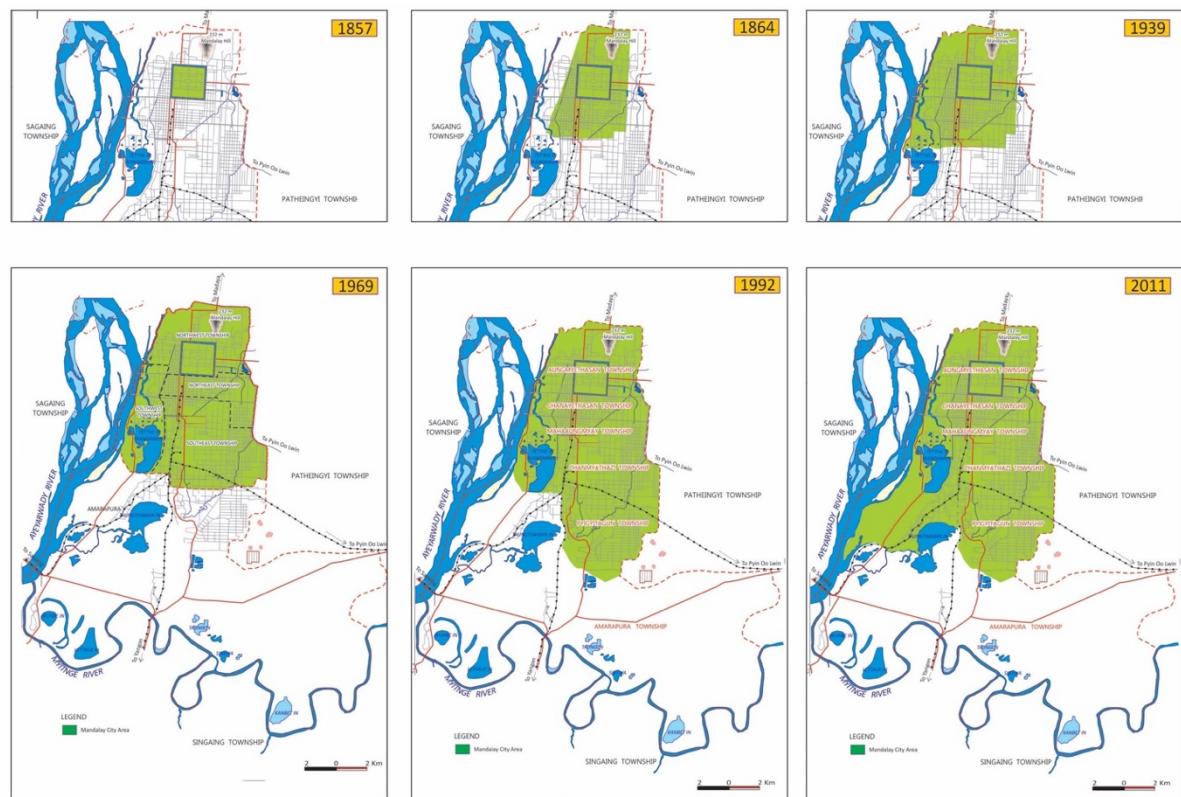
Figure 2 Maps illustrating Mandalay's urban growth over the last 154 years. During the tenure of the last Burmese monarchy, Mandalay was built as a royal city in 1857 and expanded to include an outer city in 1864. During the colonial era, Mandalay grew considerably to the south and west (see map for 1939), and again during the Burmese socialist military period (see map for 1969). As reflected by the 1992 map, the city expanded to five townships following the addition of Pyigyidagon to the south. Most of Pyigyidagon and Chanmyatharsi townships are part of the so-called myo thet (new town) and were used for

The longer I worked in Mandalay, the more I realised that the outskirts are at the forefront of urban changes. Throughout the history of Mandalay, its expansions have been erratic, with vast stretches of farmland rapidly converted into urban land without any consultation. Indeed, from 1962 to 2011, one-third of Mandalay's total land was eventually used for resettlement purposes, with such regions primarily located in the southern and eastern outskirts.[3] Local officials and residents refer to this third of Mandalay as the *myo thet* ('new town' in English), and it reflects the haphazard urban expansion supported by the government during the military era, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s (Hsue Hgnet 2003). Most of the current southern outskirts, including Tagyi, was used for resettling populations and industries from the central parts of town to make way for development projects or for political purposes (Skidmore 2004). These resettled neighbourhoods were often developed by the residents themselves, with limited government assistance. Land on the southern outskirts is cheaper compared to central Mandalay because the outskirts are less developed and less connected to the city proper. This has also made resettlement wards an attractive destination for working poor families looking for an affordable home in Mandalay and, increasingly, even some better-off families or individuals seeking larger plots of land than they would be able to afford in the inner city.

Despite negative perceptions among those outside the ward, residents of Tagyi did not consider themselves to be living in a problematic area. For them, the outskirts were home, and a place that fulfilled their desire to live in the city, even if people elsewhere in the city looked down on them and viewed the area as dangerous. Thus, looking into the transformations of the outskirts and the residents' lived experiences there can tell us more about the non-official story of Mandalay, and how residents have had to grapple with the challenges of living in a remote part of the city.

The outskirts

Tagyi is one of the wards within the third of Mandalay that was incorporated into the municipal territory over the course of the last three decades. Established in 1995, Tagyi was set up mostly as a resettlement ward for residents then living along the Irrawaddy riverbank near downtown

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[3] My estimate for this figure is based on an analysis of Mandalay's resettlement history and was confirmed by a member of the Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC) during an interview.

Mandalay, whom the junta wished to evict to make way for a government development project. The area was farmland at the time, but nowadays Tagyi, a ward covering 520 acres of land, is a working-class neighbourhood on Mandalay's outskirts.

Given its location and history, Tagyi is often referred to by locals and municipal officers by three different names. as the first is *myo sun*, or "the outskirts" in English. *Myo sun* can be directly translated into English as "a city" (myo) and "an end" (sun). Tagyi is also referred to as part of the *myo thet*, or "new town", given that it was part of the area added to Mandalay under military rule. The ward is also called *hsin kye pon*, which can be translated as "suburb" or "the outer city" (Tainturier 2021, 103), but which literally means "soldiers who cover the feet of a war elephant during battle".[4] This Burmese phrasing conveys the idea that the outskirts of a city are like its protective outer layer. Thus the outskirts – as the outermost land still within the city limits – have a very specific meaning in Myanmar, with an implied role in safeguarding a city and by extension, those who rule over it.

Indeed, the most important asset one can have in Tagyi is land, and this asset is becoming increasingly important at a time when numerous residents have lost possession of theirs. Land also carries a special meaning in Tagyi because it was the only compensation received by residents who were resettled there following the eviction from the Irrawaddy riverbank. Each household resettled in Tagyi was given a plot of land measuring 60x40 square feet, along with a temporary occupancy permit known as a landslip (which will be discussed in Chapter 5), and residents were not allowed to sell or rent their plots until they had paid for a land title. In reality, however, most Tagyi households never registered to obtain full legal rights to their plots, and many have already sold or rented out some or all of their land.

Land in Tagyi is, at first glance, what de Soto (2000) might term as non-recognisable "dead capital", or land that is not legally owned or registered and thus cannot be used to raise financial capital. But the longer I worked in Tagyi, the more evidence I saw that possession of a legal title was neither central to residents' landholdings, nor to their ability to sell land. Residents continued to buy and sell land that had no legal title for millions of kyats.[5] Residents made it

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[4] Tainturier (2021) argues that historically the capital city's *hsin kye pon* was unplanned and was left to the residents for development. Mandalay is different because its outer city was carefully planned, with a grid system that extended from the inner royal city and with specific land use categories and amenities. That meant Mandalay's outer city, while shielding the Burmese court against invading British forces, was also blessed and protected by the crown. In contemporary Mandalay, urban expansion no longer shares this vision, and newly expanded urban areas are often poorly planned.

[5] This thesis uses an exchange rate of 1,500 Myanmar kyats per 1 US dollar, reflecting the level at which the currency traded during my fieldwork in 2018-19. For prices and other figures from 2012 to 2017, my conversions use the official exchange rate from that period of 6 Myanmar kyats per 1 US dollar, however it is worth noting

clear to me that the cost of a land title application was high and the tax payments that came with it were onerous, but were equally explicit that these were not the main reasons for not applying. Rather, residents shared a belief that having a title would not make their landholdings substantially more secure. Local news reports also suggest that urban residents in Myanmar do not necessarily want to hold a land title, the attainment of which remains complicated and expensive (Zay Yar Lin 2016c); that trading land without a legal title is common in both rural and urban Myanmar; and that people often rely on local intermediaries such as lawyers and brokers to enhance their sense of security when trading land without a title.[6]

Land is also directly tied to Tagyi's demographic changes. Originally, approximately 2,800 households were transferred from the Irrawaddy riverbank to Tagyi, but rising land prices in the city have led many residents to look for cheaper land in residential wards on the outskirts, including Tagyi. Tagyi presently has around 26,000 urban residents (Department of Population of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2015). As demand for land increased, land prices in Tagyi rose sharply, spurred higher in part thanks to land speculation, particularly between the mid-2000s and late 2010s. The majority of Tagyi's newcomers are wealthier than the original residents. Tagyi is becoming more crowded while also becoming more segregated. Land is also becoming a source of conflict between the wealthier outsiders and those who were forcibly resettled, as the stories of U Bhant and Ma Shine suggest.

Nonetheless, Tagyi is still primarily a working-class neighbourhood, and this is reflected in the occupations of the ward's residents. While the most recent census did not include data on employment trends in Tagyi, based on interviews with locals and observations during my fieldwork, most female residents worked from home as tailors; as street vendors selling breakfast in the morning and then traditional Burmese snacks in the afternoon; or earned a daily wage as cleaners or shop assistants.[7] Many male residents worked in factories nearby or as security guards, but some did construction work in the ward and elsewhere within Pyigyidagon township. A small minority of residents I interviewed were wealthy. These residents were usually engaged in the jade trading business, money lending or were land brokers, while others

that this official rate vastly overstates the strength of the kyat, and that the grey market exchange rate from this period was closer to 400-500 kyats per dollar. For figures from before 2012, I use an informal exchange rate of 400 kyats per 1 US dollar.

[6] See Rhoads (2020) for a more detailed discussion on the role of land brokers in informal land trades in Yangon.

[7] This should not be seen as a generalisation of women's work in Myanmar. Most female residents in Tagyi are cleaners, street vendors, or tailors due to a lack of employment opportunities. While Tagyi is close to industrial areas on the outskirts, the factories in these areas are mostly steel or cement plants that do not provide much work for the ward's female labour force. By comparison, on the outskirts of Yangon there are many garment factories which employ a substantial female labour force (see Nguyen 2021; Campbell 2022).

were professionals such as doctors, lawyers or engineers.

Tagyi's layout uses the city's grid-based system which was designed during King Mindon's reign and employed by successive governments when expanding Mandalay (see figure 3). Tagyi has two public schools, one of which is an elementary school and the other a high school. These two schools serve the majority of the students in the ward. Tagyi market, located within the ward, is the busiest location in the neighbourhood. Tagyi also has a park, although residents rarely visit because it lacks shade that would offer escape from the notorious Mandalay heat. During my fieldwork there was a ward administrator in charge of local affairs, assisted by a clerk, and a single police officer who oversaw the entire ward.

Figure 3 Map of Tagyi. Each unmarked section of the grid delineates a residential sub-ward. Tagyi has 60 sub-wards.

Tagyi also lacked municipal services, with no public transport connecting the ward to the rest of the city. Most roads had been paved by the residents over the years following relocation, with some assistance from International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) (figure 4). Residents had to build their own wells, and it was only near the end of my fieldwork that Tagyi was finally integrated into Mandalay's public water and drainage system. Yet only a few of the residents could afford to apply. Most residents also had an electricity meter at home, but blackouts were frequent despite Myanmar's rapid urbanisation (Ther Aung et al. 2022).

Figure 4 A stone stele stating that the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded road pavement projects in Tagyi. When asked about local development projects in Tagyi, residents usually answered that "Japan helped us" or "Japan paved our roads" rather than crediting their own government (photo by author).

Tagyi's residents enjoy discussing their governments, both municipal and national. Several residents told me that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was the most well-known Burmese in

contemporary Myanmar, and that she alone had made the country famous. While the ward administrator was a former military man, the majority of the residents, including the local elders, were National League for Democracy (NLD) supporters. However, for many residents who had witnessed no material improvement since 2015, the phrase "change" which was one of the NLD's other keywords besides "democracy" had become increasingly empty. "We need to be patient", residents said repeatedly during interviews when I asked what if any changes they had seen first-hand during the era of political transition.

The longer I worked in Tagyi, the more I realised that the term "outskirts" not only means a geographically remote area; it entails other meanings as a lived space. Legally, most residents in Tagyi have no land titles and instead hold their land via temporary occupancy permits, called landslips, which they received during the resettlement. The creation of these landslips has burdened their holders with legal ambiguity in which they are considered by the municipality not as illegal, but only tentatively legal. Most residents I interviewed also appeared to be sitting on the socioeconomic outskirts, that is, doing low-paid daily wage jobs that barely qualified as inclusion in the urban economy proper. Their salaries were barely enough to support their daily lives and many residents had been forced to sell some of their land – their most valuable asset – to compensate for their lack of economic mobility. Politically, Tagyi residents were all recognised as citizens, both locally and nationally, but in a meaningful sense they had been pushed to the outermost limits of political inclusion. Most were supporters of the NLD and the partly elected municipal government, yet at the same time received little attention from the politicians they endorsed, let alone any meaningful support. Visits from top local officials and lawmakers were rare.

Tagyi also seems to contrast in notable ways with other outskirts that researchers have studied in Myanmar, where such areas are frequently viewed as a hybrid of state territorial expansion and local development carried out by residents (Astolfo and Boano 2020; Maxime Boutry et al. 2016; Campbell 2022; Forbes 2019; Harrisson 2020). Many areas on the outskirts of the city are used for resettlement or developed into slums. Despite the different geographical locations of the outskirts examined by researchers in Myanmar, there is one thing they have in common: residents are invariably working diligently to develop their neighbourhoods, with little or no government assistance. At the same time, however, their agency in developing and transforming the outskirts is subject to the external, institutional forces that often marginalise residents.

From a development perspective, Tagyi can be viewed as a typical example of a Global South

city that the government cannot govern and control, as is often seen in the discussion of weak states.[8] This explanation seems logical, as Myanmar has since its independence generally been considered a weak state.[9] Researchers such as Thawnghmung (2011, 2019), McCarthy (2018, 2019), and Roberts and Rhoads (2021) have all shown how people in Myanmar are forced to rely on informal channels whenever the state cannot provide for them in their everyday lives.

But in the case of Tagyi, rather than focusing on how and why Southern cities cannot govern and control the urban space, I ask how the establishment and transformation of working-class neighbourhoods on the outskirts could allow us to rethink the foundations of urban citizenship—that is, how people perceive and navigate their relationship with the state, and what the role of the "urban" is in shaping people's agency. For the residents of Tagyi, citizenship specifically means urban citizenship, as their experiences of dealing with the state are by and large the experiences of urban dwellers, in that they concern acquiring, maintaining, and building on land. In other words, if the urban question is a land question (Roy 2016), then it is inevitably also a question of citizenship.

1.2 Conceptualising urban citizenship

This thesis is essentially about examining urban citizenship in Myanmar by understanding how the urban is planned, and how urban land is owned and maintained. Citizenship is one of the most thoroughly examined topics across a variety of disciplines, yet at the same time new ideas are often generated and examined under differentiated circumstances. T.H. Marshall (1950) argued that citizenship should be delinked from its formal and legal aspects, and that citizenship and rights are founded on local status and membership negotiations. In this context, citizenship is always defined as having some tie to the state, as "an ongoing process and temporary outcome of situated struggles over, among other things, space, resources, security, recognition, and becoming" (Hammar 2017, 84).

In this context, "urban" does not refer to a particular geographical location or administrative

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[8] The discussion of whether a state is strong or weak is invariably a discussion of state power. Mann (1984) argues that there are two kinds of state power: despotic and infrastructural (see p. 188-189 for detailed definitions). Migdal (1988) elaborates on the idea of infrastructural power to argue that a state is weak when it is unable to exercise control over society to enact changes. In this thesis, a weak state means a state with weak infrastructural power.

[9] For discussion, see Aung-Thwin (2017); Egreteau and Mangan (2018); Khin Zaw Win (2013); Pedersen, Rudland, and May (2000); Skidmore and Wilson (2008); Smith (2002); Steinberg (2010); and Thant Myint U (2020).

unit, but rather to "a specific sociopolitical and institutional setting, in which many scales - from the local to the transnational - are layered, condensed, and materialised" (Blokland *et al.* 2015, 655). As Roy (2016, 816) indicates, the urban is a governmental category "with populations that must be governed." To comprehend the urban, one must inquire as to how places and people are controlled and ruled.

Understanding citizenship from the outskirts

Virtually every city has its version of the outskirts. History has provided a long list of how different city outskirts have emerged, been transformed, and lived in, from the suburban areas of New Jersey (Gans 1967) and peripheries of Chicago and Paris (Wacquant 2007) in the Global North, to Global South cities such as São Paulo (Holston 2008), Maputo (Nielsen 2011b), Saigon (Harms 2011), New Delhi (Datta 2012; Levien 2018), and Santiago (Edward Murphy 2015), to name but a few. These studies of outskirts, while conducted in different cities, share a similar focus on planning, land and the production of urban citizenship, in which the outer areas of the cities serve as both a place for starting afresh and a site of social contests.

The creation of the outskirts is essentially an issue of the production of space. The discussion of the production of space in recent decades has been mostly related to Henri Lefebvre's (1991, 33) concept of space. For Lefebvre, space is open and full of contradictions and contests, and is produced through highly diversified processes of social and spatial construction. Briefly speaking, Lefebvre argues that spatial practices are norms that "ensure continuity and some degree of cohesion"; that is, they are physical tools for spatial and social control (see also Yiftachel 2000). Yet at the same time, such lived spaces are full of contests and can provide the space necessary for resistance to occur. I draw on Lefebvre's concept of space as a first step in thinking about how space is not something abstract but indeed manipulatable and changeable—that space is a form of power.[10]

According to Lefebvre (1991, 23), states plan and organize society "rationally", "with the help of knowledge and technology, imposing analogous, if not homologous, measures irrespective of political ideology, historical background, or the class origins of those power". Urban plans and associated maps are what Lefebvre (1991) might consider tools for coercing and enforcing

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[10] While Lefebvre assumes that planning is based on knowledge and technology, urban studies literature has shown us that planning without knowledge or technology is indeed common (Ghertner 2015; Roy 2009b). At the same time, planning outcomes are not always aimed at achieving development or improvements, and can result in dispossession and inequalities (Bou Akar 2018; Roy 2003a; Yiftachel 1998).

the use of space in an official urban imaginary. Yiftachel (1998, 395) defines planning of all sorts as "the formulation, content, and implementation of spatial public policies" and holds that the practice of planning is necessarily a "public production of space" for the exercise of power and social control. The power to plan, thus, is the power to control, and the language of control is often narrated by discourses such as development, improvement, and modernity. It is under this context that Lefebvre (1991) advocated for the right to the city as essentially the right to participate in urban planning.

Yet, urban planning is often based not on rights but on land use and control (Blomley 2004). In the context of academic debate about urban citizenship, equal rights among citizens remain more a matter of theory than a matter of fact (Beebeejaun 2017; Hammar 2017; Holston 2008; Lund 2016; Rasmussen and Lund 2018). There is a vast literature in particular exploring the lives of residents who are living on the urban margins,[11] a periphery,[12] a frontier,[13] or a borderland[14], detailing how they build and transform their neighbourhoods. This form of urban change driven by the residents themselves is what Teresa Caldeira (2017) terms peripheral urbanisation.[15] Caldeira (2017) argues that these peripheral spaces are also "spaces of insurgent citizenship". Insurgent citizenship, as James Holston explains, refers to the urban working class's strategies seeking to address the challenges of achieving substantive citizenship and claiming rights outside of traditional mobilisation mechanisms such as political parties and labour unions. He defines it as:

> "The political transformation that occurs when the conviction of having a right to the

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[11] As a concept, marginality has been criticised as being based on anxiety – "the need to theorise deviance from a standard" (Caldeira 2009, 849) – and challenged as a socially produced myth used by the dominant classes to justify oppression and inequality (Perlman 1975). In this thesis, I broadly agree with these criticisms. See Kihato (2011); Lancione (2016); and Aceska, Heer, and Kaiser-Grolimund (2019) for a discussion on urban margins.

[12] For example, see Ananya Roy (2005), Asef Bayat (2010), and Oren Yiftachel (2009). Resettlement to urban peripheries within cities in the Global South has been the subject of an extensive body of writing. I refer to the following works: Cross (2014); Datta (2012); Harms (2016); and Ptáčková (2020).

[13] According to Lund and Rachman (2018, 419), the frontier is a dynamic space where "existing social orders, property and citizenship rights, and other social contracts" are destroyed and eliminated, which "obscures and dismisses previous resource use and disenfranchises those who hitherto have benefited from resource access". Frontiers are a critical space in urban studies where identities (national, ethnic, and state) and territories coexist (Yiftachel, 2006). See Smith (1996) and Cross (2004) on discussion related to gentrification, capital accumulation and displacement. In the context of Myanmar, see Sarma and Sidaway (2019) and Rhoads (2020b) for discussion on "frontierisation" in Yangon.

[14] The studies of borderland have acknowledged that the concept does not only apply to international borders but intranational ones, such as urban borders. See van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002); Iossifova (2013); and McConnachie, Ho and Kyed (2022) for discussion on borders/borderlands.

[15] According to subaltern urbanism literature, the terms margin and periphery do not necessarily refer to a geographical location, but rather to a social position or a mode of space production in which people act as insurgent planners themselves (Caldeira 2017). Frontiers, while implying "a border with another city, nation, or rural area" (Simone 2010, 40), do not always imply a specific edgy geographical location (Rasmussen and Lund 2018).

city turns residents into active citizens who mobilize demands around city-based issues and often through residentially-based organizations that confront entrenched national regimes of citizenship inequality and disability." (Holston 2013, 261)

In this context, through building their neighbourhoods in peripheral areas, residents' struggles for resources, essential services, and shelter have "also generated new movements of insurgent citizenship based on their claims to have a right to the city and a right to rights" (Holston 2009, 245), and these autoconstructed neighbourhoods symbolise a space of empowerment for residents acting as their own agents (Simone 2010).

Aceska, Heer, and Kaiser-Grolimund (2019, 2) argue that the discussion of urban margins in critical urban studies has been set within a binary of "romanticising (conceiving urban contexts primarily as enabling) and condemning (conceiving them as constraining structural conditions)", and they advocate for finding a middle ground between the two extremes by seeking to understand how people realise their agency.[16] I would argue that the question in this context is not so much whether the external environment is enabling or not, but rather how people might exercise their agency despite being subject to a given external environment. Agency is not independent of external circumstances, recognition of which is crucial since perceiving agency as independent of external powerful forces risks overlooking and underplaying the influence of external constraints.[17] In other words: how do people claim urban citizenship? This is the matter which lies at the core of the "urban question" (Castells 1977).

The urban question and property

Contemporary discussions on the urban question often start with Manuel Castells, who wrote The Urban Question in the 1970s, and argued that the spatial structure of cities and the way they look are the results of how capitalist development has expanded in the past. For Castells, the urban question is a question of collective consumption, which has much to do with understanding the role of cities in both reproducing and resisting capitalist development. The

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[16] While I agree with Aceska, Heer, and Kaiser-Grolimunds' point of view, I disagree with their classification of some of the literature they highlight as romanticising the conditions of the urban poor. They point to Simone (2010), for example, as viewing the urban as overly enabling, but in his text Simone (2010, 38) does emphasise the need not to romanticise people's hardships while also trying not to be too pessimistic about their ability to exercise agency, as well as the need to take a broader view on how people engage with their external environment.

[17] Here, I would like to thank Stephen Campbell for highlighting this danger when he was reading a draft of this chapter. See Campbell (2021) for the related critique.

urban question is ever-changing, reconstructed and reapproached in relation to the social, political, and theoretical changes we can see in societies (Brenner 2000; Merrifield 2014; A. J. Scott and Moulaert 1997).[18] After Castells, the urban question effectively turned into a land question concerned with how the institution of private property rights sorts land uses and users across space and shapes many Western cities (Fogelsong 1986; Harvey 1982; A. J. Scott 1980), and in the Global South (Levien 2012; Roy 2016; Shannon *et al.* 2021).

Land is often the basis of urban transformations. Many researchers and scholars have examined issues such as dispossession, claim-making, and belonging in the process of urbanisation through the lens of urban land struggles.[19] In other words, the land question is essentially a question of how land is assembled, acquired and managed. As land is immovable, and its value lies in its ability to exclude (Li 2014), speculation on land can lead to the dispossession and displacement of the poor, with land has been portrayed as both a tool for exclusion and inclusion, i.e. bases of citizenship.

Macpherson (1978, 3) defines property as an enforceable claim "to some use or benefit of something." Sikor and Lund (2009, 4) broaden MacPherson's definition by emphasising that such claims must be legitimised "in the sense that the state or some other form of politico-legal authority sanctions them". As a result, property describes a social relationship between people. In this respect, a claim may only be deemed a property that confers rights on its holder if it is recognised by an authority. In other words, property, according to Blomley (2004, 154), is a "political vocabulary that gives individuals and groups in the city a language for naming, blaming, and claiming".

According to Roy (2003b), being propertied means having formal titles, or legally sanctioned rights from the government. Having property or living in a legalised residence is the foundation for being seen and treated as a citizen. The idea of propertied citizenship works as an exclusionary paradigm that marginalises social groups – such as the homeless – by labelling them as undeserving and undesirable, and not worthy of the rights of citizenship (Ghertner 2015; Purser 2016). Propertied citizenship denotes the position and assurance of having become a "proper" citizen through both the legality of one's residence and, perhaps more crucially, the dignity acquired through property ownership (Hammar 2017). Thus struggling

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[18] For a more detailed debate on the evolution of the urban question, see Nicholls (2008), Robinson (2014), and Shaw (2015).

[19] To name but a few: Chitonge and Mfune (2015); Levien (2012); Roy (2016); and Steel, Noorloos and Klaufus (2017).

for property is the same as struggling for citizenship rights (see Lund 2011), which results in mobilisation for both (Holston 2008).

It is in this setting that Castells' (1977) urban issue meets Roy's (2016) land question: both are concerned with how people organise social movements to combat displacement. But it is also where I'd like to depart from the previous scholarly discussion. In my fieldwork in Tagyi, I did not see residents turning their land struggles into a social movement (Castells 1977; Roy 2016) or a political movement "that struggles for generalized democracy" (Merrifield 2014, 2). Although residents' struggles for land were genuine, as the accounts of U Bhant, Ma Shine, and Daw Den demonstrate, there were no such movements in Tagyi. My intention here is not to contradict the extensive literature on people's movements centred on land issues. Rather, I want to highlight that there are other responses to the pressures outlined above besides resistance. What if insurgency isn't always how people claim necessities like shelter? And, if it isn't, what are the conditions necessary to precipitate such non-insurgent resistance?

1.3 Meddling in the transition narrative

Here I again refer to James Holston's (2008) idea of insurgent citizenship, which has been widely applied in citizenship and urban studies to examine how residents claim rights and entitlement through their contributions while also challenging the inequality created by formal citizenship. Yet with many such applications, a core element of insurgent citizenship goes relatively overlooked: Holston's insurgent citizenship was enabled by the democratisation process in Brazil. As he argues, during the transition to democracy, "insurgent citizens" on the self-built peripheries of big cities in Brazil began to challenge differentiated citizenship by asserting their rights to legal property ownership. In my research, this raises the question of whether the same kind of insurgency was happening on the outskirts of cities in Myanmar, and more generally, what the effects of the transition are on ordinary people there.

If we look at the broader literature on transition, many have pointed out how transition, especially from dictatorship to at least some degree of democracy, is not a silver bullet and does not necessarily enhance people's citizenship rights (Berenschot, Nordholt, and Bakker 2017). And as Lund (2016) reminds us, regime changes are always full of historical baggage:

> "When we use words like post-colonial, post-liberal, post-socialist, or post-authoritarian, it is to suggest a dramatic break from a previous social organization, without implying that all colonial features have disappeared, all liberal freedoms have

been curbed, all socialist property forms are extinct, or all authoritarian edicts have been superseded. Likewise, post-conflict is hardly the definitive end of violence." (1204)

In Myanmar, the word transition is a loaded term. It often carries three meanings: a political transition from an autocratic military regime to a civilian-led one; an economic transition from a closed economy to an open-door policy; and a social transition from war to peace. The country is often portrayed as having entered a transitional period since President Thein Sein introduced a series of political and economic reforms that precipitated the change to a civilian-led government in 2015. Yet as many scholars have pointed out, there are two broad issues with the transition narrative in Myanmar (Chachavalpongpun, Prasse-Freeman, and Strefford 2020). First is how to determine when the transition started. While many see 2011 as the beginning of the transitional era, the economic transition – that is, from a closed economy to an open-door policy – started in 1989, more than a decade before the political change started in earnest (Mya Than and Myat Thein 2007). This question is also intertwined with a second issue, namely how the term transition has been imagined and portrayed in the context of Myanmar. While official uses of the word refer to a simple journey of improvement from a chaotic and troubled start to a better and peaceful end, many activists and researchers have contested this narrative.

Indeed, Myanmar's transition has sparked numerous intellectual and political discussions concerning its causes, characteristics, and outcome in this regard (Egreteau 2016; M. Lall 2016; Mullen 2016). In this context, the debate on Myanmar's transition has largely focused on political actors, their interests, and strategies,[20] or on criticising the transition narrative itself (Girke and Beyer 2018; Rhoads and Wittekind 2019), with relatively little research being done on how the transition is experienced in people's daily lives (Hedström 2021).[21] This reflects a gap in the research on the effects of political change because it largely overlooks how ordinary people experience it. According to Girke and Beyer (2018, 226), the transition experience in Myanmar is relatively idiosyncratic, depending on a person's "local relationships, social milieus, and strata." And it is in this environment that I wish to investigate how urban residents perceive transition in their daily lives in order to participate in and contribute to the ongoing

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[20] There is a great deal of research on this topic: Cheesman, Farrelly and Trevor Wilson (2014); Kirsten McConnachie, Ho and Kyed (2022); Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2012); Suhardiman, Kenney-Lazar and Meinzen-Dick (2019); and Thant Myint U (2020); Simpson and Farrelly (2021).

[21] Hedström (2021) investigates how ethnic minority women in rural Myanmar feel about the political transition, suggesting that the transformation has not brought peace, as political leaders in the country typically suggest, but rather has exacerbated the insecurities in many people's lives.

debate about how we can analyse and evaluate Myanmar's political reforms.

At the macro level, this narrative of urban transformation has frequently been accompanied by the discourse of development and growth, with officials and experts arguing that political and economic reform will encourage more foreign businesses to invest in Myanmar (Asian Development Bank 2012; Findlay, Park, and Verbiest 2015; World Bank 2019). At the micro level, research has focused on examining local governance, pointing out how political transition does not appear to have brought about more inclusive, pro-poor policies in Myanmar's cities (Robert 2018; Sanchez 2019; 2020).

Nor have the benefits of urban change been evenly distributed. Some people, like the residents of Tagyi, are experiencing urban changes as detrimental in ways that do not conform to existing narratives. As the city has grown, land prices have risen, and many urban, working-class families have been forced to either sell all or at least part of what land they do own. While building affordable housing has been one of major urban policies in transitional Myanmar, they are far from being affordable to the working class.[22] At the same time, the civilian-led government, eager to differentiate itself from the military junta, has carried out policies that actually harm poorer residents without actually enhancing governance capacity, such as with a marked increase in building violation fines (will be discussed in Chapter 7).[23] While Holston (2008) argues that democratisation opens up space for acts of insurgent citizenship by the urban poor, I would argue that we need to examine how the regime change has, in numerous and meaningful ways, actually increased inequality in the name of democratisation in the context of Myanmar.

1.4 Urban studies in Myanmar

The goal of this thesis is to move the focus of citizenship studies from the national to the local level. It also intends to broaden Myanmar's existing urban studies by placing the land question at the heart of the urban inquiry.

Citizenship studies in Myanmar have primarily focused on the national level. This is reasonable, considering that the country has been troubled by civil wars for nearly the entirety of its post-colonial period, and that citizenship has frequently been viewed as an ethnic struggle and a

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[22] See Hein Ko Soe (2016) and Zarni Mann (2016) for local reports on the lack of affordable housing in cities in Myanmar, which highlight the shortage of urban affordable housing as a chronic problem in the country.
[23] This research was conducted in 2018-2019 during the transitional era, when the NLD was still in power.

battle against Myanmar's rigid and exclusive concept of "national races" (Cheesman 2017; Ho and Chua 2016; Thawnhmung and U Yadana 2018). Citizenship debates frequently centre on ethnicity, resistance, and conflict (Prasse-Freeman 2012; Holliday 2014), as well as the use of ordinary informal justice systems on the ground when formal ones are unavailable (Kyed 2020). While acknowledging the importance of ethnicity and the critical role of national political actors in the citizenship debate, I argue that we should not overlook the landscape of urban citizenship because, as my fieldwork suggests, residents' experiences of citizenship or encounters with the state are based on their urban experiences, suggesting that additional research on urban citizenship in Myanmar is needed.

This brings us to my second proposition, which concerns the narrative of "lack" prevalent within in urban studies in Myanmar. In contemporary Myanmar scholarship, there is a consensus that there has not been enough research on the country's urban areas.[24] Roberts (2018, 401) asserts that "very few scholars have studied cities in Burma/Myanmar, leaving changes in time difficult to document and analyse". Many questions are left unanswered in urban Myanmar not because they are unimportant, but because it is difficult to capture changes that occurred during the military dictatorship, when research was heavily censored or curtailed. In this regard, Sabrié (2019, 37) contends that Myanmar's "epistemological silence" about what cities are implies a "lack of interest in urban politics." Sabrié's statement is justified in pointing out the bias of Myanmar studies in focusing on the national level; however, as Sabrié also notes, conducting research during the era of military rule was especially difficult, and access to many records has remained restricted to this day. Thus, the absence of research focused on urban areas does not necessarily demonstrate a lack of interest, but rather may reflect a combination of research bias and access difficulties.

Urban studies in Myanmar have also tended to focus on matters of poverty, governance, and inequality of access (Kyed 2017; 2019; Matelski and Sabrié 2019; Rhoads 2018; Roberts 2020; Sanchez 2019; Than Pale 2018). Most research has been conducted in Yangon,[25] and although there has been an increase in work concerning Mandalay[26] and Naypyidaw,[27] research on

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[24] Within the growing scholarship on urban studies in Myanmar, many scholars have called for more research on cities: Matelski and Sabrié (2019); Naing Oo (1989); Puttilli (2020); Rhoads (2018); Roberts (2017, 2018); Sabrié (2019); Sanchez and Su Su Myat (2021); Sarma and Sidaway (2019); Than Than Nwe (1998).
[25] To name but a few: Astolfo and Boano (2020); Myat Nyein Aye (2016); Rhoads (2018); Roberts (2020); Sabrié (2019); Seekins (2011); Simone (2018); Wells and Lamb (2021)
[26] For example, Balac et al. (2019); Kim (2018); Puttilli (2020); Sanchez (2019, 2020); Sanchez and Su Su Myat (2021).
[27] For example, Preecharushh (2010) and Seekins (2009).

ethnic cities remains relatively limited.[28] While we do see an uneven geographical distribution of urban studies in Myanmar, perhaps what urban studies researchers in Myanmar must also reflect on, myself included, is not merely how to fill this research gap, but how we can understand and keep track of the country's changing urban circumstances, and how we can unpack "Myanmar urbanism" (Roberts 2017, 69).

As I argue in my thesis, the subject of urban citizenship is a land concern, which is also at the heart of Myanmar's urban problem. Given that Myanmar is primarily a rural society, land grabs, unfair land distributions, and land disputes in rural areas between ethnic armed groups and the military dominate Myanmar literature on land issues (see Boutry *et al.* 2017; Faxon 2017; Woods 2020). Land is not, however, governed in the same way in rural and urban areas. Cities have increasingly become contested sites for land conflicts as the country has continued to urbanise. Existing research on urban land in Myanmar has mostly concentrated on state-led slum evictions (Campbell 2022; Forbes 2019; Kyed 2019; Moe Moe Hlaing 2021; Roberts 2020) and private development projects (Wells and Lamb 2021) which, while significant for understanding urban land issues in Myanmar, are not the only angles we can use to understand working-class struggles for land and ownership in cities. As D. Hall, Hirsch, and Li (2011) advocate, when looking at exclusion, we should pay more attention to intimate forms of land grabbing that happen between local residents in neighbourhoods. In this context, studying a working-class peripheral neighbourhood like Tagyi both answers the call for the ways land grabbing and exclusion happen from below (Kan and Chen 2021; Borras and Franco 2013), and allows us to better appreciate the link between citizenship claims, land, and property in urban Myanmar.

1.5 The overall argument

This section argues that understanding the urban transformations during Myanmar's transition requires us to look beyond the city centre and instead focus on the making of and changes on the city's outskirts by examining planning, property and citizenship there.

A central aim of this research is to rethink how the urban outskirts are politically and socially constructed. Based on my research into the history of urban planning in Myanmar, I argue that cities have traditionally been seen as sources of political and socioeconomic problems by the

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[28] The notable exceptions are: Bastos Lima and Kmoch (2021); Harrisson (2020); Lamb (2020); Middleton and Tay Zar Myo Win (2021).

military, which has sought to use planning as a means of controlling the population and often seeks to solve these problems by expanding cities. The outer areas created as a result of this approach are often left out of urban planning programs and enjoy few or no government services, but the state still has to deal with them and the people who live there because it cannot afford to completely cede control of the outskirts. The oral histories of residents living on Mandalay's outskirts show that people are also shaping the urban through their everyday practices, which runs counter to the expectations fostered by a state-centric approach[29].

However, the outskirts of Mandalay aren't the outskirts of São Paulo, and the outskirts of Mandalay do not provide the same space for insurgent citizenship that Holston finds in Brazil.[30] Nor is what has been happening in Tagyi exactly what Nielsen (2011) terms "inverse governmentality", in which residents in peri-urban Maputo tried to mimic government planning and state-defined urban standards when developing their informal settlements. Instead, Tagyi residents built their houses and undertook various other construction work both because they believed in self-reliance, and because they hoped that if they proved they were contributing to Mandalay's development, the municipality would eventually provide them with government services.

Concerning urban citizenship, I argue that in Myanmar it is ultimately an urban land question. Residents like U Bhant, Ma Shine and Daw Den have varied but similar questions about their ability to hold onto their land and claim ownership, reflecting how land ownership has been used as an exclusionary tool by the government but also acts as a means through which residents can be included in the city. Ownership is viewed as a practical issue of control in Myanmar rather than a legal issue, and issues of land commodification and speculation are at the heart of conflicts and claims about urban citizenship. At the same time, land and housing are seen as a personal duty, not a state obligation. This mentality is highly related to the ideology of self-reliance that has been one of the dominant tropes manipulated by the military as a way to control the population, and for the population to survive the military era, albeit often in self-defeating ways (Thawnghmung 2019). Through my case studies on informal land sales and land subdivisions in the settlement of Tagyi, even as residents attempt to subvert the

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[29] Such as Taylor (2009) and Thant Myint U (2001).

[30] Holston (2011, 344) argues that residents in the working-class neighbourhoods in São Paulo's peripheries have an insurgent spirit because they have established three senses of rights from three sources: as morally good citizens, as contributors to their neighbourhoods and society, and as legal citizens protected by the constitution. In Myanmar, the concept of universal human rights is less prevalent among residents who have lived through many years of military dictatorship (in contrast with most of the contemporary history of Brazil, which was a democracy except for a period of military rule in 1964-1985).

paradigm of propertied citizenship by informally subdividing their land, they continue to reinforce the notion that owning or renting property must be credentialed to constitute a proper form of residence. Looking at urban citizenship through the lens of land issues also suggests that urban citizenship in Mandalay is highly differentiated based on residents' wealth, and the matter of land ownership is related to whether one can gain access to financing and market information.

The final central aim of this research is to analyse the impacts of transition on Myanmar's urban transformation. I argue that the former compounds the latter, resulting in unexpected detriments for the lives of urban residents, especially the poor. During my research on house construction, I discovered that many residents complained about being heavily fined by the municipal government for building without an official permit, which they were unable to obtain due to inconsistencies between the policies of the former military government and those of the new civilian-led government. Residents' criticisms suggest that the political transition has created new inequalities while preserving old ones. Despite their discontent with the civilian-led government, many locals continue to support it because they have no other option, and I argue this is how the transition looks on the ground in Myanmar—that it is indeed quite invisible. Transition and changes are highly anticipated but also disappointing in residents' everyday lives, and this echoes Thant Myint U's (2020) criticism about the transition narrative in Myanmar: that it was tightly controlled by the political elites who cared more about constitutional reforms or institutional changes than people's livelihoods.

1.6 Outline of the thesis

This thesis spans the years from the late 1800s to the present. However, it focuses primarily on the three decades since the 1990s, when Myanmar adopted an open-door policy and implemented numerous reforms. In this thesis, I argue that investigating people's land and housing-related activities on the outskirts can provide us with valuable insights into how property is produced and citizenship is experienced. And focusing on property and citizenship is especially important when we consider that Myanmar has historically been dominated by an authoritarian dictatorship, the legacy of which has lingered well into the subsequent civilian-led era. True, struggles for property and citizenship have frequently been state-led in this context, resulting in various forms of resistance—protests, rallies, and even armed conflicts. However, I contend that residents' land and housing-related activities are not purely or even

primarily confrontational; they represent residents' efforts to claim property and citizenship, and they help elucidate the challenges posed by both state and non-state actors encountered in the process.

In what follows, the story shifts from a broad historical context to ethnographic, current, and personal content. The chapters loosely follow the chronological order of urban planning in Mandalay.

Chapter 2 lays out my research methodology. My goal is to present to the reader the process of how this thesis has come to be. It first provides an account of how I started researching land and the housing struggles of the working class in Mandalay, and includes a discussion on the troubles I had in obtaining official permission to do research which ultimately affected my choice of field site. This serves as a reminder to me that despite substantial improvements, research conducted during the period of political transition still faced many restrictions in terms of overall freedom and access to information—the presence of which is a running theme throughout this chapter. I also provide a review of my positionality and my cooperation with research assistants and translators, which at the time affected how I collected information and interacted with residents and officials. I conclude by noting the limitations of my data collection.

Chapter 3 is about the history of urban planning in Myanmar. It first traces the history of post-colonial Myanmar with a focus on understanding the shifts and continuity of urban planning approaches following regime changes, from the post-colonial multi-partisan union lasting until 1962, on to the long-term military dictatorship which continued until 2011, and through the period of political transition that ended in 2021. This chapter shows that during regime changes, successive governments had different perceptions of the urban that affected their approaches to urban planning. While the focus of urban planning has shifted over time, successive governments in Myanmar continued to see newly expanded areas as solutions to a given city's problems, using them as resettlement wards for people who were forced out of their existing homes within the city proper. I argue that these urban expansions and resettlements have actively marginalised the city outskirts and that, despite the state's intent to ignore these areas, local governments must also contend with the residents of these marginalised areas.

Chapter 4 is about place making – how residents in Tagyi have developed and transformed their neighbourhood, turning it from a dumping ground into a fully realised residential area. By documenting local practices and tactics (de Certeau 1984) used to develop Tagyi, this

chapter argues that residents' everyday practices are not resistant per se, nor they tried to evade the state (Harrisson 2020; Roberts and Rhoads, 2021). But they were motivated to engage in development work hoping these efforts would draw the municipality's attention and result in the improved provision of services. Through my study of residents' planning practices in Tagyi, I found that most sought to engage with the state following their involuntary resettlement because they wished to both make themselves more recognizable and avoid being treated as marginal. This suggests that the outskirts are both a contested space as well as a place where residents grappling with their marginality engage with the same state that imposed this disadvantaged status on them in the first place via top-down planning.

Chapter 5 talks about the land market in Tagyi. It suggests that people are buying and selling land in the ward not because they are after legal rights but because they want access to the location and its attendant advantages. In this situation, poorer residents are unable to hold onto their land and are forced to sell, and analysis of this phenomenon allows us to understand the process of accumulation by displacement (Zhang 2010) that has been happening on the outskirts of Mandalay since the resettlement, and to analyse displacement as a form of access failure (Ribot and Peluso 2003; Ribot 2014).

Chapter 6 investigates the common practice of informal land subdivisions in Tagyi. It argues that residents see housing as a personal duty, not the obligation of the state. It explores the rationales of residents who subdivide their plots, and argues that informal subdivision of land subverts aspects of propertied citizenship (Roy 2003b; Hammar 2017) while ultimately reinforcing it by differentiating between residents based on wealth.

Chapter 7 looks into the practice of house construction in Tagyi during the political transition. Through engaging with residents' stories of unfinished construction and other house-building problems, this chapter joins the existing discussion on how house construction is a way for the urban poor to claim urban belonging and even citizenship in cities (Gastrow 2017; Nielsen 2011a). It examines why housebuilding serves to embody and reinforce aspirations for urban belonging among impoverished supporters of political transition, and how political change can disrupt the housebuilding process, fostering feelings of resentment and helplessness that residents did not expect from the transitional era.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion of the thesis. It provides an overview of the thesis' findings and implications.

Chapter 2 Nothing happens here

"The ethnographer always arrives late. The life of the people among whom she lives had started long before her arrival and will continue beyond her provisional stay. Her job is to retrieve something whole from this necessarily partial picture that emerges from fieldwork, especially because no study can be exhaustive in the literal sense of the word."

(Ikeuchi 2019, 14)

During my fieldwork in Mandalay, the University of Mandalay and the University of Chiang Mai co-hosted a research workshop. The University of Chiang Mai gave research assistance to teachers at the University of Mandalay, who worked in groups to discuss their various study topics, such as a gold leaf producing company in Mandalay, migrant nuns in rural Shan State, and Irrawaddy River water quality. There was a translator at the workshop who assisted with translating Burmese into English and vice versa. He was a University of Mandalay graduate, and his family ran a private hospital in town. One could call him a local elite. During a break, he inquired as to what I was doing in Mandalay. I said, "Doing research at Tagyi, one of the resettlement wards in Pyigyidagon township", to which he replied, dismayed: "A resettlement ward? I'd never heard of it before. What can you learn there?"

When teachers and local friends heard I was studying urban changes in Mandalay through Tagyi the resettlement ward, in particular, they often asked, "why are you interested in the resettlement ward? Why are you interested in the south where nothing happens?". The residents in Tagyi asked similar questions and were curious why I was interested in their everyday lives, saying that their lives were quiet, that the resettlement had happened was almost three decades ago, and that these days "nothing happens here" – a phrase I repeatedly heard during my fieldwork.

Ikeuchi's quote is a frank reflection on the role and challenge of an ethnographer. While an ethnographer "always arrives late", they are responsible for both unpacking the past and understanding how the past continues to affect the present. That leads to the question of what past and present to study. For this matter, I reflect on Edmund Leach's famous metaphor. As Leach (1961, 5) argues, anthropological research that merely aims at collecting new empirical cases and cultural facts is nothing more than "butterfly collecting". Just because no one has done any research in Tagyi, or more broadly speaking, Mandalay's outskirts, does not

automatically justify the research. It is the same as the fact that no one has collected a particular butterfly - in Leach's terms, does not mean that such a butterfly needs to be collected. That leads to a series of questions: Why should we study the residents in Tagyi? Why should we study the outskirts of Mandalay? Do I have the necessary tools to conduct such research? What can be produced - theoretically and empirically - from this research?

These are the questions that both troubled and guided me through my fieldwork and even my writing-up. This thesis is, essentially, an urban anthropology of the formation and the transformation of the outskirts; of the everyday lives of ordinary people (de Certeau 1984); and of property and citizenship. And this research builds upon the existing urban studies literature on Myanmar, expanding its scope to include less-studied ordinary residents, in order to provide a fuller picture of urban lives in the country.

This chapter contributes to the thesis by discussing the methodology and research methods used, which assist in illustrating how this research was designed, how data was acquired and analysed, and how conclusions were formed. It reflects on the nature of this research, as well as questions of access and the challenges of investigating contentious domains such as land, housing, and spatial politics during Myanmar's political transition.

Section 2.1 provides a peek at my research trajectory, which situates this research within the greater landscape of urban lives in modern Myanmar. Section 2.2 describes the reasons for and problems with locating the field site, as well as the reasons for selecting Tagyi as my field site to investigate planning, property, and citizenship in Mandalay. Section 2.3 describes the research methods used to collect data, emphasising the need for research assistants and language training. Section 2.4 outlines how my various roles influenced my data collection, analysis, and writing up. Section 2.5 briefly discusses research ethics. Section 2.6 serves as the chapter's conclusion.

2.1 The research trajectory

This research is an ethnographic study on planning, property and urban citizenship in transitional Myanmar, which reflects on my interests in understanding rights and state-people relationships in a context where full democracy is not yet achieved.

Through my legal studies for my bachelor degree, I became interested in exploring the gap between rights on paper and how rights are carried out in practice. For me this gap represents both the failure of the laws to protect rights as well as a space for people and activists to act on.

There is also a personal factor contributing to my interest in citizenship. I grew up in Hong Kong, a former British colony and now a part of China. Hong Kong was promised democracy before the handover in 1997, but this promise was quickly broken, increasingly so after crackdowns on the city's democratic movement since 2016. Growing up in Hong Kong was confusing for me, as I often felt like I did not have a country I belonged to, and the city's failure to transition to democracy has prompted me to reflect on the purpose of citizenship and what it entails in a society where the government often fails to meet the needs of its people.

When I was studying developmentalism in Southeast Asia for my master's degree, I was particularly interested in Myanmar's status, particularly why it had been labelled as one of the least developed countries for decades but had seen virtually no improvement. The master's programme, however, was a taught research degree with no possibility for fieldwork. Because of these factors, I sought an opportunity to undertake fieldwork in Myanmar when preparing my Ph.D. studentship proposal. Finally, I travelled to Myanmar in February 2018 for a one-month pilot research project.[31]

I initially planned to study land conflict and citizenship in rural Myanmar, where most land seizures and fights for recognition occur. After visiting a few villages in upper Myanmar for the pilot project, I realised I wasn't well-connected or equipped for rural research, so I switched to urban studies. I also reconsidered my research objective. One episode from my pilot visit stands out in particular: I met a Burmese researcher who helped villagers obtain official IDs, and who questioned my desire to do my research in a village, asking, "Why do international researchers study remote places? Don't you think cities have enough problems?"

This Burmese researcher caused me to reconsider what I wanted to obtain and produce with this research. His remarks about international scholars' rush to rural areas reminded me of how the country has been depicted as a rural "Other"; that in our rapidly urbanising world, Myanmar is still portrayed as geographically and chronologically lagging behind the so-called developed world.[32] That encouraged me to consider how to explore and analyse cities in Myanmar while focusing on questions of property and citizenship, both of which are broad concepts that can

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[31] I visited Mandalay, Yangon and Taunggyi. While I was staying in Mandalay and Taunggyi I visited the villages outside of the cities for site visits with local NGOs staff.

[32] See, for example, Fabian (2014) on the discussion on the construction of Other in anthropology.

be investigated in a variety of contexts.

In Mandalay, I met Hin, who inspired my research on housing in urban Myanmar. I encountered Hin, a bellhop, on my first day in Mandalay. Hin studied math in an university in Mandalay and wanted to work in trading because he was good with numbers. Hin took me around Mandalay on his motorbike and introduced me to the stores and their owners near the guesthouse. Hin shared a rented bedroom with three male workers in an ancient, two-story structure five blocks south of Theik Pan Street, which locals said divided the city into "old town" and "new town". Hin considered moving south for cheaper rent. Some of his friends had already done so, and some had even moved to the slums.

Hin was both excited and frustrated about staying in the city. He often praised how the city had developed and improved, compared to when he had first moved to Mandalay in 2013. But at the same time, he thought those improvements had not benefitted him personally. With a degree and a hotel job, Hin was by no means the least fortunate person in the city, but his struggles with urban life were all very real.

Hin talked a lot about his problems, but he never mentioned seeking government assistance. Existing literature can provide some preliminary explanations for this. According to an extensive body of literature on governmentality, non-state actors in civil society, including but not limited to NGOs, ethnic groups, and neighbourhood associations, are frequently involved in governance (Li 2007; Lund 2006; Rose 1999). As a result, when the state is unable or unwilling to provide assistance, services, and protection to its citizens, they are more likely to seek assistance from non-state actors. This is exactly the situation described by researchers studying civil society and governance in Myanmar, where people were forced to rely on themselves and civil society rather than the state to meet their needs during military rule (Hsu 2019; McCarthy 2018; Prasse-Freeman 2012; Roberts and Rhoads 2021).

Another explanation can be found in a strain of literature that examines state-people relationships. When state does not provide any assistance, people simply have none to rely on. One reason for such an absence of support can be a malfunctioning taxation policy, which in Myanmar's case has been argued for by researchers and NGOs (Nixon et al. 2018; Owen and Hay Mahn Htun 2018). Tax evasion has often been blamed as a reason for the country's lack of development, with citizens tending to evade taxes and the state providing little or no assistance or support in as a result.

But during my pilot study, these explanations did not seem to match the reality on the ground.

Urban workers like Hin did not receive help from NGOs, since these groups were, in Hin's own words, "more eager to help people who were poorer than the poor". At the same time, the urban struggles of those who were not in the most desperate straits rarely made it into news headlines.[33] The urban struggles Hin and many working poor faced had thus been internalised and become personal problems. In addition, there appeared to be a genuine belief that citizens should not rely on the state for assistance - if indeed there was any - which was unrelated to the nature of the state or the amount of taxes citizens paid.

My encounter with Hin made me realize how little we know about the struggles of ordinary people in Myanmar - those who, unlike slum dwellers or internally displaced migrants, do not face immediate or cataclysmic situations. Only a few studies provide readers with a glimpse into the everyday lives of urban populations (Mullen 2016; Roberts and Rhoads 2021; Skidmore 2004; Thawnghmung 2011; 2019). If we follow Robinson's (2012) idea that we should distance ourselves from western theorisation when trying to understand cities and urban modernity in a non-western context, then we should also be careful not to assume those who were marginalised in the western context share the same experiences of those in a non-western context. It is in this belief that I chose to study the ordinary people of Mandalay, a group that is working class, struggling to secure a place in the city, but which is by no means seen as the most vulnerable there. They represent an urban majority which is an "assemblage of people of different backgrounds" (Simone 2014, 3), and their struggles should be understood in the local context. If the absence of the state was taken for granted when it came to social welfare, then how do urban residents perceive their relationship with the state? How do ordinary people claim urban citizenship? These were the questions I had following the pilot study and which prompted me to start my official fieldwork looking into ordinary people's housing struggles in Mandalay in the fall of 2018.

2.2 Finding the field site

My decision to set my field site in Tagyi was both planned and a coincidence. Picking up on Hin's struggle to find an affordable place to stay in the city, I aimed to focus on the housing struggles of the urban working class. But unfortunately, when I returned to Mandalay for the field research in September 2018, Hin no longer lived in Mandalay, as he had to move back to his village due to family issues. Losing Hin as a key informant was an initial setback when I

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[33] Hin's comments echo the anti-poor attitude shared by urban planning experts in Mandalay (Sanchez 2019).

returned to Mandalay, but remembering what he said about the south of Mandalay being "where the ordinary poor live", I had a preliminary idea that my field site would be there.

After a few visits, I chose the slum areas along the Irrawaddy riverbank and at the southern margins of Mandalay – where the municipal government often carried out evictions – as my field site for studying the urban poor's struggles in Mandalay. However, when I held meetings with municipal officials to gather information about slums in the city, I was warned by the head of the Administration in MCDC that if I wanted to interview slum dwellers I had to first seek the approval from an unspecified "higher authority", and would also have to be accompanied by officers to ensure my "safety".[34] It was at this point that I realised the slums were considered a sensitive topic by the state in Mandalay. Their indirect interference with my research allowed them to signal that they were uncomfortable with the topic without explicitly saying so (Hung and Aung Myo Min 2020). Picking up on this, it became clear that it would be impossible to avoid state supervision of myself and of slum dwellers, and that my actions as a researcher might lead to slum evictions (Ryan and Tynen 2020). Therefore I decided not to work in the slums. And, looking back, I realise I made a mistake in selecting the slums as my field site in the first place, as it contradicts my intended goal of researching ordinary urban residents.

Having been forced to abandon the slums as a target field site, I was faced with the difficult question of where else to turn. "The south" gave me only general direction—which part of the south of Mandalay should I select? It was also at this time I started learning more about the urban history of Mandalay; in particular, how it was expanded over the years through resettlements to the newly expanded areas in the south. Through conversations with residents living along the riverbank, Sai, my research assistant at that time, and I were directed to certain areas in Pyigyidagon township, the southernmost township in Mandalay, in our search for resettled populations. And the first resettlement ward we visited was Tagyi.

When I began to visit Tagyi with Sai (and later with Shwe Yee), residents were curious about our visits. One moment in particular stands out in my memory, when Shwe Yee and I went to visit a 100-household leader in Tagyi to learn more about his duties in the sub-ward. He was not at home when we arrived, so we sat down and chatted with his wife about mundane household matters, such as shopping at the nearby market, the delicious-smelling food that she was cooking for lunch, and her son, who was a botany student at a local college. After chitchatting for a while I explained to her that I was interested in the lives of residents in the

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[34] The interview was conducted on October 23, 2018.

neighbourhood and was working on a research project. At this point she paused cooking for a few seconds, then asked in a teasing tone, "What kind of degree requires a student to study the poor and this place? *Nothing happens here.*"

It was exactly this idea that "nothing happens here" which made residents view my research as unusual, or even weird. The resettlement in Tagyi had occurred almost three decades ago. Land ownership in the ward was not entirely legal, and land disputes had occurred in the early years following the resettlement. But there were no land disputes anymore, as ownership had become more stable. Residents had a quiet life—some were better off, and some were worse off; some lived in bigger houses, some lived in smaller ones; but nothing really "happened" except for some petty theft and missing cattle. Quiet, peaceful, harmonious, these were the descriptors residents often used when talking about their lives and their neighbours. So what could be achieved by studying such a quiet place on the outskirts of a second-tier Asian city?

After being questioned so many times, I started asking myself similar questions. I was frustrated because I couldn't explore slums where government actions and evictions frequently occurred. And even though I chose to work in Mandalay because of its history and geography, I was frequently being questioned by local and international scholars as to why I wasn't conducting research in an ethnic area or in Yangon, where data would be more readily available. At the same time, I found studies on subaltern urbanisation valuable in deciding on what I wanted in a field site. As critical urban theorists argue, "all cities are ordinary" in the sense that each city is distinct in its own way: history, urban planning, locality, and authenticity; and they argue that urban studies should be elevated and more attentive to the differences and diversity of different cities around the world (Robinson 2012; Roy 2009a). This focus on ordinary cities extends to smaller, micro settings, such as streets, local sites, and neighbourhoods (Hall 2012), and may apply to any area formed outside of the logic of official planning (Caldeira 2017).

In my research, as I learned more about the residents and the history of the ward, I realised Tagyi matched my research interests: it is a place where both the relatively wealthy and poor lived close together; where the aftermath of old state violence can still be felt; and where residents had been forced to build their own community. The more I visited Tagyi and got to know the residents, the more I realised I was not looking at a working class neighbourhood or a specific resettlement per se, but at an embodiment of the transformations happening on the outskirts of a fast-developing city in Southeast Asia, and how the residents there worked diligently to remain in an increasingly expensive city. This was a personal story that I and my family were familiar with from our experience in Hong Kong, which I will provide further

detail on in a section on positionality. Through my fieldwork in Tagyi, my research question expanded from how to understand the land and housing issues of Mandalay's urban poor, to analysing how their struggles for self-reliance intersect with the city's peripheral urbanisation.

I adopt the perspective of Burmese anthropologist U Chit Hlaing (2008), who argues that studies on Myanmar are derived from mixed interests and motivations, meaning that the ethnographic accounts and themes they produced interpreting Myanmar are also complex. In a way, this research has been a journey in which I have developed my own interpretations of Myanmar in and beyond the existing "interpretive communities" (Aung-Thwin 2008, 188), both to better understand urban Myanmar, and to expand how we understand property and urban citizenship by studying the outskirts in Myanmar.

Given its focus on the city and citizens' daily life, this research adds to the existing literature on urban studies in Myanmar, positioning itself as a study of the anthropology of a Myanmar city. In this case, I emphasise "a city" since, in Myanmar, Bamar-dominated cities (such as Mandalay and Yangon) are very different from places where ethnic minorities constitute the majority. At the same time, this research is not simply an anthropological study "in a city" but "of a city" because it seeks to see the city as a distinct and special context that shapes and is shaped by social relations.[35] This study, while mostly focused on the people of Tagyi, is also a study of Mandalay. In general, this research is about processes—the processes of urban change and social transformation, and in this context, urban is considered to be an inherent element of these processes, rather than a product of them.

2.3 Research methods

The methodology for enquiring about the urban dwellers' practices and struggles to remain in a fast-developing city during my fieldwork includes gathering information and data about resettlement, land and housing arrangements, and the residents' lived stories in Tagyi: what they did to support themselves, what kinds of struggle they faced while living in Mandalay, why and how they moved to Tagyi, and so on. Before I get into details of the research methods,

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[35] For the discussion on anthropology in or of cities, see Fox (1977), Gutkind (1983), Hannerz (1980), Low (1996), and Pardo and Prato (2012). This discussion gets to the heart of how we define urban anthropology. My understanding is that anthropology in cities, as Pardo and Prato (2012, 17) argue, means that urban anthropology is just anthropology because "the complexity of the world in which we live should not be translated into academic dispute and disciplinary insecurity". On the other hand, scholars like Gutkind (1983) and Low (1996) argue that cities should not be treated as facts but should be studied as institutions with different historical, political, and social aspects.

I would like to address the issue of language and translation, as well as working with local colleagues during my fieldwork, because these issues are fundamental to the research methodology and methods.

Language, translation and assistance

I learned to speak basic Burmese, the most common language in Myanmar, at the beginning of my fieldwork. With a one-month intensive language training in Yangon beforehand and continuous training during my fieldwork in Mandalay, I could introduce myself and explain who I was, why I was in Mandalay or Tagyi, and the purpose of my research in Burmese. While my Burmese was not good enough for me to conduct extended interviews on my own, I could partially follow along during interviews and jot down some key notes.

Working with local colleagues is a key methodological issue because of their roles in shaping data collection, analyses, and even the writing up. In this regard, I was fortunate to work with Sai and Shwe Yee in my research. Sai was a final-year anthropology student at the University of Mandalay and we worked briefly for two months during the school holidays. In January 2019, I shared a recruitment post with local friends on Facebook and Shwe Yee, a fresh graduate of international relations, responded because she wanted to gain more experience in research work. We worked together for seven months in Mandalay. Before each interview, I prepared a list of draft questions written in English and sent them to my research assistants, who would translate the questions into Burmese for interviews. When the interviewee responded in Burmese, the research assistants would do an onsite translation, at which point I could ask follow-up questions based on their responses. With her onsite translation, Shwe Yee in particular helped me establish communication and my ties of trust with respondents as gatekeepers (Hung and Aung Myo Min 2020). I also worked with Cho and Ma Oo in Mandalay and May in Yangon, who helped me transcribe and translate interview recordings, government documents, and news articles.

As most of the materials and data were collected in Myanmar, this research inevitably required extensive translation between Burmese and English, and such a process is never straightforward. In relation to translating Burmese, as Taylor points out in his reflections on studying Myanmar as non-native speakers,

> "We foreigners' capacity to understand and analyse Myanmar politics are also limited
> by our linguistic capacities and immersion in the structures of the English language in

which we reason, argue and write. Political thought in Myanmar is usually reasoned, argued and written in Burmese or one of the minority languages. Yet few students of Myanmar politics ever manage to learn even one minority language and those who tackle Burmese quickly discover that the language is very different from English. The lack of 'fit' between Burmese and English makes accurate translation very difficult; there is often room for interpretation and this bedevils agreement." (Taylor 2008, 220)

My Burmese level was not sufficient for me to do much Burmese-English translation myself, and therefore I worked closely with local colleagues who translated most of the materials relied upon in this research, including interviews and written documents that were in Burmese. Looking back, my local colleagues rarely raised translation problems and I was unaware if they encountered any "lack of 'fit'" (Taylor 2008, 220) during work, meaning that "lost in translation" (Farquhar and Fitzsimons 2011) moments were inevitable. Given the time and resources available to me during the fieldwork, my capacity to mitigate these potential problems was limited.

Existing literature discussing the relationship between foreign researchers and local research brokers such as research assistants and translators usually focuses on the technical aspects of translation,[36] but more recent discussion has tended to focus on the power dynamics between the two parties. As Edwards reminds us,

> "Power relations between academic researchers and the interpreters they position as gatekeepers are multifaceted, as are relations of trust. They do not merely follow a straightforward flow down a hierarchy, but are multiple and fluid. The balance of power shifts at different stages of the research process, affecting the extent of the leap of faith that is trust." (Edwards 2013, 511)

Because of my substantial reliance on local colleagues for translation, I experienced a sense of powerlessness during research, especially when facing long delays in their translation and transcription of interviews. To solve this problem, after reflecting on the existing working arrangements I hired more translators to share the workload, and spoke to individual colleagues to figure out the causes of any delays. This process helped us build a relationship of support and trust: one of my colleagues was unmotivated because of a sudden breakup, and a proposed talk about work became a talk about how to overcome heartbreak. Meanwhile, Shwe Yee revealed that her ward experienced frequent blackouts that left her unable to work, so we agreed

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[36] See Turner (2010) for reviews and critics.

to extend her deadline and I provided an extra stipend so she could work in a local café or tea shop, where the power was typically more stable.

After the fieldwork, I continued to support my colleagues by writing reference letters and by providing some financial and emotional support after the coup in February 2021. I ultimately maintained relationships mixing friendship and finance with my local colleagues (Molony and Hammett 2007), recognising the importance of hired help, while at the same time acknowledging the asymmetric wealth and power dynamics inherent to these relationships.

Data collection

My fieldwork in Tagyi was based primarily on ethnographic methods, a combination of interviews and observations. This was supplemented with collection of secondary data. In total, I formally interviewed 135 individuals across a variety of groups including local residents, government officials, ward administrators, lawmakers, and professionals during my fieldwork. I interviewed 79 residents in Tagyi. I stopped interviewing when I reached a point where unknown attributes did not seem to be appearing anymore (Bauer and Aarts 2000).

Interviews

Residents

Interviews with residents of Tagyi ward fell into two main categories. The first was a semi-structured household survey which helped me collect basic information such as household size, income, land ownership and in some cases the individual histories of those living in Tagyi.[37] The purpose of the survey was primarily to get a basic sense of Tagyi and its residents. I conducted 50 such surveys in Tagyi, and revisited 11 households for interviews on personal history where interviewees had been particularly informative during the initial survey. When I formally began the surveys I already knew a few residents of the ward, through whom I was able to reach out and conduct interviews with other residents. In the end I conducted 54 life history interviews in Tagyi.

My research experience with residents in Tagyi was quite different from what I had imagined before starting my fieldwork: people would be willing to talk about the state and politics since

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[37] See Appendix for a sample survey.

the country was undergoing democratisation. But during my fieldwork, most residents were still scared of discussing the resettlement, the military dictatorship, or their views on the political changes in Myanmar. This gap in expectations and reality can be compared with other researchers' experiences during the junta dictatorship, who found Myanmar citizens surprisingly talkative on sensitive issues (Matelski 2014; Skidmore 2004). During my fieldwork, I realised that even during the post-junta period, citizens might still be afraid to speak openly about certain subjects, and that common sense was required in judging which topics were still too sensitive during data collection and analysis. I also realised I had to be more patient when introducing myself to residents in Tagyi and understand that they were sensitive to historical and cultural risks specific to the politics and society of Myanmar.

While my time with Tagyi's residents usually started with a more formal survey or interviews, it soon became more informal when I revisited them for semi-structured interviews and chats. These chats were about the residents' life stories—how they moved (or were moved) from one place to another; how they shifted between jobs; how they met their spouses; how they raised their children, etc. During these chats about life stories, residents shared emotional connections that enrich the ethnographic data (Parvez 2018): anger about the resettlement, fear about the military government, mixed feelings about the political transition, and so forth.

The length of these interviews ranged from brief 20-minute sessions to long conversations spanning over three hours. During interviews, I sought consent from residents before using my phone to record our conversations. I only recorded formal interviews; during chitchat and other informal exchanges I only wrote down notes, as it was inappropriate to record causal conversations. While other studies note that using a recorder can make respondents nervous,[38] my experiences in Tagyi suggested otherwise: my use of a smart phone to record drew little attention, as residents often put their own smart phones on the table too during our interviews. While I understand that recording may have prompted some residents to hold back from making more frank or honest comments, I tried to mitigate this by assuring those I interviewed of the confidentiality of the information they provided. Some residents, especially the 100-household leaders, asked me who else I had talked to in the ward, but I refused to name anyone and explained to them that this refusal supported my promise that all information was confidential.

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[38] Lee (2004) provides a detailed history of recording devices to illustrate how the evolution of recording devices has affected ethnographic data collection. Nordstrom (2015, 398) argues that recording devices are not merely "an innocent tool" but they affect how narratives and meanings are constructed.

While I entered Tagyi expecting to find a resettlement ward, I quickly realised that it was no longer populated solely by those who had been forcibly resettled from the Irrawaddy riverbank. Many city dwellers and rural migrants had also moved to the ward seeking more affordable housing. I did not specifically select residents based on whether they had been relocated to Tagyi or moved there themselves. My intention was not simply to study the resettlement but to get a sense of how residents perceived Tagyi, how they viewed the many transformations of the ward, their agency, and their struggles living on the outskirts.

Several individuals among the residents I met in Tagyi acted as crucial informants, and they are worth summarising briefly below to get a general understanding of the informants I most frequently worked with during my research. I encountered these residents at various phases of my fieldwork and under various circumstances—some I knew I'd have to speak with, such as the ward administrator, but some interactions were unplanned, and others were deliberately designed to acquire certain information. I met these key informants more frequently than others and in a variety of venues, not only at their offices or homes, but also at tea houses or social gatherings; and not only for interviews, but also for casual conversation. And it was these residents, together with U Bhant, Ma Shine, and Daw Den in Chapter 1, that inspired me to study the ethnography of land sales, subdivisions, and house construction in Tagyi.

U Kyu had lived in Tagyi for over two decades when I met him. As the ward administrator, he was one of the first people I met there, and he provided me with land maps and information on Tagyi. As a resident, U Kyu shared the story of how he moved to Tagyi and how he had worked as a land broker and made money in the ward's land market and surrounding areas. He was preparing to step down from the position of ward administrator because he had already held the office for two terms, and he saw Tagyi as a place where he could retire. Through U Kyu, I got a chance to learn about the daily work of ward administration, and he put me in touch with lawyers and others key figures who participated in the local land market.

U Kyu worked closely with **U Aung**, who was relocated to Tagyi in 1995 and had lived there ever since. He had also acted as the 100-household leader for his sub-ward and used to work as a land broker, but by the time I arrived he was already the self-proclaimed "agent of everything", as land sales had dropped off in the ward. I first met U Aung at the ward administration office, which he often visited during the day. U Aung was informative about the history of the ward's resettlement and had fond memories of his life along the Irrawaddy riverbank, where he had spent more than 20 years before being forced to move. While their stories are not particularly featured in later chapters, U Kyu and U Aung were nonetheless

present throughout the whole thesis by providing background information on the resettlement, changes in Tagyi, and details about land sales, subdivision practices and the challenges of house building that could not be found in any written records.

These wealthier families were normally more hesitant to give interviews, yet even on my first visit, **Ko Tin** and **Daw Aye** welcomed me with open arms. Ko Tin was a middle-aged Burmese businessman. In 1995, he and his family moved to Tagyi. Ko Tin presented himself as a jade seller. Stepping inside his office, however, it was impossible not to see the mounds of banknotes and cabinets full of money ledgers that his staff was constantly updating. Others later told me that Ko Tin was a moneylender, possibly the most powerful one in Tagyi. When we met, Ko Tin was aggressively looking for land to buy in Tagyi so that he could leave it to his two young children. Ko Tin's story about land speculation shows how the ward's wealthier families began to exert a more tangible influence on its development, representing market forces that have (perhaps unwittingly) pushed the poor like U Bhant, introduced in Chapter 1, further out into Mandalay's outskirts in search of even cheaper land, contributing to their displacement in Chapter 5.

Daw Aye, 62, was a Burmese woman whose family was involved in the jade trade. In 2018, her family purchased a three-storey concrete structure in Tagyi. I visited Daw Aye several times, initially to obtain more information because she was chatty, but she soon agreed to practise Burmese with me. On Saturdays, I generally went to her house by myself, where we had lunch together in the dining room and then practised Burmese in her bedroom. Daw Aye was furious with her neighbours for allowing their cows to roam freely throughout the neighbourhood since they loved to pee in front of her house, which she suspected was due to their attraction to the flowers in her garden. She then placed her flowers further away from the street in the hopes that the cows would not see them, but old habits die hard. Daw Aye's story helped me understand the subtle disagreements in the ward over space between people with different-sized plots of land, which will be explained in Chapter 6.

Most Tagyi people are not quite as wealthy as Ko Tin or Daw Aye. During my fieldwork, I also befriended **Ma Nwe**, who is very devoted Buddhist (figure 5). Chapter 6 on land subdivisions details her story. I visited Ma Nwe five times for extensive conversations about land, education, debt, Korean dramas, wedding, Facebook, her family, Myanmar, and herself as a citizen. Ma Nwe's existence is typical of working women in Tagyi, where many men work long hours or are far away from the ward. Ma Nwe asked me about the present political situation in Myanmar and which party she should vote for in the upcoming election. Ma Nwe

struggled to buy even a subdivided plot on the outskirts. Her story in Chapter 6 shows how land ownership and urban citizenship are linked in Mandalay.

Figure 5 Ma Nwe's prayer corner. It is also her sanctuary where she spends a lot of time praying and meditating. This praying corner occupies around a quarter of her rented room (photo by author).

Another key contact I met in Tagyi was **Daw Thida**, whose stories are detailed in Chapter 7, on house construction. Daw Thida and her daughters were introduced to me by one of their many cats, who interrupted an interview I was conducting across the street with a neighbour. Daw Thida and her family were living in a house with a wide rooftop gap due to a new building violation fine they could not afford to pay—a story similar to Daw Den's at the beginning of Chapter 1. What began as an attempt to play with Daw Thida's cats turned into a lengthy debate about topics such as relocation, house construction, and Myanmar's political transition. Daw Thida's story highlighted the problems of the poorer people in Tagyi, particularly because they were on the political outskirts and could not get assistance from the civilian-led government they so ardently supported.

I collected ethnographic data from the residents above and others to study the urban poor's struggles to stay in the city. My goal was not to shove these stories into my chapters as proof of existing theories, but rather to learn and understand what is at stake and hopefully link them

to other existing discussions of land ownership, belongings, and aspirations in Myanmar to better understand the interplay between state, citizens, and urbanisation on the outskirts of Mandalay.

Government officials and legislators

Before arriving in Mandalay, I expected that interviewing officers would be easier compared to accounts from researchers who had worked under the junta dictatorship (Skidmore 2004; Thawnghmung 2004). I also assumed that holding an education visa approved by the Ministry of Education and the Immigration Office would be the only official requirement for doing research in Myanmar.[39] But I quickly realised my mistake: no one cared about what type of visa I had. Because my initial plan to set my field site within the city's slums, I was told by different municipal officials, and even the vice mayor, that to conduct any research in Mandalay I must seek approval from a "higher authority". But until this "higher authority" approved my research, no government staff would even speak to me.

But who was the "higher authority" I needed to seek approval from? Nobody at the MCDC could provide me with a definitive answer. I was told to seek approval from a department head at the MCDC, who then directed me to the vice mayor, who forwarded my application to the mayor. I thought the mayor's office would be my final destination, but he forwarded my research application to his superior: the Mandalay Region's Chief Minister, who was in charge of the regional government. Fortunately, the Chief Minister turned out to be the "higher authority" I needed, since he did not refer my research application to the national Union government.

But since it was unclear how long it would take the chief minister to review my application, and because I had grown worried about my research causing evictions, I switched my research site to the resettlement wards, as detailed in 2.2. I did ultimately receive an approval letter from the Chief Minister three months after changing my focus, but his approval still provided tangible benefits, as union government officers and MCDC members were now at least willing

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[39] With the help of the Anthropology Department at the University of Mandalay, I could apply for an education visa to conduct my research. It took me four months and multiple trips between Mandalay and Yangon to finally get my visa at the Immigration Office in downtown Yangon. There was no service delivery commitment, so it was unclear how long the application process would ultimately take. I also had to pay additional, off-the-books surcharges to multiple officers at the Immigration Office when they processed my application. I had mixed feelings about the political transitions because of the red tape I encountered, which echoed Tagyi residents' comments about visiting the municipal government.

to schedule interviews with me. Even so, my requests for official data were frequently stymied—a phenomenon that will be further detailed later in this section.

Looking back, this long journey to seek approval from a "higher authority" complicates the commonly held belief that Myanmar has adopted a much more welcoming attitude toward academic research since its democratisation began in the early 2010s (Thawnghmung 2017), and brings this research into conversation with other research detailing how the state continued to appear and act autocratically during the transitional period (Sanchez 2020). It provided me with first-hand knowledge of both the rigidity and flexibility of the state in a democratising Myanmar, which helped me appreciate why people would prefer not to rely on potentially untrustworthy official authorities. It also made me consider my privilege: I had significantly more resources to deal with such red tape, and I was able to adjust my research strategy. However, as my time in Tagyi showed, many residents could not negotiate with the municipal government and were forced to accept its regulations as they were. All of these helped me establish my arguments about urban residents' ambivalence about the civilian-led municipal government and the political transition.

The MCDC was my primary site for official interviews. I interviewed officials from the City Planning and Land Administration Department (CPLAD), the Building Department, the Tax Department, and the Administration Department. These departments were typically busy handling numerous requests from residents and land brokers for land maps, land records, land grant certificates, building permits, taxation forms, etc. I interviewed MCDC officials in their offices at the MCDC headquarters, with a few others conducted at the township-level MCDC office in Pyigyidagon.

My conversations with MCDC officials were routinely postponed, delayed for hours, or interrupted by phone calls, visits, and impromptu meetings. As a result, I had several "waiting ruptures" which gave me a "backroom perspective" of connections and interactions that are not obvious during the standard interview procedure (Mannay and Morgan 2015,177). During these disruptions, I saw local agents and lawyers bribe officers by placing money in envelopes beneath desk calendars, heaps of banknotes between application package pages, or rolls of cash wrapped in newspapers on an officer's table. Nobody explained how bribes worked. These observations allowed me to triangulate residents' mixed views on bribery: it "keeps things going" at government offices yet favours the wealthy. My observations of bribes at the MCDC made me wonder why it remained after the NLD took power. Bribery and corruption were often associated with military rule in Myanmar. In Chapter 7, I use my observations from

waiting in government offices to analyse the relationship between people and municipalities throughout the political shift.

Mandalay's land governance system includes Union-level departments like the Department of Agricultural Land Management and Statistics (DALMS), the Department of Urban Housing and Development (DUHD), and the Internal Revenue Department (IRD), which I interviewed along with the MCDC. This was mostly to gather information on topics such as land grant and building permit application procedures, policy history and development. The interviews were informative but frustrating, because officers often disagreed with and contradicted each other or even government guidelines. Such conflicting answers regarding the same issue or policy showed me how inconsistent Myanmar's civil services were and helped me understand citizens' frustrations with the state.

More generally, simply being able to schedule and conduct interviews does not guarantee one will obtain useable information. Even after getting the approval letter from the Chief Minister, many government staffers were still reluctant to speak when they learned about my research topic, for a variety of reasons. First, they were often suspicious of my motivation and believed I was an outsider looking for opportunities to criticise Myanmar's government—a suspicion that became more common after the international community spoke out against Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD government for denying the central facts of the Rohingya crisis.[40] The fact that I came from a UK university to do research in Myanmar also appeared to ring alarm bells for many officials, prompting them to either refuse to speak to me or to withhold details or the written documents needed to support their verbal assertions.

Second, much care was taken to supply me with "the correct answer" especially by many lower and mid-ranking officers. Correct here does not imply an exact figure or accurate facts, but rather responses that officers believe their superiors would approve of. For example, when I asked a mid-ranking officer at the CPLAD responsible for handling land title applications how many households had land titles in Tagyi, he insisted I ask the MCDC member supervising his department for approval before he would answer, because he was concerned the figure might be considered confidential by his superiors and he would incur their wrath by disclosing it.

Third, the civil service in Mandalay is made up of retired military officers, many of whom were mid- or high-ranking officials in charge of land and general administration (Sanchez 2020). When these officers retired early from the military to join the civil service in the early 2000s,

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[40] See Marston (2018) and Selth (2022) for a brief discussion on this matter.

they had little or no training and held the belief that they were superior to both the public and their fellow civil workers who lacked any military background. During interviews, such officials would suddenly emphasise their military background, reminding me that their expertise was in army operations rather than public administration; they frequently refused to answer questions about the previous policies of the military government, which made interviews difficult since many current policies are a legacy of military rule.

Building trust with informants was critical for overcoming these access issues. To reassure government officials that I was not gathering information to use against their country, I frequently prepared lists of questions to show to interviewees so they could see what I was interested in and what questions I would ask ahead of time. I never deliberately voiced any judgements or opinions about Myanmar politics while in government offices, and I had to repeatedly emphasise that I was not working for a news organisation and that my research was exclusively for academic purposes. I eventually realised that officers who abruptly emphasised their military past were effectively telling me, "I don't know the answer to your inquiries" which meant I could stop asking them the same questions. These difficulties in obtaining meaningful responses from government officials in the post-junta era led me to reconsider my positions while demonstrating how the state remained a challenging topic to approach and research in Myanmar.

I also interviewed a few Mandalay township legislators in the regional parliament. These parliamentarians were from the NLD and were more willing to speak with me and exchange information than government officials. The politicians I met had all worked in the city on land conflicts and related issues. They frequently made negative comments about the previous military government, in contrast to government officials who either supported or were apathetic to the military government's policies. Local legislators' and government officials' differing perspectives aided in filling information gaps left by the municipality. It also highlights the differences between elected NLD lawmakers and officers in a mostly civilian-led government, as the former was free of historical baggage and any obligation to defend the previous military government's policies.

The interviews and interactions with government officials and local lawmakers provided a complex and complicated picture of local governance in Mandalay, which reflected the multifaceted nature of the state that local citizens had to deal with on a daily basis and helped me develop my arguments on state-people relationships in urban Myanmar.

Professionals

In this study, professionals were crucial secondary informants. During my fieldwork, I interviewed a variety of local and foreign experts on land and urban planning to learn about major patterns in Mandalay's development. They took an "anti-politics" approach (J. Ferguson 1999) to Mandalay's urban development efforts (Sanchez 2019), which matches with the MCDC's attitude of ignoring the city's urban poor. I also learned the planning history in Mandalay from private urban planners who have been working in the city with different INGOs for years, and these conversations helped me analyse the urban planning trajectory and the relationship between official planning and INGOs. In addition to interviewing experts in urban planning in Mandalay, I also spoke with city lawyers. I learned about the legal complexity of Mandalay land titles as well as actual legal practice on the ground.

Documents, archives and maps

My initial tactic was to search the internet for any relevant data, such as national census reports, media articles, laws, and government notices. I intended to next obtain documents from my sources that could not be available online.

Despite multiple inquiries to numerous government offices, particularly the MCDC, many records were not made available to me. My requests for data, such as the number of households relocated to Tagyi in 1995, records of landslips issued for resettlement, the operations schedule and planning for relocation, the number of land plots used for resettlement in Tagyi and Mandalay, and the number of land grant certificate holders in Tagyi, were all denied, despite having obtained approval from the Chief Minister. Despite this, I was able to acquire a variety of documents from various government departments and the ward administration on topics such as government operations, municipal rules and regulations, and government publications such as newspapers and magazines—materials that the MCDC deemed unharmful. These records enabled me to reconstruct several aspects of Mandalay's urban development history and politics pertinent to my research (see Figure 6). They were also valuable for comparing data gathered through interviews.
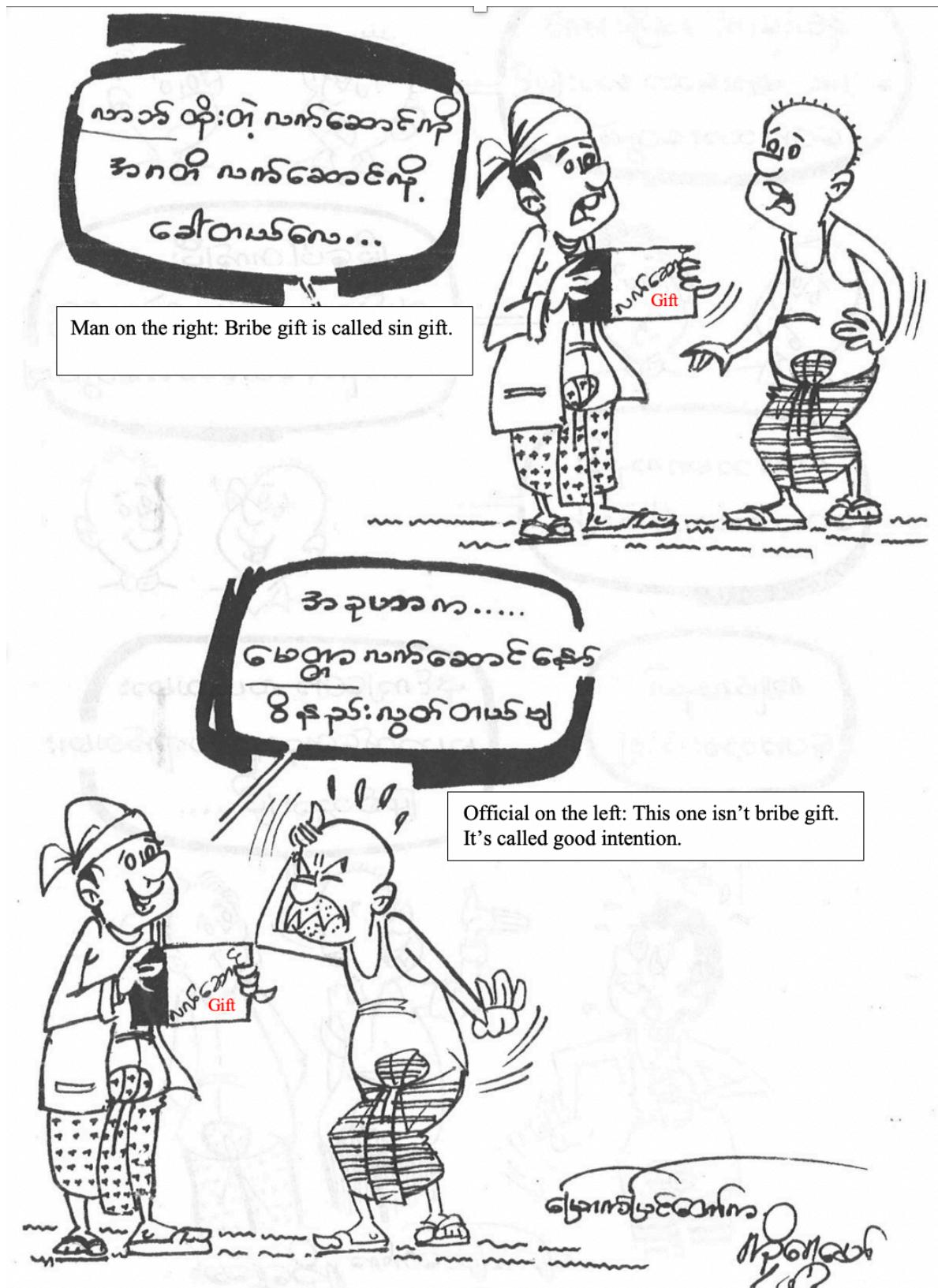
Figure 6 A political cartoon from the 2017 MCDC magazine. This cartoon is critical of the government despite being printed in an official publication. It was published after the NLD's electoral victory in 2015 and its subsequent formation of a civilian-led government. Despite the NLD's anti-corruption campaign, some government agents continued to ask for bribes. In this cartoon, it is shown that the habit of bribery was problematic and unwelcome among the people. As I learned during my research, however, some people preferred paying bribes over visiting a government office even during the period of political reform, as detailed in Chapter 7 (Cartoonist: Ko Shwe Maw).

During my fieldwork, I visited the Department of National Archives in Yangon. My goal was to obtain meeting minutes from the cabinet and parliament, as well as any Mandalay planning proposals. I made ten requests for archival materials related to my research, such as reports from the Ministry of Construction on Mandalay in the 1990s and a few reports from the Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development in the 2000s—all based solely on their titles, as no further information was available. All my requests were denied, and the assistant director of the archives later explained that this was because all unpublished records from 1962 onward had been made unavailable to the public as "many people who made decisions were still alive and disclosing this information may embarrass them". These archival materials were likewise inaccessible to me in Mandalay. Due to my limited access to government records on urban planning and development, this thesis must inevitably rely more substantially on residents' and MCDC officials' oral accounts of what happened, meaning that the official roles of the Union and regional governments go partially unaddressed.

In terms of archival research, I also consulted the library at the University of Mandalay for older government publications and books related to the city's historical and urban development, as well as relevant PhD and Master's theses submitted to the university.[41] Outside of Myanmar, I also did archival research at the Southeast Asia collections at the British Library and could access maps and reports related to Mandalay from the colonial era.

While my access to land-related government records was limited, I was able to gather materials individually from residents themselves, such as land documents, contracts, and family registrations. One thing I would like to emphasise is that many documents residents showed me were not the originals, but rather copies of the originals, or even copies of copies. It is common in Tagyi for a land buyer to hold a copy of a land document that was not under his own name, but the seller's. This raises several questions: How valid are these documents? Are the copies as good as the originals? What can these copies do? What do they represent? And what is "produced" by the copy?

Following Hull's (2012) call to treat documents not merely as containers of information, but to focus instead on the relationships they create, in my research I pay attention not only to the relationships formed through these papers (such as those between the state and individuals, between land sellers and buyers, and between the land and the people) but also relationships

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[41] Notably, the unpublished thesis of Hla Kyaw (2010) and Maung Pwar (2009) from the University of Mandalay archives.

that are formed in practice but which cannot be seen on paper, or can only be seen when reading more than one document—such as in the case of informal land trades and subdivision of land.

Finally, land maps are a crucial source of information for this thesis. The land maps herein were patched together from various sources, both official and unofficial. Online aerial maps provided current satellite images and mapping of Mandalay. I also collected three types of official maps: ward maps, township maps, and city maps. Ward administrator U Kyu provided me with the maps of Tagyi. My requests for the latest township and city maps were rejected by the MCDC, and I was advised by an urban planner to purchase soft copies of the maps from a local print shop.[42] However, one common problem with these maps is that they do not reveal any data such as land use type or ownership status. In addition, the city maps and the Pyigyidagon township map fail to label facilities such as schools, hospitals, and parks, even though these facilities can be found on the maps of other townships (see figure 7 for an example).

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[42] The full city map I purchased from a local print store states that the map was made in 2001. The township maps I bought from the print store did not specify any year, but they are similar to those printed in the 2017 MCDC magazine, therefore I understood them to be the most updated township maps available to the public. The 2017 MCDC magazine township maps were not very useful to this research due to their low resolution, with most words rendered too small to read. Therefore in this thesis, when I refer to city and township maps, I mean those I purchased from the local print store unless otherwise stated.

Figure 7 Mandalay's Pyigyidagon Township map (Ministry of Construction, 2000). The southern outskirts of Pyigyidagon township are not included on the map. This map also contains minimal information, such as school, park, and market sites throughout the township, particularly in the south.

Despite these issues, the maps revealed the changes in the boundaries of Mandalay over time. They also helped during interviews. I typically brought multiple maps so I could refer to them when I talked to residents. I asked residents to indicate where they lived before moving to Tagyi, and which government offices they had visited. Many residents could not read the maps, even though they were printed in Burmese. It was also difficult to find where their previous residences had been because of changes to the names of wards and streets. Typically, a resident would tell us in a general sense where the location might be (for example, "close to the riverbank"), then we would try to look at known landmarks in that area to try and pinpoint an exact location. This mapping exercise allowed me to visualise residents' relocation histories, which is especially relevant in chapter 4.

By the end of my fieldwork, I had collected many government documents and maps that helped me understand how urban Mandalay's official history was constructed, which I could then compare to Tagyi residents' oral histories. Although there were numerous documents I was not permitted access to and which left gaps in my research, I was nonetheless able to patch together a relatively complete account covering the most essential information from a range of other

documents and sources.

2.4 Positionality and reflexivity

During my fieldwork, I realised that determining "how to enter a field site" was a constant negotiation. While I saw myself as a foreign female researcher studying at a UK university and interested in Myanmar's rapid urbanisation, these positions - foreign, female, and researcher - are perceived differently by me than by the informants. Following Robertson's (2002) advice to avoid mirroring myself in informants and writing positions as fixed categories, I hope to reflect here on how these various positions were interconnected and shifting during my fieldwork, influencing how data was collected, analysed, and written up.

By calling the researcher's different positions "ethnographic toolkits", Reyes (2020) suggests that researchers' positions are either visible (such as with race, ethnicity, and gender) or invisible (such as with individual background and social capital), and they should strategically use their different positions in different situations to gain access. However, during my experience of fieldwork in Mandalay, my own positions could not be drawn upon freely as if they were tools. Ethnic markers such as skin colour, fashion style and language are often used by others to determine the identity of the researcher. As Roberts (2016) shares in her ethnographic research on Sino-Burmese in Yangon, despite her identifying herself as Taiwanese-American, she was often misidentified as Sino-Burmese by Sino-Burmese interviewees. As she puts it, "weaving through the upper, middle and lower blocks of Rangoon, one is hard-pressed to identify with any certainty who is Chinese" (Roberts 2016, 5). Unlike Roberts, I was not researching a group of people who mistakenly identified me as one of them because of my appearance. But I was very soon labelled as Chinese, meaning I was ethnically different from my informants.

From being Chinese to being a foreigner

I grew up in Hong Kong, a city that is geographically distant yet in some ways shares some similarities with Myanmar in terms of history and culture. Before arriving for my fieldwork, I knew that there was a growing population of ethnic Chinese in Myanmar, particularly in Mandalay, which has long been a popular place of residence for the Yunnanese population who hail from within the modern-day borders of China. I understood that there were anti-Chinese

riots in 1967 in Myanmar, and that perceptions of China and Chinese people are at best mixed.[43] I also noticed tensions between locals and Chinese businesses,[44] as well as ongoing conflicts over China-funded development projects in Myanmar, especially those carried out under China's One Belt One Road initiative (Chan and Pun 2020).

I expected that my Chinese appearance might facilitate access to Sino-Burmese communities or the Chinese community in Mandalay, provided I met them during my research. I did not think disputes between locals and Chinese businesses would affect me as a researcher because, based on my readings and general understanding, negative sentiment is directed at Chinese companies and even the government in Beijing, but not at individuals. However, the overall attitude towards Chinese people was not exactly friendly either. Locals saw Chinese as money-driven and controlling most of Mandalay's major businesses. They were often viewed as part of a rising middle class responsible for marginalising local Burmese residents.[45]

I never told people in Myanmar that I was Chinese, but I was virtually always identified as such. As previously mentioned, being labelled as Chinese resulted in several people believing I might be a land buyer. To locals in Myanmar, being Chinese and being foreign is distinct in that being Chinese denotes a specific type of outsider. In actuality, given the unfavourable impressions of Chinese enterprises and Beijing in Burmese culture, being labelled as Chinese meant I was automatically connected with unscrupulous and profit-driven Chinese businesses. And asking around for information on land and housing in a resettlement ward did not help!

However, language did. During one interview, I tried to learn more about a local politician and two of his friends' perspectives on Mandalay's urban development and land conflicts.[46] It was my first meeting with the politician, so I had prepared a short introduction in Burmese with the help of my teacher, explaining who I was, the focus of my research, and apologising for my limited Burmese. Before I could even begin my self-introduction, the local politician looked at me and asked where I was from. When I said "Hong Kong" he immediately responded: "You're Chinese."

His remark caught me off guard, and I forgot to introduce myself. His friends began discussing the town's land disputes, but the local politician remained silent. I wasn't sure why, and I

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[43] For a more detailed discussion of the history of Chinese people in Myanmar, see Chang (2013), Maung Aung Myoe (2011) and Roberts (2016). For discussion on Burmese perceptions of Chinese people, see Min Zin (2012).

[44] For a discussion on protests against Chinese investments from a Myanmar perspective, see Mark and Zhang (2017), and Soe Nandar Linn (2015). For a discussion on the issue from a China perspective, see Sun (2012).

[45] For a discussion on the media, see Associated Press (2018) and Min Lwin (2009) for some examples.

[46] This interview was conducted on September 17, 2018.

suspected I hadn't explained myself or my research well enough. So I took out my script and began reading it. The politician was patient and listened until I finished. He slammed the Chinese businessmen in Mandalay, saying they were all "walking on money" and skirting any local rules they could when doing business in the city. I did not say anything. Then he suddenly turned to me and said, "I know you're not Chinese, you're just a foreigner, because Chinese don't bother to learn our language—but you are learning, so you're no Chinese. I call tell you my real thoughts."

This incident occurred very early in my fieldwork, and had no direct bearing on the contents of this thesis. However, it taught me how my positions could influence informants' responses, which determined what kind of data I could access and how my informants perceived me. That made me reconsider how I could and should introduce myself when I arrived at my field site, and how my positions would influence informants' responses. I continued to introduce myself in Burmese before interviews, and I frequently stated that I was conducting research with a UK university to emphasise that I was not related to any private businesses. As it became clear that I was not buying land in Tagyi, I became less Chinese and more "just a foreigner" and to some residents whom I frequently visited, I was referred to as "a foreign sister" which marked my gradual transformation from a symbol of potential hostility to a neutral entity, to someone who cared. This shift enabled me to learn more about the residents and their struggles in Tagyi because they were more willing to share after establishing rapport and trusting ties with the residents.

Being foreign also affords me certain opportunities. As a foreigner, I found it easier to ask some questions, especially those concerning people's thoughts on the government and policies. However, being foreign also barred me from certain types of access. For example, near the end of the above interview, Daw Thida and Ma Cho suggested that I accompany them to the government office to argue with an officer for a fine reduction, because they thought I was logical and good at arguing. However, before I could say anything, Ma Cho changed her mind and said that it was a bad idea because bringing a foreigner with her might draw unnecessary attention to her overdue payment and thus might upset the officer. In a way, being foreign prevented me from observing residents' interactions with MCDC officers about a building violation. Witnessing such an incident would have allowed me to add more context regarding state-people interactions in Chapter 7.

While this study does not specifically address gender, it is another factor that influenced the dynamics of my fieldwork and thus my research findings. My gender was both a tool for me to

get close to most women in Tagyi and a barrier when I tried to reach out to male residents. I attempted to interview an equal number of male and female Tagyi residents, but I also noticed that even if I approached a female resident first, another male resident in the house would soon try to join the conversation and even take charge, effectively driving the female residents out of the conversation to "spare her to do housework". When I attempted to approach a male resident, I was told to "talk to the woman" in the house instead because "[the male resident] stayed outside the house most of the time to work". In either case, I attempted to compensate by speaking to both female and male residents in a group discussion at the same time, and when I noticed the discussion skewing in one direction (e.g., when the male resident began to take charge) I made a point of asking the female residents for their thoughts. At the same time, I noticed that the residents I approached were mostly women. This could also imply that my ethnographic data is biased toward female residents' experiences at the cost of their male counterparts.

"Invisible" positions

As pointed out by Reyes (2020), there are some internal, "invisible" positions a researcher has which can be used when assessing the field. I was raised in a blue-collar family in Hong Kong, a city with major housing issues. Hong Kong is full of "coffin homes", cage-homes, and partitioned apartments. For my family, housing was always a struggle. My father was born into a poor home with a blind father and an illiterate mother. My mother came from a relatively better-off family, since my grandfather was a merchant; but as a daughter, she received less care from her parents than her brothers. When they met, my father worked as a minibus driver while my mother had a job in a factory. They moved to an old public housing estate in a remote part of Hong Kong after they got married, where I was born and lived until I was five. One of my most vivid childhood memories was accompanying my mother to a government housing allocation centre to wait for housing lottery results. Later, we moved to a slightly larger public housing unit that was still less than 400 square feet and had just two bedrooms. My parents wanted to move again because our family included five people—three adults (including my blind grandfather) and two children (including my brother). Even though I wasn't from Mandalay's outskirts, I could empathise with locals' struggles to support their families and remain in the city. That is part of my motivation for not simply understanding their experiences as difficulties but also highlighting their agency in overcoming the obstacles they have faced and transforming the outskirts.

Now that I'm writing up, I see I didn't have many chances to create rapport with my informants by sharing my past. An officer joked that he could assist me to buy land in Mandalay because "land in Mandalay must be cheap" for me.[47] I chuckled and replied that I came from a working-class family and that a PhD scholarship would not be enough to buy land in Mandalay, where land prices had been skyrocketing. The officer disbelieved me. He continued: "I don't think you don't have money. One bottle of water in Mandalay costs 500 kyats (0.33 USD). How much does a bottle of water cost at a supermarket in your country? I told him a bottle of water cost 1,500 kyats in Hong Kong and possibly the same in the UK. "See, that's my point." Water is three times cheaper here. Land, too! You can afford land here!"

That exchange deterred me from discussing my family history with my informants, especially Tagyi residents. I was afraid of the same response and being labelled a whiner. This self-distance may have hindered my access to Tagyi people, who may have perceived me as someone interested in their life stories but not sharing much about herself. These events show how my diverse perspectives occasionally conflict and even contradict sources, which affected my access to information.

2.5 Research ethics

As much as Tagyi residents prefer to tell me that "nothing happens here" when I told them about my research, the longer I did my fieldwork, the more I realised that ethical considerations like privacy, confidentiality and relationality were inevitable. Field ethics is typically an imperfect exercise (Bell 2019), and I confronted two main ethical issues throughout my fieldwork.

First, when I interviewed CPLAD officers for data, I had no choice but to inform them that I worked in Tagyi, which made me worry about bringing unnecessary attention to the ward. The most obvious example of this comes from my work on house building permits (to be discussed in Chapter 7). Before my fieldwork, most residents in Tagyi were barred from applying for building permits due to policy inconsistencies between the previous military government and the then civilian-led municipality; indeed, many were heavily fined for violating building restrictions. However, after I mentioned the issue of policy inconsistencies to an MCDC engineer when inquiring about building regulations and procedures, a few months later the

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[47] The interview was conducted on January 22, 2019.

MCDC informally modified its stance and once again began allowing Tagyi residents to apply for building permits. This result was not intended. While the aforementioned occurrence appears beneficial to the residents, throughout my fieldwork I was primarily concerned about drawing undue and detrimental attention to the ward and its residents.

Second, there is the question of what constitutes appropriate reciprocity. This study includes interviews with Tagyi residents, the vast majority of whom are low-paid workers. I initially planned to give gifts to residents after interviews as a way of thanking them for their time. At the same time, I was concerned that giving gifts to residents would create a perverse incentive. After consulting with local university teachers, at the end of my fieldwork I bought gifts for a few families I interviewed repeatedly, such as food, stationery, and colouring books. The gifts usually cost less than 5,000 kyats (about 3.5 USD), and I distributed them according to the needs of each household. I also occasionally bought snacks and fruit from the residents I interviewed.

2.6 Conclusion

This thesis is about understanding how residents struggle in pursuit of land, housing, property, citizenship, and their aspirations on the outskirts of Mandalay. It accomplishes this by studying the historical development of Mandalay, analysing the practices of the municipality, and engaging with local residents' narratives and practices on land and housing. Before getting to any of the analytical chapters I dedicate a full chapter to detailing my methodology and methods, because the research trajectory, field site selection, data collection methods and positionality are all relevant not only to how I shaped my research questions but also to how I developed and reworked my central arguments. My entire research journey – from pre fieldwork, to fieldwork, and on to the writing up process – has been suffused by themes of planning, property and citizenship.

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked three questions: why study Tagyi and the outskirts; whether I had the tools to conduct the research; and what this research produces and contributes. For the first question, there is a need to understand ordinary residents' struggles and tactics for living in Mandalay, as these are relatively overlooked due to their 'ordinariness' (Simone 2010). While existing literature has demonstrated how little we know of the urban in Myanmar, my approach is to better understand the topic of urban citizenship through understanding residents' struggles on the outskirts, and I came to this research focus because of my research trajectory

and field site selection as detailed in section 2.1 and 2.2.

For the second question, in section 2.3, I explain the research methods I used. This research is an ethnography of residents' lives on the outskirts. Given that many official documents were not available to me, this research relies largely on narratives, stories, and discourses from Tagyi residents and different government actors to construct a working understanding. I also reflect on my background and position in section 2.4 and on research ethics in section 2.5, which impact my ability to access data and understand narratives and stories, as well as how I interpret them throughout the research, which helps me understand and analyse the issues of planning, property and urban citizenship in Myanmar.

For the third question, this research seeks to produce an ethnographic account of residents' struggles with property and citizenship in transitional Myanmar. It seeks to construct a fuller history of urban planning in Myanmar by adding the oral histories of ordinary people to official narratives. It also seeks to explore how property and citizenship are produced, reproduced and connected in urban Myanmar, and through the lens of land this research seeks to examine "the making of the urban" (Roberts 2017, 64) in Myanmar.

This thesis is an ethnography of the outskirts and residents' everyday lives there, and it explores issues including land sales (Chapter 5), land subdivision (Chapter 6), and house construction (Chapter 7), which are crucial components in Tagyi residents' claims to property and citizenship. Before delving into these issues in Tagyi, however, I will first examine how Tagyi came to be through a macro analysis of the history of urban planning in Myanmar with a particular focus on Mandalay (Chapter 3), which will be followed by an examination of the formation and transformation of Tagyi through residents' moving histories and efforts to develop the resettlement ward (Chapter 4).

Chapter 3 Myanmar's post-colonial urban planning trajectory

> "Usually we return back to where we were when the visit is over."
>
> Pho Thar, a squatter living alongside the Irrawaddy riverbank (DVBTV English 2014)

In December of 2014 Mandalay's municipal government made international headlines, but for all the wrong reasons. The Norwegian King Harald V and his wife were visiting Mandalay for an official visit, providing an important opportunity for the MCDC, the municipal government, to show off both the city's cultural and historical significance and its progress in modernising to esteemed foreign guests. But the MCDC sparked controversy when it evicted thousands of slum dwellers along the Irrawaddy riverbank ahead of the visit, which led domestic and international news outlets to focus on the city's slum clearance policies.[48] Days after the Norwegian king and queen left, those evicted went back to their old residences, only to find that everything had been torn apart, and they had to rebuild their tents and livelihoods again. As Pho Thar's quote above suggests, those evicted always came back to the Irrawaddy riverbank after each slum clearance, in a repeating cycle of eviction and reconstruction. Indeed, this cycle has been running for decades in Mandalay, which not only raises questions about the purpose or usefulness of slum evictions, but also points to the chronic lack of affordable housing for the urban poor which the city has never fully addressed (see Moe Moe Hlaing 2021).

Following the slum clearance in 2014, the MCDC was criticised for attempting to hide the city's poverty and exacerbating the struggles faced by thousands of slum dwellers.[49] In response, the MCDC announced in 2015 that it would build low-cost housing near the north-western city limits of Mandalay to which slum dwellers along the Irrawaddy riverbank could relocate (Zarni Mann 2016). It was the first time in Mandalay's history that the municipality had offered to build housing for those it evicted, having previously only provided barren land on the outskirts during resettlements. The municipality spent one billion kyats (around 666,667 USD) building nearly 1,600 units across six apartment blocks which it allowed ex-slum dwellers to rent for 30,000 kyats (around 20 USD) per month - a considerable amount for ex-slum dwellers.

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[48] For the news coverage, see Berglund (2014a); and Hnin Yadanar Zaw (2014).
[49] For the news coverage, see Berglund (2014b); and Zarni Mann (2014a, 2014b).

In 2016, the MCDC conducted a lucky draw to allocate these housing units to ex-slum dwellers. Many complained that despite their eligibility, they were unable to participate because they lacked identification documents or were simply unable to afford the rent. At the same time, the MCDC accused ex-slum dwellers of misusing social welfare by leasing out the apartments for profit and then returning to the slums in the hopes of receiving another opportunity to receive affordable housing. This was the excuse given by the MCDC when it later announced that it "had no plan to build more housing to benefit the professional squatters" (figure 8).[50]

Figure 8 Ex-slum dwellers' social housing units in Mandalay. Each unit contains a bathroom, a kitchen, and a small room that is used by residents as both eating, sitting and sleeping areas. Many residents complained about the small size of the unit compared to the rent they are paying (Photo by author).

These ongoing slum evictions and chronic lack of housing for ex-slum dwellers reflect long-held concerns among Myanmar studies scholars that regime change from a military dictatorship to a civilian-led government would not alter the direction of urban policy, which has remained substantially anti-poor and reliant on the use of force to evict slum dwellers without also

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[50] This comment was given by the MCDC spokesperson during an interview dated on March 28, 2019 about my fieldwork in Mandalay. The term "professional squatters" was commonly used by government officials, in local media, and even among some urban planners I knew in Mandalay to refer to squatters who live in slums not because of poverty but because they wanted to get access to government housing through squatting. See Phyo Wai Kyaw (2018) for reporting.

making any long term plans to support the poor (Forbes 2019; Rhoads 2018; Roberts 2020; Sanchez 2019). Indeed, throughout Myanmar's modern history there is a repeating pattern of evictions forcing central residential to move to the city outskirts due to development projects or government policies.

In terms of understanding the state as a planning regime, existing discussion in Myanmar has mostly focused on the country's history of economic planning (Myat Thein 2004; Rieffel 2015) , while urban planning has gone largely overlooked. In this chapter, my goal is to provide a more comprehensive macro-level analysis of urban planning in Myanmar's post-colonial history. The overall argument of this chapter is that each successive regime in Myanmar has had differing perceptions of the importance of cities and urban planning. Additionally, it demonstrates how in Myanmar, as outlined by urban studies scholars in a broader context, governments have used planning as a tool to marginalize rather than to include (Roy 2009b; Watson 2009a, 2009b).

In this thesis, I define urban planning as broadly as possible: policies and activities that are carried out by state and non-state actors at the national and local levels to produce urban space. I emphasise both state and non-state actors' participation because planning in Myanmar is not exclusive to the state, and urban planning is a multi-scalar practice. Moreover, the production of urban space here does not merely mean the built environment of cities, provision of services or the construction of infrastructure, but rather how cities develop in ways that are the result of actions by both the state and the people. And while Chapter 4 will focus on the role of people's actions in shaping urban space and responding to state planning, this chapter limits its scope to focusing on the government's role in urban planning.

This chapter contributes to the overall argument of this thesis by providing a macro account of urban planning in Mandalay. It shows that outer areas in the city have been created by successive governments as solutions to urban problems, which explains these governments' demeaning of the outskirts. At the same time, even though the state wishes to ignore these outer areas, it must still cater to the people living there from time to time. These tensions between planning a marginal space and contending with it create the outskirts as a dynamic space and place that is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the government and residents (as will be detailed further in Chapter 4).

This chapter's structure is as follows: Section 3.1 provides a genealogy of the debates and discourses of planning and control to illustrate the shifting relationship between the two and

the implications for the urbanisation of Mandalay's outskirts. In Myanmar, as in many former British colonies, it is important to start the discussion in the post-colonial era and from there trace the developments that set the tone for future efforts. Section 3.2 thus examines urban planning initiatives in the early years of Myanmar's independence. It suggests that the first post-independence government saw the city as an integral part of the country's overall development plan, with a vision to include the urban working poor in this plan through a housing scheme focused on the outskirts. However, this period of democracy did not last long, and following the 1962 military coup there was a shift from planning for development to planning as a containment strategy, as will be shown in Section 3.3. Section 3.4 then suggests another shift in urban planning, as Myanmar embarked on a political transition in 2011, in which urban planning came to be viewed as equivalent to development, resulting in many ambitious city plans that never made it beyond ink and paper. Section 3.5 narrows its focus and serves as a summary of the urban planning history of Mandalay. It argues that alongside regime changes in Myanmar, there was also a shift in the urban planning of successive governments— even though all viewed planning as a tool that each government could use to achieve their various goals. Within these processes, we can see not merely how successive governments' attitudes towards the urban changed, or the ways they used urban planning as a tool for control, but how the history of urban planning in Myanmar should be read as a narrative focused on creating and contending with the margins, which helps clarify why the government's controls have always remained incomplete. Section 3.6 concludes.

3.1 Planning as an incomplete form of control

By the time I arrived in Mandalay in 2018, no one was talking about the Norwegian royals' visit anymore, or even about the affordable housing built for those evicted. Slum eviction operations continued along the Irrawaddy riverbank every Sunday, but because they were so frequent the local media no longer reported on them. I spoke briefly with some of those evicted, and when I asked them where they were going, their responses were all very much like Pho Thar's: they would find a temporary place to stay for a day, and once the police and government officers were gone they would come back and continue living on the riverbank until the eviction team arrived again next Sunday.

These evicted tenants' comments merit attention because they suggest evictions in Mandalay are performative rather than an effort to solve the underlying issues, and that urban planning remains an incomplete form of government control in Mandalay, as I will elaborate below.

Although slum evictions have been conducted regularly in Mandalay for decades, many slum dwellers continue to return and newcomers continue to arrive and pitch tents along the Irrawaddy riverbank.

Anthropologists, geographers, and urbanists have noted that planning has often served as a control, a form of power inflicted by the state on the people.[51] They have acknowledged that planning does not merely serve as an objective design of space, but too often as a means of control (García 2016; Njoh 2006; Yiftachel 1998). Those who have the power to plan have the power to decide who gets what in the course of that planning.

Planning can serve as a governmental tool for its political and economic goals in multiple ways: drawing physical boundaries, establishing zones with different and restricted land uses, or recognising certain land rights and claims while rejecting others. The notion of planning as a professional activity controlled by the state has also led to concerns over the use of planning as an exclusionary tool.

The power of planning lies not only in control over spatial design or land uses, but in the discourse of planning – that is, planning as something that is professionally done and which will deliver desirable results - which has become widely accepted by the people, even those who are being excluded by it. Erik Harms (2012), in his research in Vietnam, shows that a discourse of "fresh air and breeze" has been used by the local government as grounds for forceful eviction, and describes how those being evicted indeed align themselves with the fictional "beauty" of the new urban plan presented by the developers and the government. Thus, the power of planning is not merely physical but can also be cultural.

Attitudes toward and practices of urban planning have changed substantially since Myanmar's independence in 1948. U Nu, the first Prime Minister of Myanmar, launched a series of nationwide plans for the country. Urban planning is an essential part of centralised state power in Myanmar, as the power to plan and approve plans remains in the hands of a few urban planners at the Ministry of Construction. Yet these planners, for generation after generation, have drawn plans for the government that allow it to control the country's cities and people in line with the political trends and agendas of those in power. It is in this context that planning and state control are closely related in Myanmar.

How the state and the urban are related in Myanmar is complicated. Cities are often under the

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[51] For example, Bou Akar (2018); Harms (2016); Low (1996); Njoh (2006); Robinson (2012); Scott (1998); Watson (2009a); Yiftachel (2000); and Yiftachel et al. (2001)

control of the state (Roberts 2018), and the word "state" itself can imply something as simple as an institution, but what is more complicated are the ways in which actors inside and outside of the state act and relate to each other so as to govern or rule. One certainty, however, is that the meaning of "state" in Myanmar has changed dramatically throughout its long history. Before the 19th century the state was the Burmese monarchy; then the British colonial government up until 1948; the post-independence, multi-partisan union until 1962; the military Socialist government till 1988; the junta dictatorship until 2011; the reformist government till 2015; a civilian-led union until 2021, and, since February 1, 2021, the state has reverted to a military dictatorship. Despite these changes, and although Taylor (2008) argues that little common ground can be found in these different "states", Rhoads and Wittekind (2019) remind us that legacies from the past continue to play a role in the present.

In the arena of urban studies, Myanmar's cities have been and continue to be made by the state, of the state, and for the state. Urban planning, while essentially meaning state planning in this context, is nonetheless a continuous practice we can see threaded through the successive governments of contemporary Myanmar. But we should not take this continuity for granted. Instead, as the following sections will show, the practice of urban planning has swung between extremes of continuity and change in its application over the years, particularly during Myanmar's post-colonial history.

The history of state planning in urban Myanmar is essential to this thesis because it provides a lens for examining how the state in its various forms has interacted with the urban, and how its visions and strategies – sometimes in tension, sometimes in harmony – continue to shape the urban. Yet it is equally important to remember that state planning is only half the story of the formation of the urban in Myanmar, since urban residents, as disenfranchised as they are, actively reshape the urban as they live, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. But, for the time being, let us examine the official development of urban planning in Myanmar since its independence.

3.2 Urban planning for growth (1948-1962)

During the 1950s, the concept of planning was both old and new to many newly independent nations. In the past, colonisers used planning to control their colonies, but in these new countries, planning became a new instrument for nation-building. Those who had recently seized power in their respective nations possessed a strong desire to decolonize their countries.

Ambe Njoh (2003) suggests that post-colonial governments tended to continue and even strengthen colonial spatial plans and land management tools, sometimes in a manner that was even more rigid than that of colonial governments. Myanmar was not an exception to this tension between decolonisation and continuing colonial policies.

In the early years of independence, Myanmar's Union government under the leadership of U Nu was eager to distinguish itself from the colonial administration in every respect, while at the same time using urban planning as a tool to control the populations. The late General Aung San saw cities as having been "developed as trading, industrial and administrative centres" under the British (Aung San 1993, 79), and the post-colonial government aimed to transform them, expanding their purpose beyond mere centres of commerce to become places a growing urban population could call home. It was in this context that U Nu's government made urban housing one of its policy priorities. In 1951 the National Housing and Town and Country Development Board was established to solve the issue of inadequate housing throughout the country, including in cities. The board was also charged with urban planning and development duties, all of which would help achieve the goal of "a more healthful and prosperous life throughout the Union of Burma" (Government of the Union of Burma 1960, 386).

During U Nu's era, around 15% of the total population was living in urban areas (Union of Burma 1955). That was a sharp increase based on census figures from the colonial era, during which the urban population had remained below 10% (Khin Maung 1979). Among Burma's rising urban population were a growing number of university students who preferred to remain in cities after graduation and aspired to pursue careers in urban areas in both the public and private sectors (Silverstein and Wohl 1964). This not only marked the beginning of urban growth in independent Burma but also paved the way for an increasing focus on urban issues within the government (Silverstein and Wohl 1964).

In 1952, Burma announced the country's first national economic plan, called the Pyidawtha Plan, produced with input from American consultants. Under the Pyidawtha Plan, the Union government announced that it aimed to provide social housing for urban dwellers, as well as transit camps for those who were ex-slum dwellers in cities including Mandalay (Union of Burma 1954, 158).[52] While colonial urban planning policies such as eviction and resettlement continued in post-colonial Myanmar, U Nu's government did not want to forcefully evict people, as it risked losing their votes (Rhoads 2018). Thus, the government was eager to

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[52] For more discussion on the Pyidawtha Plan as a socioeconomic plan and the U Nu's government, see Maung Maung (1953), Tharaphi Than (2013), and Turnell (2009)

provide social housing to the poor to secure its popularity. In U Nu's vision for Burma, the country had to achieve self-reliance, a goal for which industrialisation was necessary. To achieve this industrialisation, the development of cities was envisioned as complementary to the country's rural development. Thus, in U Nu's vision, urban planning and rural planning would work hand in hand to help the country develop—transforming Burma from a war-torn former colony into an industrialised welfare state in just eight years.

Crisis: the formation of General Ne Win's caretaker government in 1958

But U Nu never saw the completion of his Pyidawtha Plan. On the political front, after General Ne Win took power by forming a caretaker government in 1958, he was uninterested in finishing U Nu's plan, which would have marginalised the military in the country's post-colonial political landscape (Smith 1999). Economically, a fall in rice export prices due to the winding down of the Korean War meant the domestic economy could not support such a grand development plan. Many projects fell apart—for example, the transit camps provided for ex-slum dwellers failed to meet the high standards promised by U Nu's government, suffering from deeply unsatisfactory living conditions (UN Habitat 1991), whereas the low-cost housing was indeed expensive to build and only a limited number of people, mostly higher level government officials and a small number of slum dwellers, were able to live in such heavily subsidised housing (Walinsky 1962). In cities, workers' wages could not keep pace with rising prices, and when the government attempted to cap rice prices it upset paddy farmers. With the Pyidawtha Plan rendered infeasible due to a lack of financing, U Nu was unable to adequately address neither urban or rural unrest in the country.

In 1958, U Nu handed over power to General Ne Win in the belief that the Tatmadaw could restore law and order in the country at a time when unrest in urban and rural areas was on the rise. In Rangoon, during the period of General Ne Win's caretaker government, the violent slum evictions U Nu had tried so hard to avoid became a weekly source of drama (Seekins 2011). While similar data is lacking for Mandalay, many long-term and elderly residents I met in Tagyi recalled frequent evictions by General Ne Win's caretaker government in the late 1950s. Although U Nu regained power in 1960, it was not long before he was ousted from power once again, this time permanently, by General Ne Win's coup d'état in 1962.

With the sudden demise of the Pyidawtha Plan, the promise of social housing for the poor became an unfulfilled dream. Urban planning, as we will see in this section, became

increasingly anti-urban under General Ne Win, who sought to crack down on urban-based opposition forces across the country.

3.3 From planning for development to planning as containment (1962-2011)

The second phase of urban development in Myanmar began in the 1960s when the military began its 50-year rule of the country, which lasted until 2011. This section is divided into two major parts reflecting changes in government: firstly, General Ne Win's era, which covers the Revolutionary Council (RC) (1962-1974) and the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) (1974-1988); and secondly, the post-1988 era, which covers the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in 1988-1997, and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997-2011. The year 1988 is an important dividing line in Myanmar's contemporary history because the failure of General Ne Win's Burmese Way to Socialism led to the 8888 (August 8, 1988) uprisings, which resulted in a shift of power within the Tatmadaw. It is also the year when new rounds of primitive accumulation happened (see Jones 2014; Woods 2011), and large scale oppressive eviction and forced resettlement occurred (see Rhoads, 2018; Seekins, 2011).

These successive forms of military government, despite sharing the same authoritarian nature, saw a gradual shift from viewing cities solely as a challenge to military rule; to acknowledging that urbanisation was inevitable and urban issues would have to be dealt with; to the military eventually seeing urban areas as possible vehicles for economic development. However, the military governments continued to see cities as potential bases of opposition where the urban poor were prone to revolt. For this reason, urban planning was used to contain discontent through the resettlement of urban populations to newly established wards on the outskirts of cities.

General Ne Win and the Burmese way to Socialism

Two features of Ne Win's Burmese Way to Socialism stand out in particular: it was both "contra-development" (Perry 2007, 4), and "anti-urban" (Kraas, Spohner and Aye Aye Myint, 2017, 75). The first feature stemmed from the junta's belief that development was a western concept and ultimately just another name for imperialism; while the latter represents the junta's

vision of Burma's economic development as rural, or more precisely, agriculturally focused. The countryside was not merely envisioned by post-colonial governments as the economic engine of Burma but, as Mya Maung (1964) argues, was viewed as a key site for establishing political legitimacy and support. Therefore, rural issues – how to house the rural population, how to appeal to the countryside's residents, and how to increase its productivity – dominated thinking on what post-colonial Burma was and should be.

According to Smith (1999), the Tatmadaw under Ne Win's leadership was generally anti-intellectual and sought support from rural peasants. The composition of Ne Win's cabinet further reflects his anti-urban stance. He specifically selected military members who shared his perspective on pro-agricultural and anti-urban development programmes (Smith 1999, 204). Unfortunately, despite the national government's pro-rural stance, rural areas saw little meaningful benefit during this period, and both rural and urban areas saw popular unrest due to the RC's isolationist policies and the weak economy.

In 1974, General Ne Win abolished the RC and entrusted the governance of the country to the BSPP, the only legal political party at the time. The BSPP was supposedly led by civilians, but in truth the military continued to dominate its operations. It largely adopted existing policies from the RC, but in the face of even more severe economic problems. With the fall of the rural economy, many from the countryside moved to cities in search of opportunity. The wage gap between rural and urban, and between civilians and the military elite widened (Aung Thwin and Thant Myint U 1992), and General Ne Win's behind-the-scenes power games fooled no one—the public knew the military still ran the country. Tensions between civilians and the military continued to rise.

Despite the ostensible political importance of the countryside and the anti-urban attitude of the government, Myanmar's urban population continued to grow both in absolute terms and as a share of the total population during this period. According to the 1973 census, around 24% of the total population lived in urban areas, 9% points higher than the previous census in 1953 (Khin Maung 1986). Given widespread poverty in rural areas, the BSPP's pro-rural stance could not stop people from migrating to cities, making urbanisation unavoidable (Naing Oo 1989). Yet cities were not stable places to live, either, and urbanisation during this period did not mean urban development, as poverty was widespread among urban workers and postsecondary graduates. Land grabs, slum evictions, and forced resettlement continued but were sugar-coated as "urban redevelopment programmes" during the BSPP era (Rhoads 2018; Seekins 2011; Smith 1994). In addition, because of its socialist doctrine, General Ne Win's

government did not promote private homeownership, but due to its policy of nationalisation and the eradication of most of the private sector there was little new housing being built (Myint Naing 2021). Public housing was limited and only provided to government officials. The result was that many urban dwellers were forced to live in slums, which were constantly targeted for eviction.

In the BSPP era, cities, especially Rangoon and Mandalay, were considered potential bases for dissent and their inhabitants as a threat to the military socialist state. Demonstrations and riots were often reported in larger cities, but as Perry (2007, 47) note, many smaller protests in other, smaller towns and rural areas, but went unreported. These urban demonstrations were motivated by different causes: a change in university regulations (Silverstein and Wohl 1964), a rise in rice prices due to a shortage (Martin 1975), and dissatisfaction over military socialist rule (Smith 1999). Students were assaulted, shot or otherwise injured by police and universities were shut down (Cook 1970; M. Smith 1999). These demonstrations and protests were brutally suppressed by General Ne Win's army, and mainly occurred in cities, which served to reinforce the belief that cities were problematic and acted as bases for opposition forces. In a sense, the protests were a direct response to General Ne Win's anti-urban approach, which was more than a government recruitment directive or an economic plan; rather, it was a form of political oppression. In this context, urban planning was used as a strategy to spatially contain troublesome populations using forced eviction and resettlement to the outskirts, and little was done to develop cities or provide housing and social services to those in need.

Additionally, thanks to General Ne Win's isolationist policies Burma failed to industrialise and many urban workers were unable to find jobs. Far from becoming a socialist welfare state, Burma had instead become one of the poorest countries in the world. As political scientist Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2003, 24) notes, the BSPP's belated attempt in the 1970s to fix the country's failing economy with foreign aid and loans amounted to "[giving] analgesic pills to a patient with kidney problems". The larger cities suffered the most from this change in policy. In Mandalay, once considered one of the leading cities in the region, the streets were often piled high with trash and living conditions stagnated despite numerous cleaning and beautification efforts by the BSPP (MCDC Annual Magazine 2015). The decline in the economy, the continuous suppression in both the urban and rural areas, and the failure to provide basic services and social welfare meant that a major uprising became increasingly likely.

The 8888 uprisings and the SLORC-SPDC era (1988-2011)

After roughly 25 years of autocratic rule based on the Burmese Way to Socialism, the economy in Burma had deteriorated badly. As a result, in December 1987, the United Nations designated Burma as one of the world's least developed countries. Even though this designation made it possible to reschedule the payments on its external debt, the regime desperately sought foreign funds to kickstart economic expansion. But on 8 August 1988, simmering discontent boiled over thanks to a combination of economic stagnation, a scheme to demonetise Myanmar's currency, and ongoing widespread repression, and protests broke out across the country in Bamar-majority cities (Smith 1999).

These demonstrations were put down with extreme prejudice by the military, resulting in the deaths of thousands of people in the streets of cities involved in the demonstrations, and the student-led movement was crushed on 18 September 1988. And while the 8888 uprising failed to overthrow military rule, they did spur a series of major policy changes—just not the ones the protestors wanted.

With General Ne Win's resignation, the BSPP entered a state of collapse and was soon replaced by the SLORC led by General Saw Maung in a "pseudo-coup"(Burma Watcher 1989). Ne Win's Burmese Way to Socialism, meanwhile, was swapped for an open-door policy, or "military capitalism" (Mya Maung 1994), although this policy mainly only opened doors for the military and its affiliated businesses.

Spatialising containment

The SLORC, following the BSPP's model, forcefully evicted and relocated urban dwellers to city peripheries. Cities were still considered strongholds for the opposition where military intervention was needed. What really changed under the SLORC was the scale of relocations, which escalated dramatically (Smith 1994). From 1988 to 1990, almost 1.5 million people, or approximately 16% of the country's total urban population, were affected by the implementation of a national resettlement programme (UN Habitat 1991).

The junta justified these evictions on the grounds that those affected were illegal occupants, arguing relocations were necessary to clean up the cities and enable their beautification and growth. However, not all those relocated were squatters. Numerous individuals had title deeds to their properties, while many having obtained a title through adverse possession under Myanmar law. But the SLORC cared little for such legal nuances, and levelled settlements

regardless of whether they were made up of concrete homes or bamboo shacks, evicting everyone regardless of their ownership status. All were required to relocate on short notice, and anyone who refused was threatened with force (Khan 1991).

Resettlement has frequently been viewed as a programme of land control in Myanmar (Rhoads, 2018), but the discussion has typically centred on the land seized from the evicted population. A further argument might be made that these resettlement strategies were also utilised as a technique to physically and socially control people and their space. Those resettled were effectively being contained in resettlement wards on the outskirts.[53] Thus, in modern Myanmar, policies of expansion and containment have often been used together to spatialise cities based on the government's priorities.

Mandalay's expansion and the establishment of Myo Thet

However, urban eviction and resettlement were not only political repression measures; they were also increasingly used as official strategy to develop cities by forcing residents to relocate to remote parts of town. The resettlement wards were typically located along city boundaries and provided little or no government services. The SLORC intended for those who were forced to relocate to develop these resettlement wards themselves. In the context of Mandalay, the junta's plan to draw up a master plan for the city coincided with the use of forced labour to develop the newly expanded areas. And as section 4.3 suggests, the resettlement did not only force residents to move out from their original residences in the central locations of the city, but also forced them to remain on the outskirts by making them build houses there.

In Mandalay, these newly expanded territories predominantly used for resettlement were known as myo thet, or new towns. The origins of myo thet can be traced back to the early 1980s, when the junta had already begun relocating people in order to acquire land. While the urban expansion that resulted from this practice was modest during the RC and the BSPP eras, in 1992 the SLORC substantially increased the size of Mandalay by using the Land Acquisition Law to incorporate vast swathes of farmland into Mandalay, creating a new township called Pyigyidagon.

Adding Pyigyidagon as the city's fifth township was by far the largest expansion in its modern history. This 1992 expansion was intended to allow the myo thet in the south of Mandalay to

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[53] These reports were supplied by locals who attempted to return to their former residences after resettlement but were stopped by soldiers and taken back to their resettlement wards in Mandalay.

develop and provide a location on the outskirts for more urban residents. But it was not until 1995, when the MCDC launched its Maha Mandalar project (see figure 9), that relocations to this area began in earnest. This project, Mandalay's first master planning effort since the country's independence, was a collaboration between the Myanmar government and a Japanese corporation. The project included seven development zones and 69 planning initiatives, with a total investment of 700 million USD by domestic and foreign investors over 25 years. The Japanese planners intended to use the myo thet in Pyigyidagon township to provide space for the city's growing population, which was expected to increase more than tenfold over the coming quarter-century. The intent was to extend the development of the city proper to its southern boundary by developing additional economic, industrial, and residential zones. Mandalay's south would become part of a single vast urban corridor, and the city would no longer be characterised as "the last royal capital" or "the second-largest city in Myanmar" but as a "dual-downtown megacity" (MCDC Annual Magazine, 2009).
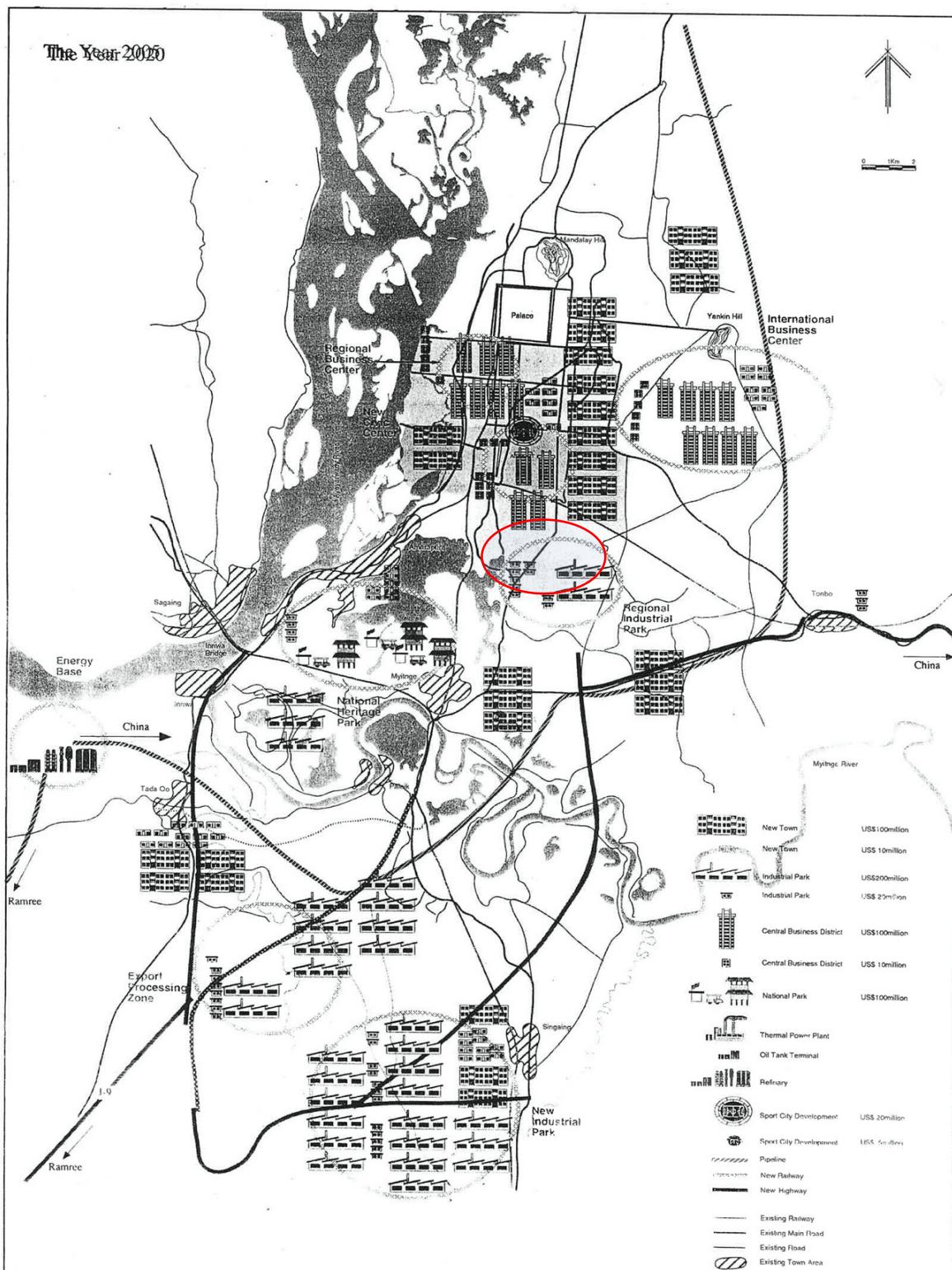
Figure 9 Planning map of the Maha Mandalar Development Project. On the map, Tagyi is located at the red circle, which was designed for a new industrial park nearly the second downtown in the south. (Map courtesy to U Mann)

Despite the completion of this master plan in 1996, the Maha Mandalar Development Plan was never implemented. The MCDC has never responded to this question to me during my field work or to the public generally, but it may be unable to because, the national government has

traditionally had authority over master planning in Myanmar, and municipal governments have very little influence in this area. Following the examination of the Maha Mandalar plan, it is now time for a brief history of urban planning professions and institutions in Myanmar, which continued to be central to the evolution of planning in Myanmar.

A highly centralised planning regime

Throughout Myanmar's modern history, urban planning has always been centralised in the hands of the national government, while local governments like the MCDC have had no power to decide the final master plans for their cities (Roberts 2018). This practice can be traced back to the 1950s when U Nu established the National Housing Board, which was later renamed the Housing Department under General Ne Win, then the Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development (DHSHD) in 1990 by Senior General Saw Maung.

Between the BSPP and the SLORC (and the subsequent SPDC[54]), while both considered cities as the home of opposition which necessitated security measures, the latter had a more pragmatic view of the urban as something inevitable: people were, despite all the anti-urban policies that came before, still drawn to cities, and intended to stay there for their children's sake. This shift in attitude towards the urban and urban planning was reflected in General Saw Maung's policies on housing. Instead of merely seeing urban housing as government-subsidised housing, General Saw Maung urged the Housing department to "focus on urban and rural housing development conceptual master plan covering the whole country as macro-level" (unpublished meeting minutes of the SLORC, quoted in Myint Naing 2021, 737). Yet urban planning remained limited, power was entirely held by the Union government and plans were implemented with limited foreign assistance, and even so-called public housing largely went to privileged groups. While it had become less hostile to cities, the junta continued to use planning as a tool to control urban populations while itself benefiting from urban development projects both politically and economically.

In such a highly centralised planning system, it is not surprising that urban planning continues to be used as a governance tool, and that local needs are frequently overshadowed by the pursuit of national unity and the supremacy of the Tatmadaw. In a nutshell, planning appears to be a powerful tool manipulated by the military state to rule and control the population, even though

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[54] In 1997, the SLORC was abolished and was rebranded as the SPDC, which continued to be run by Senior General Than Shwe, who had succeeded General Saw Maung in 1993.

in Chapter 4 we will see the other side of the story—how on the ground local planning is not as powerful as it appears to be at the macro level.

3.4 From planning as containment to planning as development (2011-2021)

After former military general Thein Shwe became the President of Myanmar and promised political reform, foreign development organisations and other key players in the planning professions began increasing their engagement with Myanmar's government and started carrying out more urban development work. As questions of how to improve the lagging economy and development emerged, there was a shift from planning as containment to planning as development.

Planning as development refers to the government's position that the act of planning itself - identifying areas in need of development, improving planning capacity, and developing plans and proposals - satisfies the state's planning responsibility, even if these plans are not executed or are significantly revised (Bou Akar 2018). However, as the beginning of this chapter suggests, evicted slum dwellers simply returned to their original locations as officials and police continued to carry out clearance operations regularly. This returns us to the central issue, in which planning becomes more performative than a means to address urban problems despite the country's democratisation process.

The beginning of the political transition

In 2010, former military man Thein Sein won Myanmar's national election and became president and in 2011, Senior General Than Shwe officially dissolved the SPDC, yet this was not the end of military rule. When Thein Sein became president, he promised economic reform, changes to Myanmar's currency exchange rate policy, policies to attract more foreign direct investment, and the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Pushing in the direction of an open market, Thein Sein's economic reforms focused on adopting a sustainable and growth-oriented developmentalist direction (Gabusi 2015). In January 2013, the then Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (2013) published a report, "Framework for Economic and Social Reforms 2012-2015", in which the government adopted the goal of becoming a modern, developed, and globally integrated country in the medium term, and acknowledged that doing so required using cities as a vehicle to help villages develop and

transform.

When the NLD won the 2015 elections and formed the civilian-led government in 2016, it promised to continue the reforms—and, indeed, would carry out even more. To that effect, the Department of Urban and Housing Development (DUHD), formerly known as the DHSHD, drafted a National Urban Policy Framework in 2020 (Department of Urban and Housing Development 2020a). It identified the need for orderly urban development, which requires sound urban policy and planning. Cities in Myanmar, especially Yangon and Mandalay, therefore, became seen as engines for growth (Aye Aye Myint 2018), but also as places where urgent reform and better planning were needed (Department of Urban and Housing Development 2020b; World Bank 2019).

Planning as development

In 2013, the Ministry of Construction created a concept plan for development in Mandalay. The plan's development focus was on formulating future urban development for Mandalay as it expanded, especially to the south, as a way to solve issues such as lack of housing and land for development, albeit without looking into the root causes of these problems. The concept plan suggests that resettlement wards for low income populations should be set up further south of the city. But this plan did not address any of the existing problems on the outskirts and instead continued to use them as a space for solutions. However, like the earlier master plan, this conceptual plan remained conceptual and was never implemented.

Myanmar's democratisation has attracted more development assistance from international organisations and private-sector investment. World Bank and the ADB, for example, have issued several publications on urban planning and urban services expansion to outlying areas. In 2013-14, the ADB collaborated with the MCDC to design a comprehensive urban development plan. The concept, according to the initial study made by ADB consultants, included the construction of affordable housing for the urban poor in the south. However, according to one of the project consultants,[55] while other parts of the plan for improving urban services were mostly approved, the proposal for housing was rejected by the regional government. The result was that ADB had to change from a master urban planning project to an urban services improvement one.

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[55] The interview was carried out on November 26, 2018.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (2016) in particular prepared The Urban Development Plan for Mandalay 2040. The plan was supposed to provide a comprehensive development trajectory for Mandalay and further develop its southern region. Yet as of 2021, the JICA initiative, however, was neither accepted nor rejected by the NLD government, and whether it will be implemented is yet to be decided. During my interviews, MCDC officials declined to discuss what exactly was holding back the JICA plan.

This series of planning initiatives in Mandalay parallels the broader issue of how planning appears to be performative. Despite the regime change, the civilian-led government seemed to share the military government's planning ethos. Mandalay's urban planning remains a grandiose but hollow gesture about which the ordinary public knows little, if anything. Following a series of failed planning attempts, we can see how the planning as development mentality operates in urban Myanmar.

3.5 Creating and contending with the marginal

As we can see from this urban history trajectory, successive governments in Burma/Myanmar have tended to view resettlement wards on the outskirts of the city as inferior and to overlook these areas' development needs. At the same time, these governments have also had to contend with the populations living on the outskirts of the cities – with the majority having been forced to live there against their will – as well as the urban working class. And all of these groups continue to search for affordable land on which to live within the country's increasingly expensive cities.

Take the ex-slum dwellers' housing discussed at the beginning of the chapter as an example. The MCDC, while evicting slum dwellers and displacing thousands in the course of just days, was also forced to look after the evicted residents after international and national media reported these eviction operations. Despite its criticism of the ex-slum dwellers as being "professional squatters" who resold this low-cost housing for profit, the MCDC had to deal with these issues by agreeing to allow tenants of low-cost housing to transfer their apartment units to outsiders.

Furthermore, while MCDC did not offer a great deal of aid in the establishment of the resettlement wards on the city's outskirts (as we will see in chapter 4), it was not able to completely ignore those regions, with municipal services such as garbage collection and lamppost/lighting maintenance ultimately being provided. The outskirts are therefore places

that the state creates in order to solve problems in the city centre, but it cannot completely ignore its municipal responsibilities in these outer areas, nor can it allow uncontrolled development.

The fact that the state has to contend with cities' marginal areas and their occupants shows how planning itself is an incomplete form of control. Drawing from Peluso and Lund's (2011) discussion on land control, Rhoads (2018) argues that successive governments in Myanmar have used policies such as "the annihilation of pre-conquest property rights, the intentional under equipping and under servicing of Burman majority or outlying areas, and the use of forced evictions in urban development and city expansion" (278) to territorialise people and resources in Yangon. Eviction and relocation were commonly used by the colonial state and the subsequent military dictatorship to grab land from the people and force them to move to the edges of a city. Through territorialisation, the state grabbed land for self-interest. It is in this context that urban planning has been used as an excuse by the state to justify land control practices and the violence exercised against the people (Skidmore 2004; Steinberg 2001).

In Mandalay, for example, marginal areas such as Tagyi and other resettlement wards on the outskirts are constantly subject to the dynamics of state planning. They are established by the state as a solution to perceived urban problems such as overpopulation and pollution, as well as for development purposes. Yet these newly expanded areas are usually unprepared for large-scale resettlement despite ostensibly being established for such a purpose. Yet the MCDC cannot ignore Tagyi entirely due to the ward's growing population. Some services must be provided to the outskirts, regardless of how limited or delayed they are in arriving. As a result, in this trajectory of urban development, the state must always contend with the aspects that fall outside its capacity to plan. If planning is about boundary setting, then it inevitably creates a binary between those who are inside and outside of a given boundary. But as has been shown in this chapter, these boundaries are never truly fixed and are instead constantly being pushed and tested by residents. The state must then decide what to do about those people and places that do not stay within its prescribed borders.

3.6 Conclusion

Based on the above overview of urban planning changes in post-colonial Burma/Myanmar, it appears that independent Burma has witnessed a shift in planning direction. Firstly, from understanding urban planning as a path for growth to using urban planning as a containment

strategy; then to believing that urban planning was equivalent to development. This indicates that the state has frequently influenced planning to realise its ideas of urban and state-city connections.

Yet it is undeniable that Myanmar has been ruled by military dictatorships for much of its modern history. These authoritarian regimes tended to regard cities as obstacles to their authority, as many opposition groups, including the NLD, were concentrated in cities (Smith 1999). This meant that the city was long viewed as a source of fermenting political issues, necessitating securitisation. Despite their anti-urban stance, military strategists had to appreciate, and eventually take advantage of, the enormous economic potential that cities provide. As urbanisation progressed, it became impossible for the state to ignore issues such as urban overpopulation and slums, and so the junta began evicting residents from central areas to newly expanded outskirts to both clear the population in the city and rely on the forced labour of those resettled to develop the outskirts. Even during the time of the NLD, planning seems to have ignored these newly developed areas on the edges of cities. Instead, particular attention has been paid to privatised urban development and megaprojects.

The existing literature on urban studies in Myanmar identifies the state as the most powerful actor in shaping urban planning. And despite the political changes and economic reforms since 2011, Myanmar's urban planning continues to appear largely centralised and authoritarian. This authoritarian mentality can be useful to the state by giving its actions legitimacy and providing an excuse to dominate city-making; but at the same time, the state has also been wilfully blind in the process of urban planning, with city outskirts often marginalised even though these areas most require state assistance. Yet as this chapter suggests, the Myanmar government, despite creating the outskirts as marginal spaces, has also to contend with the people living there. This thesis, while acknowledging the state's central role in urban development, also examines how its authoritarian urban planning interacts with local reactions and the modifications that follow through the unique history of Tagyi, as the next chapter will show.

Chapter 4 Welcome to Tagyi

When Sai and I first arrived in Tagyi, it was impossible to tell that it had once been farmland. At the same time, the ward's development did not appear to be following any grand vision of urban planning.

Tagyi is technically a part of Mandalay but feels disconnected from the city due to a lack of government services and development. The roads were unevenly paved, the houses built by locals, and most of the ward was not even connected to the municipal water or sewage systems. When I first met U Aung in Tagyi, I inquired about his resettlement experience, to which he replied: "I didn't want to move. Nobody wanted to do it. My mother became ill from crying so hard. I couldn't cry because I needed to destroy our house. Can you imagine? There was nothing in Tagyi when we moved here."

In Tagyi, stories of the forced resettlement from the Irrawaddy riverbank came hand in hand with the phrase "we built our neighbourhood". When the administration of Than Shwe authorised the construction of Strand Road in 1995, a large area along the Irrawaddy riverbank was cleared. As many residents informed me, "We had no choice but to relocate to Tagyi." But often, during those same interviews, if asked about their thoughts on living there, many would respond positively, saying they did not want to now move out. As U Aung concluded: "Because we have built and developed Tagyi so much. We invested our time and money. Tagyi is now our home."

Several studies in Myanmar briefly mention that the city outskirts are largely built by the locals themselves (Astolfo and Boano 2020; Boutry et al. 2016; Campbell 2022; Harrisson 2020). In this chapter, I'd like to go into further depth about how the residents have transformed the outskirts. I will show that the outskirts are a contested place where residents are actively dealing with the marginalisation imposed by the state through forced resettlement while also attempting to engage with that state in the pursuit of services and recognition.

I specifically have chosen to look at Tagyi's history through its residents' personal journeys, reflecting a broader story of rural-urban migration, life on the riverbank, resettlement to the landlocked ward, and finally the transformation of the resettlement ward into a bustling neighbourhood with a growing population.

During my fieldwork in Tagyi, residents who had been resettled by the municipality never

spoke about their lives only in terms of existence after the relocation to Tagyi. They always talked about their lives, and even the lives of their ancestors, starting from their time living along the Irrawaddy, often from when their parents or grandparents had originally moved from their home villages to Mandalay after independence in 1948. These previous internal migration stories, and oral histories of the resettlement to Tagyi, assisted me in understanding residents' urban struggles and their tactics in transforming the ward, despite the hardship that followed their resettlement.

These transformations included attempts to connect with the state to receive resources and support. This runs counter to the common generalisation that ordinary people in Myanmar generally wish to avoid the state at all costs (see Harrisson 2020; Roberts and Rhoads, 2021), as government has traditionally been classified as one of the "five enemies" of the people, with water, fire, thieves, and "those who dislike us" (Maung Maung Gyi 1983, 154–55). Instead, the central argument of this chapter is that, rather than a binary between evading and resisting the state, or simply between viewing the government as an enemy or representative of the people, residents must engage in a variety of tactics (de Certeau 1984) - sometimes working with the state, and sometimes avoiding it, to develop their neighbourhood. People may appreciate engagement with the state if it improves their livelihoods, while being neglected is unpleasant and may even have negative consequences (Bastos Lima and Kmoch 2021). State-people interactions are always a process of negotiation (Anjaria 2011) and navigation (Vigh 2009).

This chapter adds to the thesis's overarching argument by giving a micro-level analysis of place-making in Tagyi. The timeline in this chapter follows the same format as in Chapter 3 to give readers a sense of cohesion when comparing official stories about urban planning with ordinary people's stories about how Tagyi was established and transformed. Tagyi residents adapted to and gradually modified their surroundings through daily activities and concerted efforts, engaging in both forced labour and everyday place-making in their post-resettlement discourses and actions under these conditions. They have responded to the state's lack of support by primarily developing the ward on their own, claiming land ownership, citizenship, and belonging, all of which will be detailed over the next three chapters.

This chapter's structure is as follows. Section 4.1 provides a general discussion on place and tactics in literature. Section 4.2 then examines rural-urban migration in Mandalay in the early years after independence (1948-1962), showing how many rural migrants began living along the Irrawaddy riverbank during this period due to the convenient location it afforded

Mandalay's growing urban population. Section 4.3 then focuses on the military era (1962-2011), during which residents along the Irrawaddy riverbank experienced multiple slum clearances before ultimately being evicted and resettled to Tagyi in 1995. This section shows how during the military era, residents along the Irrawaddy riverbank were often targeted by the state but always tried to return until the 1995 evictions, after which people were strictly forbidden to return from their plots in the south of Mandalay. The next section, section 4.4, details recent changes in Tagyi from 2011 to the time of my fieldwork in 2018-19. Here we witness an increasing amount of local development assistance and social welfare groups appearing in the ward, with residents engaging in various activities to transform Tagyi into a better place to live—with or without government help. Section 4.5 then focuses on two everyday practices of Tagyi residents that ultimately enabled them to obtain municipal services through demonstrations and engagement with authorities intended to persuade the municipality that delivering services to the ward would benefit the municipality as a whole. This behaviour defies the widely held belief that ordinary people in Myanmar can and should shun the state at all costs. Section 4.6 concludes.

4.1 Place and tactics

The meaning of place has been debated in various disciplines.[56] In this thesis, I adopt John Friedmann's (2010) definition, which proposes to define a place as "small, inhabited, and [which comes] to be cherished or valued by its resident population for all that it represents or means to them" (154).

Residents in Tagyi have sought to develop the ward on their own to compensate for the development gap left by the state. In this context, we might draw on the current conversation on insurgency planning to analyse people's daily practices. Insurgent planning practices are typically described as counter-hegemonic, progressive, inventive (Miraftab 2009), and are linked to grassroots activism. However scholars have made clear that what counts as insurgent depends on the local context (Meth 2010) and that we should avoid overgeneralisation (Aranya and Ulset 2016; Shrestha and Aranya 2015). As I previously stated, I do not believe the

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[56] Most Western scholars draw an intentional difference between "space" and "place." They prefer to think of "space" as abstract and "place" as physical (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). Others, however, argue that "place" is primary, and that meaningful human action transforms it into "space" (de Certeau 1984). In this thesis, I have decided not to participate in this debate because it is unrelated to my core argument, but I would like to acknowledge that such a debate exists and is ongoing.

outskirts of Mandalay can be considered to have fostered the same space for insurgency as Holston (2008) describes in Brazil, or that the activities I have documented are counter-hegemonic, as defined by Miraftab (2009). Instead, I suggest that the residents' attempts to improve the ward should be viewed as tactics employed in response to state planning.

Michel de Certeau distinguishes tactics from strategies. He sees strategies as a specific way for institutions and organisations to exercise power. While strategies[57] are employed by the powerful to retain their control, tactics[58] are used by the people to subvert the strategies employed by the powerful, and everyday life is the arena in which such tactics can be deployed against the dominant institutions' or organisations' strategies. Strategies and tactics are, thus, not oppositional; in a way, tactics must operate in the context where strategies are applied, and tactics operate within the territory of the powerful. In this sense, "many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character" (de Certeau 1984, xix).

It's critical to grasp the context in which de Certeau speaks about tactics and strategies, as well as how tactics constitute people's everyday forms of resistance. According to de Certeau, on the one hand, we have more freedom than ever before; on the other hand, institutions, including but not limited to governments, have unprecedented power over individuals in our society. The combination of technology and bureaucracy means that institutions know more about us than any pre-modern society could have imagined. de Certeau is interested in how we can erode the power that large institutions wield over us. While this is the setting in which de Certeau was writing in post-war France, I suggest his concept of tactics may be expanded to apply to contemporary Myanmar, in situations where the people's primary aim is not to resist, but rather to challenge the government's intention not to offer services and facilities. Thus, in the case of Tagyi, residents' tactics are not resistance per se, but rather ways of interacting with the government officials and the municipality that may result in the provision of services. In this context, I question the assertion that the "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985) must be confrontational and aim to rethink this concept as a fluid method of engaging with the state so to avoid romanticising those who are considered resistant (McFarlane 2011).

In this imagining, the tactics adopted by the people are fluid and share a sense of "moving

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[57] "I call a "strategy" the calculus of force relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an environment." (de Certeau 1984, xix)

[58] "The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance." (de Certeau 1984, xix)

away" (Nihal 2016, 9). Drawing on de Certeau's understanding of tactics, Henrik Vigh (2009, 420) develops the idea of social navigation. Navigating, for him, implies "the act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled". While Vigh (2009) develops the concept to analyse young men's participation in warfare in Guinea-Bissau, a social navigation perspective can also be used to comprehend how residents move around the undeveloped resettlement ward of Tagyi – a place that is full of changes and challenges – and seek to develop it, step by step, to meet their social and material needs. Thus, the environments people have to navigate are never predefined, but rather,

> "our environments and futures are, in such situations, contingent upon our knowledge of the past, our experience of the here and now as well as the emergent or potential possibilities and difficulties within it, entailing that the map is never a static set of coordinates but a dense and multi-dimensional imaginary, which is constantly in the process of coming into being." (Vigh 2009, 429)

In other words, the ways people navigate their social environments should be treated as an ongoing process that is informed by experience, and in the case of Tagyi, we should not only look at how people navigate their way through the resettlement ward per se; we should broaden our scope and look at their journeys and experiences before they were relocated to the southern outskirts, which inform how they navigated their new home on the outskirts. Following the residents' journey of internal migration thus provides us a lens through which to understand their navigational choices after resettlement.

4.2 Migrating to the city and residing along the Irrawaddy riverbank

In this section, I concentrate on the period from 1948 to 1962, when many rural migrants moved to Mandalay during the country's early years of independence. Mandalay's population was 185,867 in 1953, according to the first census after independence, marking a 25.6% increase over the 1931 census tallying 147,932 people. This population growth was mostly due to an inflow of rural migrants who had moved to Mandalay after WWII because they saw better prospects for themselves and their families in the city than they would be afforded as farmers in the countryside (Griffiths and Ito 2016).

This widespread wish to give up rice farming for urban work was in fact the result of the junta's agricultural policy. In the 1950s, rice accounted for over 80% of Burma's agricultural exports (Evans 1972). The State Agricultural Marketing Board (SAMB), which purchased rice from

cultivators throughout the country, was granted a monopoly on the sector by U Nu's government. The buying price of the SAMB, however, remained constant throughout U Nu's reign. That is, while U Nu's government was able to benefit from the widening difference between the purchase price and export price and put that marginal gain towards implementing the Pyidawtha Plan (see section 3.2 of Chapter 3), the actual cultivators who drove this rice-based economic engine were unable to enjoy a fair share of the industry's profits, which led to widespread disenchantment with rice farming (Brown 2013, 99).

Since Mandalay was already well-established as the main city in the country's northern region and second-largest city, it became the primary destination for many rural migrants from central and upper Burma. And within Mandalay, the Irrawaddy riverbank was the most popular destination among rural migrants both as their first stop during migration, and well as for a permanent home.

U Aung's grandparents were two among the many who migrated to Mandalay from the rural. In the early 1950s, U Aung's grandparents did not want their children to be rural peasants like themselves, and so to escape rural poverty they left their village near Bagan to find work as labourers in Mandalay following independence. Many other residents in Tagyi said their grandparents or parents had migrated from villages outside of Mandalay, including from neighbouring areas in Sagaing and Magway.

Living along the Irrawaddy riverbank

The Irrawaddy River is Myanmar's central waterway, which also happens to form the western boundary of Mandalay. In Mandalay, talking about the Irrawaddy riverbank means talking about a coastline that is around 20 miles long. Many residents along the riverbank preferred living along the section in Aungmyaytharzan township, which is the northern part of the riverbank near the Mandalay Palace and the Zegyo market.[59]

Aungmyaytharzan township was called the Western township back in the 1950s, at which time there were many jetties offering work to rural migrants who lived nearby in hopes of earning higher wages. At that time, most migrant workers lived in three main wards along the riverbank: Ma Yan Chan, Aya Daw, and Oat Sit Kone (see figure 10 below).[60]

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[59] Zegyo market is the largest and oldest market in Mandalay. It's located in the downtown area near the northern section of the Irrawaddy riverbank.

[60] These wards no longer officially existed and the areas which used to be where these wards were located are now grouped as part of Thi Ri Mar Lar (West) ward in Aungmyaytharzan township. However, many residents in
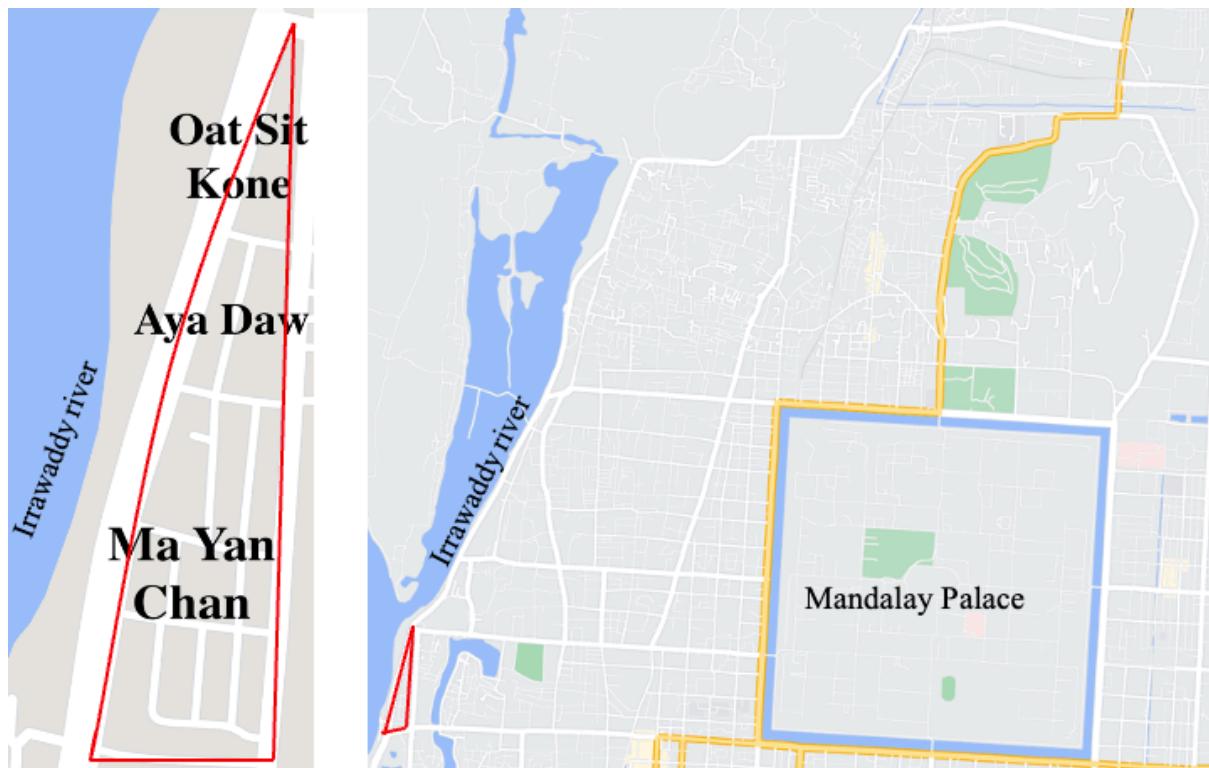
Figure 10 Map of the Irrawaddy riverbank.

Land in these three wards was either labelled as *bobuapaing* (ancestral land in English), which literally means "father's and grandfather's land" (Thant Myint U 2001, 41), or grant land, both of which implied legal landholding.[61] Indeed, U Aung's grandparents were one of the major landholders in Ma Yan Chan. "At first, they [the grandparents] rented a small bamboo house in a section near the jetty on 26th street," he told me. Thanks to their hard work at the jetty along the riverbank, the couple was able to save enough to buy a small, 20x20 square-foot plot in Ma Yan Chan from another resident. During U Nu's reign, U Aung's grandfather applied for and received a land title, and their land was changed from a *bobuapain* to a grant land. U Aung considered his grandparents lucky for having moved to the riverbank early and obtained a title. As more and more rural migrants moved to Mandalay and built homes along the riverbank, land prices rose until they were unaffordable for most, and many latecomers could only afford rent a house or a subplot. Some lived along the riverbank at staff accommodation provided by employers near the factories where they worked. The accounts of the residents and the old land maps at the MCDC contradict municipal officials, who usually portray the residents along the riverbank as occupying government land without a title, suggested

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Tagyi who used to live along the riverbank continue to refer to their old residences by these old ward names. The residents of these three wards were evicted and resettled to Tagyi in 1995.

[61] The main distinction between *bobuapaing* and grant land is that the former can only be obtained by inheritance, whereas the latter is tradable. Holders of *bobupaing* can also sell their land, but once a *bobuapaing* is sold, its land use is changed to urban grant land.

otherwise.[62]

This historical fact is significant because, as we will see in the following section, all plots in the three wards - including *bobuapaing* and grant land - were converted into government land under the military regime, and all occupants, whether they had land titles or not, were compelled to leave by the junta in the 1990s, leading to Tagyi's resettlement. This experience has fostered mistrust of Myanmar's legal title system among those resettled which will be further discussed in Chapter 5, when the issue of landownership in Tagyi takes centre stage. For now, though, it is enough to know that the land along the riverbank was never government land, as the municipality likes to claim when justifying the resettlement. Many residents living along the riverbank were indeed legal land owners, or renting from legal land owners, at the time of the final round of evictions.

4.3 From residing along the riverbank to resettling in the middle of nowhere

Under General Ne Win, the population of Mandalay increased from 185,867 in 1953 to 417,938 in 1973 (Mar Lar Yu Aung 2010).[63] The Burmese way to Socialism pushed many farmers in rural areas move to cities when the military government nationalised all major industries, including rice production, banking, mining and the teak trade. For many paddy farmers in Myanmar's Dry Zone,[64] the nationalisation of crop production meant that they lost their ability to decide what they wanted to grow, and the prices at which they would like to sell. This led to widespread poverty and hardship in rural areas, made all the worse by prolonged periods of drought in the Dry Zone during the 1960s (Moe Moe Hlaing 2021). These factors together pushed many farmers in the region to move to cities in hopes of finding better work opportunities—especially Mandalay which was and remains the biggest in Central Myanmar.

Throughout the military era, many rural migrants from other parts of the Dry Zone continued to concentrate along the riverbank in search of work at the jetties and factories nearby. Their

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[62] I was allowed to see two maps (but not to make copies) of the riverbank drawn in 1968-69 at the CPLAD of the MCDC. These maps indicated that all land along the riverbank was labelled as either *bobuapaing* or grant land. That allowed me to triangulate residents' accounts with the official land maps to confirm the legal status of plots along the riverbank.

[63] The increase in population in Mandalay during this period can likely be attributed to rural-urban migration, an increase in the birth rate, and a decrease in the death rate. However, no known existing data is available indicating how much each of these three factors individually contributed to the rise.

[64] The Dry Zone is a sprawling region in Central Myanmar that includes the majority of the Bago, Magwe, Mandalay and Sagaing States. It has a flat topography, a deforested landscape, and a dry climate prone to drought and flooding. For these reasons, food security is a chronic issue throughout the Dry Zone.

migration to Mandalay and residence along the Irrawaddy riverbank was greatly aided by "migrant pioneers" (Pritchard *et al.* 2017, 35), who had already established residences and local connections and frequently assisted family members and village acquaintances who moved to Mandalay for work. As a result, the ties formed in rural areas were maintained and even expanded into useful social capital in new urban contexts.

Due to the growing population along the riverbank, land prices in Ma Yan Chan, Aya Daw, and Oat Sit Kone continued to rise, and many plots were informally subdivided for sale or rent. At the same time, the number of tents along the area's roadsides and on the riverbank grew ever-more numerous, making them targets for eviction and slum clearance by the municipality. Residents such as U Bhant and U Aung recounted numerous slum clearance operations during this period. However, these operations did not affect people like U Aung, who lived in his grandparents' legally owned plot, or someone like U Bhant, who lived in a bamboo house behind his employer's factory in Aya Daw. The municipal government often justified evictions by saying it was restoring law and order or making the city clean and beautiful but, despite never being targeted, both U Bhant and U Aung disagreed with official narratives portraying the Irrawaddy riverbank as a problematic area in need of clearing out. For both of them, riverbank residents, regardless of whether they lived in a legally owned plot or a temporary tent, were capable of cooperating and living together peacefully. "Many residents were busy working and making money, no one had time to think about crime or stealing," said U Bhant. "I know the government at that time marked our neighbourhood as a problematic 'black area'. But we were quite peaceful living there."

"But you know," he added, "those who were evicted always came back, because most of the jobs were near the riverbank, until in 1995 when we were all evicted and no one could come back."

The 1995 resettlement

For most who were resettled to Tagyi, the move came out of nowhere.[65] "It was early 1995… No one saw it coming, and no one was consulted" was a common refrain among those recalling how they first heard that every household in Ma Yan Chan, Aya Daw and Oat Sit Kone would

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[65] Tagyi residents had about one month's notice before resettlement. Based on other research concerning forced resettlements during the military era, such notice periods could be as short as seven days or as long as a month. Residents were never consulted before resettlement (Khan 1991; Cornish 2020).

have to relocate to a new, unknown location.[66] Many told me that household heads were gathered by the ward administration one evening in a nearby school to listen to a military general announce the relocation. The residents had many questions for the general , but he told them very little, only explaining that the residents' new home would be somewhere in the south of the city. He said they had to move because their land was going to be used for the Strand Road expansion project on the riverbank, and told them the resettlement would actually be good for them because land prices in the south would quickly become very high since Mandalay's development would soon pick up speed. He promised that government trucks would come to the riverbank to pack their belongings and bring residents to their new homes, and told those assembled to "Just get ready and wait for our signal". But when? The general would not say.

Two words best summarize residents' preparations for resettlement: "waiting" and "busy." Waiting for relocation restricted how residents use their time, putting an extra burden on their social and economic lives (Harms 2013). Since there was no confirmed date for when the government transport would arrive to take them to their new homes, those being evicted recalled being forced to wait endlessly and missing out on work and social activities because they were afraid of missing the trucks.

At the same time, residents were busy packing their belongings and more importantly, dismantling their bamboo or wooden houses. The government was explicit that it would not provide any building materials to those being resettled to Tagyi, which meant every household had to dismantle their existing houses and rebuild them in the new ward.

This period of waiting for resettlement created great tension and anxiety among the residents. They had a sense of being stuck in the middle (Auyero 2011; Jeffrey, 2010), in a transitional state between eviction and relocation (Harms 2013). With their homes dismantled, many had to live in temporary tents. They had suddenly gone from homeowners or renters to homeless. Despite being told government trucks would come to help them move, no one I talked to remembered having any confidence in this promise. Some residents tried to gather more information about the resettlement location from street-level officials, only to find that these officers did not know much either—which made residents even more anxious. Most residents

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[66] There is no precise definition as to exactly which areas along the Irrawaddy riverbank were cleared for the Strand Road project. Most of those who resettled to Tagyi recalled that all households in these three wards were relocated. Some residents who were not located in these three wards but were instead living just north and south of these wards were also resettled. More than 2,800 households were relocated in total.

said the only thing they could do was to wait along the riverbank (see figure 11).[67] They never thought about fighting the resettlement—after all, how could they resist when there were soldiers with guns posted throughout their neighbourhood urging them to leave?

Figure 11 A photograph of the Irrawaddy riverbank in Mandalay taken in 1999. Despite the continuous evictions, many urban dwellers continued to move to the Irrawaddy riverbank in search of jobs. However, this was not an option for those who resettled in Tagyi in 1995, because one of the requirements for receiving land as compensation was to move to the new ward and never return. This picture, "Mandalay (6211724881)" by Arian Zwegers is licensed under CC BY 4.0 (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mandalay_(6211724881).jpg).

"The middle of nowhere"

Many residents told me that when the government trucks did finally drop them off in Tagyi, they could not believe that they were still within the city of Mandalay. The resettlement ward, it turned out, was nothing but a sprawling expanse of vacant farmland so unkempt that the grass reached all the way up to their knees, which meant they would have to spend substantial time and energy preparing their plots before they could even start building their houses. The land was muddy and the water that gathered in puddles on the ground was a sickly yellow. This was a troubling omen, and indeed, when residents started building their own wells, many got sick, with some even contracting kidney problems due to unclean groundwater. It was clear the

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[67] I couldn't find any images of the Irrawaddy riverbank from before the resettlement in 1995. Figure 11 is the best photograph I've found of the riverbank in the 1990s.

government had not prepared even the most basic infrastructure before the resettlement, and there were no transport connections to the rest of the city, nor shops or facilities of any kind.

Those who had been resettled felt displaced. Many had lived their whole lives along the Irrawaddy riverbank and were used to its central location. Questions and doubts about the future abounded, but one thing was amply clear: the resettlement was merely an exercise in land grabbing meant to shove them to the city outskirts. As Daw Den, who grew up in Ma Yan Chan, told me:

> "I knew when I arrived in Tagyi that I'd been *robbed* by the government. My land before [along the riverbank], even though it was smaller, was more valuable than this plot here [in Tagyi]. No one wanted the land here, in the middle of nowhere."

Such strong views indicate that those resettled suffered serious financial losses, being forced to accept nearly worthless plots on the outskirts in exchange for their more valuable riverbank land[68]. Dissatisfaction with this unfair compensation was common during interviews and makes the official narrative of residents benefiting from the resettlement problematic. The resettlement came long after the Land Acquisition Act 1894 requiring the government to provide compensation in lieu, which had been intended as a mechanism for safeguarding the rights of those evicted. In practice, however, the act was used by the military government to accumulate land at minimal cost.[69] Thus, the compensation offered in accordance with the law did not protect the people, but rather served as another tool for normalising eviction violence and for justifying land acquisition in the name of development. This serves as yet another example of how the law in Myanmar has served as an exclusionary tool used by those in power to deny ordinary people's suffering (see Crouch, 2021).

While injustice in inadequate compensation is often expressed in terms of "square meter and money" in the case of eviction (Harms 2012, 787), the situation in Tagyi was different: residents had no idea how much they had lost in terms of land value, because the only compensation they received was land in lieu. Tagyi, at that time, was a place where the land

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[68] The official explanation for the eviction from the Irrawaddy riverbank was to make way for the Strand Road, which was in fact constructed. However, when I asked residents if they had visited the Irrawaddy riverbank after the resettlement, many said no, and claimed that their land was taken not to enable road construction but rather for "building a swimming pool", "building a hotel", or "nothing, as the land is still vacant".

[69] The NLD administration revised the colonial Land Acquisition Act 1894 in 2019. The 1894 Act empowered the state to seize land for economic development and national interests. The 2019 amendments improved relocation standards, but the law still fails to protect, consult, and compensate affected landowners and residents. However, public input was limited. See S. McCarthy (2016) and Kenney-Lazar, Suhardiman and Hunt (2022) for further discussion on land policy reform in the transitional period in Myanmar, which seemed to provide more yet restricted opportunities for civil society organisations on the ground to influence policies.

had not previously been valued. Those resettled in Tagyi could not express their anger and frustration in quantifiable numbers, unlike those in Harms' research on peri-urban Saigon; and they had no evidence as to how much their purchasing power had decreased. While the military government claimed that those resettled would ultimately benefit from the resettlement because of rising land values, this argument relies on the vagaries of optimistic speculation and requires those resettled to remain in Tagyi until the ward's land becomes sufficiently valuable, assuming it ever does. Thus, this land compensation not only serves the state's land-grabbing purposes, but also ensures that those resettled remain on the outskirts, or at least unable to move back to the city's central areas.

But it was not only land value that was lost during the resettlement. The process of resettlement often leads to community disarticulation and "tears apart the existing social fabric" (Cernea 2000, 3666), which generates new forms of impoverishment (Bennett and McDowell 2012). The resettlement broke up communities and relocated different households to random locations across Tagyi.[70] "It was 1995, and we didn't have mobile phones or Facebook like we do now," as U Aung said. U Aung, who had grown up alongside several close friends in Ma Yan Chan, said he had never them again after the resettlement, adding to the intangible losses he incurred due to the resettlement. Another female resident shared with me that she had previously owned a convenience store for years in Aya Daw where she allowed her customers to settle up once a month after they received their salaries, or whenever they had the cash to pay. Thanks to the resettlement, she lost contact with all the customers who still owed her money, adding to her financial burden.

Early years after the resettlement to Tagyi

From the they first set foot in Tagyi, those who had been resettled were on their own—both in rebuilding their lives and building their new neighbourhood. Unlike working-class residents living in peripheral São Paulo, whose house-building activities can be viewed as claims-making, resistant moves (Holston 1998; 2008), those resettled in Tagyi had no choice but to build their own houses to derive any benefit from their new land. During interviews, residents referred to their construction activities in the early years of resettlement as burdens – they had clear the land, build new houses and pave new roads if they wanted to cobble together new

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[70] Similar situations were also seen in Yangon, where established communities were broken up by resettlement (Cornish 2020). Breaking up existing communities appears to be a common occurrence in resettlement and underscores how resettlement policies did not consider the needs of those being moved.

lives in Tagyi that resembled their old ones. Although the residents did directly benefit from their building work, many referred to the communal construction work, especially road paving, as *lok-ah-pay* (forced labour). They also considered resettlement a punishment, even though they had not done anything illegal. As one resident put it, "maybe the only thing we did wrong was accidentally living in a government project area".

In his research on developmental projects in rural Myanmar, McCarthy (2019) highlights how the military government used forced labour to carry out construction work in towns and villages in Myanmar from 1962-2011. McCarthy's work suggests people were forced to engage in all sorts of development work that is supposed to be the state's responsibility. This also holds true in my research on urban expansion and resettlement in Tagyi. The military government did not do anything to prepare the resettlement ward for new residents and expected those resettled to undertake all the construction work themselves. While residents were not forced to do work through physical threats, they felt pressured by necessity—otherwise they would not be able to survive in Tagyi. During interviews, one resident, who was relocated to Tagyi in 1995, even said that he viewed the process of rebuilding his house in Tagyi as "making my own prison", telling me that "the government did not want us to go back [to the Irrawaddy riverbank], so they made us demolish our old houses and rebuild them in the resettlement ward… They wanted to trap us here, and they even asked us to build our own prison."

Those resettled in Tagyi also faced significant difficulty in finding work. Many older settlers were compelled to retire early when they were transferred to Tagyi due to the shutdown of their previous factories along the riverfront. Despite its proximity to the so-called Industrial Zone 1, the ward did not offer much in the way of career prospects for new residents, since many plots in Industrial Zone 1 remained unoccupied. Furthermore, there was a misalignment between workers' established skill sets and the jobs available in Tagyi. Many settlers had previously worked on riverbank jetties and in brick factories. However, in landlocked Tagyi, such occupational experience was worthless. As a result, many male residents, particularly the younger ones, left Tagyi for work in other townships, with some even settling elsewhere in town and leaving their families on the outskirts. By comparison, female residents were substantially excluded from the labour force and had to work as tailors at home or hawkers to help mitigate the increased household burden created when male household members left.[71]

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[71] See Cornish and Ramsay (2018) for a similar discussion on the differentiated impact of forced resettlement on male and female residents in Myanmar.

4.4 From resettling to the middle of nowhere to "Welcome to Tagyi"

As U Aung noted at the opening of this chapter, Tagyi has grown and changed dramatically since its resettlement in 1995. If, as stated in section 4.3, the ward was "in the middle of nowhere" when settlers initially arrived, Tagyi is now more connected to the rest of the city. Even though public transportation in Tagyi is relatively lacking, practically all Tagyi households own at least one motorbike for daily trips between their homes in the ward and their workplaces. And with motorbikes becoming increasingly common in Mandalay since the mid-2000s and land prices in the city rising, many outsiders have moved to Tagyi in pursuit of a more affordable place to live.

In this section, I focus on changes in Tagyi during the decade that began with the political transition of the early 2010s. Recent developments in Tagyi have been driven by two major factors: telecom reforms, which have had numerous but intangible changes, and the availability of development funds, which has resulted in more tangible changes throughout the ward. Both are related to the Burmese concept of *lu hmu ye* (social services).

Lu Hmu Ye has two implications for local communities in Myanmar. First, it can be carried out as a religious obligation, a "moral and virtuous deed" that aids in the attainment of Nirvana and the end of rebirth (Hsu 2019, 19). On the other hand, it can be seen as a secular and morally neutral route to receiving material benefits from the state (McCarthy 2019).[72] Thus, *lu hmu ye* is both an action for the benefit of oneself and others, one which has been deployed strategically in order to obtain state assistance in Myanmar.[73]

While several social welfare organisations have worked in the ward to provide services and assistance to aid in development, Tagyi's development has also been impacted by political changes at the national level. Local funds from the government were provided at the township level for development projects in individual wards under Thein Sein's reforms (see Chapter 3 section 3.4 for details), although it appears that Tagyi, as a resettlement ward, rarely benefited from such measures. Some INGO development projects were also undertaken during this period.

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[72] This will be discussed in greater depth later in this section.

[73] These social welfare groups, however, allow for the maintenance of existing power inequalities and the continuation of the "regressive idea of entitlements where the poor suffer the expenses" (McCarthy 2019, 328). In particular, the most disadvantaged members of society can become easy targets when deservingness is used as a weapon (Chambers and Cheesman 2019).

Digitalised social welfare groups and social capital

In Tagyi, almost all residents claimed to be members of various voluntary religious groups affiliated with different pagodas. Families who are members of these social service or welfare groups had to pay an annual fee ranging from 3,000 kyats (2 USD) to 10,000 kyats (6.7 USD) a year depending on the household's economic situation. These social welfare groups often operate under the Theravada Buddhist notions of merit, reciprocity, and deservingness (Hsu 2019; G. McCarthy 2019). These groups cover a range of social services, from providing funeral services, to offering small loans, to organising volunteer work for road paving and street cleaning (Sanchez and Su Su Myat 2021).

While the previous section illustrated how resettlement broke up established social ties and destroyed social capital residents had accrued living along the riverbank, after resettlement residents tried to establish new social connections and social capital with their new neighbours.[74] Over time, these new connections provided support for residents looking for work (Cornish 2020). Residents living in the same sub-ward tended to share working opportunities with each other, and job referrals among nearby neighbours were commonplace. The formation of these networks in the post-resettlement era was aided and accelerated by telecom reforms in 2013 that facilitated greater usage of mobile phones and the availability of wireless internet, enabling many residents to use social media platforms to create local groups for social services and job referrals.

Development projects in Tagyi

Local development funds have long been a feature of Myanmar's contemporary history (Fink 2015a), and since 2011 a number of reforms were introduced by then president Thein Sein to promote a "people-centred" development for providing more and better local fundings (Shotton 2019). However, during our interviews, ward administrator U Kyu could not recall Tagyi receiving any such funds for development projects, which lined up with residents' accounts of having to carry out and pay for all local development work prior to 2011. Residents suspected this lack of support was due to Tagyi's status as a resettlement ward.

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[74] In a different context, Kirsten McConnachie (2014) asserts, based on her research with Karen refugees in Thailand, that refugee camps are "sites of growth as well as of suffering" (8), where refugees seek to build up social capital. In my research on Tagyi, I also want to emphasise people's agency and varied tactics for handling difficulties during the post-resettlement years, while also avoiding any romanticization of their plight.

Since 2013, the National Parliament, known as the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, has allocated local development funds to ward offices to develop secondary infrastructure such as drainage, bridges, and roads (B. Robertson, Joelene, and Dunn 2015). These resources were administered at the local level by ward administrators who conferred with local elders to gauge community opinion (Egreteau 2017).

Based on local news, Pyigyidagon township had a total of 37 projects under the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw development fund in the fiscal year 2019-2020, of which eight roads were paved and five sewage pipe projects were built (Than Zaw Min 2020).[75] In the fiscal year of 2017-2018, five roads were paved and 28 drainage systems were constructed in the township (Than Zaw Min 2019).[76] In each fiscal year, the township received a million kyats for local development projects, which was around USD 667. However, there is no information available as to how much money was allocated to individual wards within the township.

Theoretically, how much money each ward could receive largely depended on the needs of the population of individual wards in a township (B. Robertson, Joelene, and Dunn 2015). However, the reality does not seem to be so straightforward. According to the 2014 census, Tagyi, with a population of over 26,000, was the fourth most populous ward out of the 16 wards of Pyigyidagon township. The ward, however, appears to have received only limited assistance from the municipal development budget. While U Kyu refused to provide details to me on the amount of local development funding that Tagyi had received, he hinted that Tagyi had only benefited "maybe once or twice" from the development funds. However, other wards, especially those more developed and closer to the city centre, appear to have received substantial assistance, implying that local development funds are not allocated based on people's needs or the conditions of each ward, but rather based on MCDC's expected success rate of carrying out a development project in an area (see Sanchez 2019).

Additionally, it appeared that local development funds were primarily focused on infrastructure, while other social needs, such as the improvement of school campuses, or the construction of a local hospital (which were the top priorities of Tagyi's residents) were not addressed. Consequently, as funds were usually insufficient, Tagyi's many local development works - such as paving roads, building wells or even remodelling the local school - have been mostly undertaken by residents themselves and supported by various local social welfare groups.

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[75] Burmese only.

[76] No information can be found for the fiscal year 2018-2019.

4.5 Everyday practices to prove one's worthiness

The above-documented phenomena – rural-urban migration, resettlement projects, and a lack of attention to the outskirts – suggests that resettlement was not planned or envisioned from a professional point of view, but rather was conceived of by officials who saw it as a common-sense answer to urban problems as they had defined them. It also suggests that residents have actively engaged in shaping and transforming Tagyi while assistance from the government has remained limited.

Yet the residents of Tagyi, pioneers and contributors to their neighbourhood's development though they might be, were not consciously oppositional in their everyday lives. They did not consider themselves insurgents (Earle, 2012; Holston, 2008; Miraftab, 2009). Instead, as they described it to me, they were using everyday practices as tactics to make the municipality engage with them and provide services. This is important because it characterises the way in which residents produced their own space: they tactically engaged with the state, but did not resist after being relocated (Nihal, 2016).

In the context of Myanmar, while co-contribution to local development projects has been the norm for residents seeking eligibility for development funds, in the case of Tagyi, I argue that not only does such a "worthiness" mentality (McCarthy 2019, 331) exist; residents must also show how provision of services can actually benefit the state—and even service providers.

The following show two examples of everyday practices in Tagyi that have to some degree successfully helped residents obtain municipal services: public utility application and street vending. These everyday practices contrast with the existing literature, which focuses on how the local population cooperates with government development projects to prove it deserves funding and assistance. These examples also dovetail with the central argument of Chapter 3, which suggests that the state was unable to entirely ignore the marginalised space it created on the outskirts and was ultimately forced to contend with the population living there.

Applying for utilities

During interviews, residents often emphasised their agency in developing Tagyi. When the residents moved in, there was also no infrastructure, and to receive water and electricity, they had to negotiate with both informal and formal actors. For example, the municipality's tap

water system only started to reach Tagyi near the end of my fieldwork in 2019, meaning that for the previous three decades residents had to source their own water. Even though many built wells on their own land, the ward's groundwater quality was poor, with many recalling their wells yielded only muddy and yellowish water. To get clean water, some of the better-connected residents started to work with water merchants from outside of the ward re-selling bottled water for household use. And while Mandalay's municipal water has reached some parts of the township, most residents must still rely on bottled water from merchants (Balac et al. 2019).[77]

For electricity, residents had to apply for a meter from the Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise (MEPC), under the Ministry of Electricity. One of the requirements for applying for a meter was to have a land title. Those resettled to Tagyi were not given any land titles however, and had to purchase title documentation at their own expense. Since most residents had neither enough money nor the necessary official connections to apply for a land title (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion on the issue of land titles), many had to bribe officers from the MEPC to approve their meter applications. Many families also shared a single meter to lower the cost of the application, which based on residents' accounts varied from 10,000 kyats (6.7 USD) to 30,000 kyats (20 USD).

These examples suggest that after being forced to relocate to an unplanned ward, the residents tried to transform it into a functioning neighbourhood by engaging transversally with formal and informal actors (Caldeira, 2017), often with the help of local social welfare groups (Sanchez and Su Su Myat, 2021). These practices were not primarily counter-hegemonic but rather reflected residents' tactics for navigating officialdom to their benefit.

Vending in Tagyi

U Bhant's wife, Daw Ning recalled to me how "We used to just sell and buy on the streets. Everything. Fruit, vegetables, fish, oil, even clothes… We didn't have a market, and the wards were far away. So what could we do? We're forced to sell on the muddy streets."

Daw Ning's comments above show that when the residents were relocated in 1995, there was

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[77] During one of my interviews with an MCDC member, there was a detailed map pinned up on the wall illustrating the layout of a water sanitation improvement project, with different parts of Mandalay coded in different colours based on water quality. The outskirts' water quality was marked as "poor". They also happened to be the final group slated to receive any upgrades. When I asked for the reason, the MCDC members only said, "it's our custom; we focus on the more central locations first, then we spread our resources to the outer areas."

no marketplace in the ward. But many female residents started to visit the nearby village to buy fruit and vegetables, which they then sold in Tagyi on the streets—especially on 58th street, which was the only paved road at the time. During the military era, street vending was allowed if the vendors registered with the municipal government. However, many avoided registering. The same thing happened when residents were relocated to Tagyi in 1995. Because there was no marketplace in Tagyi, residents were forced to buy and sell on the streets, and virtually no one registered with the municipal government.

The subsequent construction of the Tagyi market is in fact another example of the military state using the strategy of controlling rather than eliminating ostensibly illegal activity (Salween Institute for Public Policy 2017). Residents began to grumble about the filth of street vending in the years that followed relocation, and explaining that they wanted to have a covered market where they could sell and shop during bad weather. Street vending also created noise problems and littering issues in the neighbourhood. Residents living on 58th Street and nearby constantly complained to officials about the noise and garbage produced by hawkers and shoppers. Then a retired military man, U Kyu – the future ward administrator of Tagyi – led the local elders in convincing the municipal government to build a market for the local population, arguing that the market would help make the ward clean and organised – which was consistent with the municipal government's overall goal for city development – and that residents would pay rental fees to sell there. In 2009, after years of negotiations, a market was finally established in the ward. Sellers at the Tagyi market had to pay a rental fee to the municipality for a stall, but many former street vendors preferred this arrangement because they wanted to have a regular and covered place to sell. Others remained on the streets to avoid the rental fees.[78]

Residents' everyday practice of buying and selling, however, continue to shape how the Tagyi market expanded. During my fieldwork, the Tagyi market had grown from a single-storey covered market to a four-block complex of cement buildings providing shade for vendors. MCDC cleaning staff could even be seen from time to time clearing the garbage bins in the market (figure 12).

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[78] The MCDC introduced a licencing system for street vending that made street hawking illegal unless vendors applied for a licence under section 106 (f) of the MCDC Laws 2014.

Figure 12 A corner of the Tagyi market (Photo by author).

These instances demonstrate that, in addition to cooperating in order to receive development support, Tagyi locals have used various tactics to gradually obtain municipal services. Yet government aid in Tagyi has remained modest. Even though the municipal administration was

no longer military-controlled, during my fieldwork the civilian-led MCDC appeared to share the junta's practice of largely marginalising resettlement wards on the outskirts. This may be because so many officers, particularly those working at the CPLAD, had either retired early from the military or were long-term civil officials who had served the municipality during the military era. Even elected MCDC members were conservative when discussing the military government's resettlement actions, and largely hewed to the previous government's habit of viewing resettlement wards as a problem while ignoring the needs of those areas' residents.

Thus the MCDC has frequently turned a blind eye to the real needs of the poor (Sanchez, 2020), and in the case of Tagyi, improvements to the ward were primarily funded by the residents themselves in lieu of government assistance. Since 1995, residents in Tagyi have been responsible for building their own houses, fencing their plots, paving the majority of the roads, operating stores and companies, creating social welfare groups, and more. They have transformed what was once "dirty and poor farmland" into a residential region that encourages outsiders to relocate and invest (see Chapter 5). As U Aung stated at the opening of this chapter, by the time I visited there was no way to tell that Tagyi had been "nothing" just 30 years prior.

4.6 Conclusion

Overall, the dominant framing of the resettlement, in the press and official accounts, is as a natural result of people trespassing government land. However, those who were resettled feel conflicted about the move. Despite its often violent history and being against their will, it is clear from the accounts of the locals that they sought to position themselves as more than simple victims. They thought of themselves as pioneers, contributors, neighbours, and community members. Tagyi, which was formerly described as being "in the middle of nowhere," is today a bustling residential district where professionals and merchants make their homes. The residents' accounts of the ward's evolution paint a picture of Tagyi as something more than the abandoned farmland it once was.

The stories told by residents about the resettlement are not merely an oral history of Tagyi. Through their descriptions of what happened before, during, and after resettlement, we can discern three interrelated arguments about the logic, execution, and impact of the resettlement on those who were resettled—and how Tagyi fits into the broader framework of Mandalay's urban development.

First, the city's expansion and resettlement were poorly planned and coordinated. The

expansion and resettlement to the expanded areas were considered by the state as solutions to the city's problems – namely overpopulation, lack of housing, pollution, and even political discontent (Rhoads 2018; Seekins 2011; Smith 1999; Steinberg 2001). In Mandalay's case, seeing these newly expanded areas as a solution was based more on belief or intuition, rather than on scientific planning or hard data. The residents' first impressions of Tagyi confirm that the resettlement ward was poorly planned. The never-implemented Maha Mandalar Development project, which covered Tagyi, serves as yet another example of how during the military era urban planning in Mandalay typically never left the early stages of policymaking (see Chapter 3).

Second, the resettlement to Tagyi was neither voluntary nor beneficial to those resettled. Residents were internally displaced (Lanjouw, Mortimer, and Bamforth 2000), and were never consulted before the move was announced. Although residents agreed to give up their original plots along the riverbank and be moved to Tagyi, their consent did not reflect a genuine choice because they could only choose "between quitting their land with compensation or without" (Franco, Park and Herre 2017, 351). The residents' narratives also highlight loopholes in the legal system regarding the right to compensation. While those resettled were compensated by receiving an allocated plot, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 did not guarantee such compensation would fairly reflect the value of the land lost (Displacement Solutions 2019). Given that an allocated plot in Tagyi was the only compensation residents received for the resettlement, the purported value of the compensation was highly speculative, relying on the assertion that land demand in the south of Mandalay would increase and consequent land value in a resettlement ward like Tagyi would also rise sufficient to compensate any loss suffered in the course of eviction. Ultimately any and all benefits that the state claimed to be a sure thing were figments of the distant, abstract future.

Thirdly, the resettlement serves as yet another example of forced labour during the military era in Myanmar. Given that Tagyi was undeveloped at the time of resettlement, and the fact that the state did not provide any support to those resettled suggests that the burden of developing the ward, and in a broader sense, the newly expanded areas in the south of Mandalay, fell mostly on the shoulders of those resettled. The stories of Tagyi residents indicate that planning has yet to become a topic of public discussion in urban Myanmar (Matelski and Sabrié 2019). While Astolfo and Boano (2020) argue that the outskirts of Yangon have been built by the residents themselves, they do not provide any evidence as to how they reached this conclusion. While I also argue that Mandalay's outskirts are built by their residents, I support my claim by

looking into the history of urban expansion, resettlement policies, and residents' personal narratives. This is important because resettlement is not merely a matter of physically moving certain populations; it also creates a space where residents are forced to find ways to obtain more services from the government.

The case of Tagyi, of how it was established and came to be, is not merely an exercise in examining and combining narratives. It is, in a broader sense, about how the geographical outskirts are formed and framed in urban Myanmar. As the case of Tagyi suggests, the geographical outskirts of Mandalay have been expanded substantially over the years. Yet these newly expanded areas were often used for resettlement purposes and were not treated as an equal part of the city by the state, which continues to treat the outskirts and residents there as an afterthought.

Roberts (2017, 67), when asking "what is Myanmar urbanism", asserts that urban planning in Myanmar is primarily state-centric, and residents are unable to "work with or against the municipal government to shape their cities". The above observation does appear to be supported by and demonstrated in urban studies literature about Myanmar. Yet despite the state's dominant role in city-making, one can argue that the people are also actively reshaping Myanmar's cities—even if they are not involved in official decision-making. If the existing literature suggests a hegemonic development – one where the state forcefully evicts and resettles residents, changes land use without consultation and creates an increasingly privatised urban planning paradigm that displaces the poor – it also leaves room to explore residents' practices, aspirations, and determination to transform their peripheral neighbourhoods and continue living in these increasingly exclusionary cities, as this chapter demonstrates. In the remaining chapters, by carefully combining official and individual accounts of Tagyi's establishment and development, I will use land – the most valuable asset one can possess in the ward – as an analytical lens to understand citizenship and transformation on the outskirts of Mandalay. I examine the cases of land sales, land subdivision, and house construction in Tagyi to better understand residents' practices and struggles with property and citizenship in Mandalay.

Chapter 5 Land transactions in the grey market

It was 11:40 on a Tuesday morning, a land seller and a buyer were about to close their deal at U Kyu's ward administration office in Tagyi. U Kyu was chewing betel while sitting on his long bench by the window. He, the ward's administrative clerk, and U Aung had been waiting there the whole morning. Now the other five plastic chairs at the office were all occupied by their visitors: a lawyer, the seller, the buyer, and a witness for each side. The buyer, who was a dried food merchant in his 40s, had arrived with his witness, who carried two plastic bags of banknotes totalling 6.5 million kyats (4,333 USD), or the remainder of the land sales price. The lawyer took out a folder from her shoulder bag and put it in front of U Kyu. The seller and his witness sat next to her.

U Kyu, after spitting the betel out through the open window, turned around and started looking at the folder's contents. He slowly put on his reading glasses and started licking his index finger on his right hand before turning a page. As he read, U Kyu did not write anything down or sign his name anywhere on the papers, but his presence was recorded by the red fingerprints of betel juice he left on the bottom right corner of every page he turned. The folder wasn't thick, and it did not take U Kyu much time to flip through the pages. "Do both the seller and buyer agree on everything?" asked U Kyu.

The lawyer, who was sitting opposite him, immediately said, "Yes, everything is agreed."

Then U Aung also spoke from his seat at the back of the office, "I confirmed that there's no land conflict on that plot."

"Good," said U Kyu while looking at the seller and buyer, "you should sign the contract." (See figure 13)

Figure 13 A Land sale at the Tagyi ward office. The land seller was putting his fingerprint next to his signature on the sales contract. The lady dressed in purple was the layer. The man behind them was the seller's witness (photo by author).

The buyer and his witness signed the contract first and left their fingerprints next to their signatures. Then it was the seller and his witness's turn to sign. When the contract was signed by both parties and their witnesses, U Kyu announced that the land deal was complete. The

seller and the buyer shook hands, while the lawyer handed the two bags of cash from the buyer to the seller's witness. "Every land transaction is in cash, so it's important to count the banknotes before leaving the office," said the ward clerk.

While the seller's witness started counting, U Aung chatted with the lawyer: "How is your businesses these days?"

"So-so," the lawyer replied. "I heard a merchant from Yangon is looking for a place to open a kindergarten in Mandalay, if you know anyone who's renting out their land, then we can work together?"

U Aung nodded his head. "Let me ask my friends."

"The amount is correct," said the seller's witness after counting the banknotes in the two plastic bags. "OK," said U Kyu, "now everyone is free to go." The seller put a roll of banknotes on the ward administrator's desk thanking him for his service, while the ward clerk took the signed contract and made a copy for the seller. The buyer got to keep the original land sales contract and the landslip from the seller. He put the documents in a paper folder he'd prepared, and put everything in his leather handbag. He was now the new owner of plot 18C in sub-ward GaGa 41, Tagyi.

I looked at my phone. The whole transaction had taken only 10 minutes. "Where are you going next?" I finally got a chance to ask the seller after knowing that the deal was complete. "I sold my land, where can I go?" he replied. Feeling embarrassed that had I asked the wrong person, I turned to the buyer and asked the same question.

"I'm heading to my new home! I have plans to build a new house there and I need to inspect the land," said the new owner, who was an imported food merchant in town. As the seller, the buyer, and their witnesses left the office, the ward clerk said: "It's just another land deal. People move in, people move out." Regardless of who the seller and the buyer are, land trades always took place at the ward office. On top of his ward administration duties, U Kyu himself worked as a land broker, and so did U Aung. Most of the transactions were sales, although occasionally people visited the ward office for signing a rental contract.

Land prices in Tagyi, along with those in the rest of Mandalay, were increasing sharply, even though the ward sat on the outskirts. While local newspapers were full of stories about high land prices in downtown Mandalay, where a plot of 40x60 square feet land could cost a billion kyats (Phyo Wai Kyaw 2020), U Kyu estimated the price of land on the outskirts, in a place like Tagyi, was usually around a quarter, or at most one-third of the cost of a similarly sized

plot downtown. While there was no standard or average land price in Tagyi, land prices were often determined by several factors, according to U Kyu: "Land will cost more per square foot if it's by the main road; a plot at a corner is usually more expensive too, and a land that is on the west side of the ward is more expensive than land on the east, and even the financial status of the seller affects the land price." East of Tagyi was a slum area, which dragged down land prices nearby. U Kyu, using the land trade that had just happened in his office as an example, estimated a plot of 15x40 square feet by a side road in a sub-ward four blocks away from the slums would cost around 13 million kyats (8,667 USD). He added that "the price could have been higher, but the seller needed money and wanted to sell quickly." In contrast with all the factors he listed that had a tangible impact on land prices, U Kyu emphasised that whether a plot came with a legal title or not mattered very little.[79]

In Tagyi, land transactions involving millions of kyats often occur in the absence of legal tenure, without the involvement of a legal title or property registration with the appropriate government office. But such land markets do not only exist on the outskirts. Trading land without a legal title is common in urban Myanmar and is seen as both a response to high property taxes and a result of poor land records, with few even bothering with land registration (Blake and Kriticos 2019; Rhoads 2020a; Zay Yar Lin 2016c). Indeed, it seems that many if not most land transactions in urban Myanmar are carried out without a legal title. Given that land is their most valuable asset and the most important investment for many households, it is intriguing to see how residents put substantial sums of money into a grey area in which the legality of land sales and landholdings is not supported by a legal title and is never recorded on official land ownership maps.

But what is most interesting about the case of Tagyi is that, while residents buy and sell land without a legal title, this does not mean they trade land without any official papers. Instead, they are actively trading with the landslips issued during the resettlement in the 1990s. These landslips are recognised by the municipality as official documents that allow holders to reside on the allocated plots, but which do not infer a full legal title. The land trades in Tagyi are, thus,

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[79] U Kyu's observations matched the observations of other land brokers, including U Aung, in Tagyi. But their experience with legal titles having no (or very little) impact on land prices is quite different from the discussion in existing literature, which usually suggests that land with a legal title is worth more than land without it (see Durand-Lasserve and Selod (2009) for the discussion). Based on my fieldwork, I suspect that since obtaining a land title is extremely difficult and residents see no difference between having a legal title and merely having a landslip, and a legal title does not protect one from eviction, having a legal title has a limited impact on one's sense of tenure security and thus on local land prices. This again suggests that locals have rather pragmatic views on legal ownership, and on the ostensible protection a legal title implies.

somewhat legal and somewhat illegal- they are legally *ambiguous*.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the emergence of this legally ambiguous land trade in Tagyi, and it is composed of four arguments. First, I challenge the official narrative that locals are trading land without a title chiefly for reasons of tax evasion,[80] and argue that the residents – such as the seller and buyer at the beginning of this chapter – do so because they see no significant difference between buying land titles and keeping their landslips. I demonstrate that this indifferent attitude is a result of the history of resettlement and the accompanying land allocation policy.

Second, by scrutinising at how the grey market for land sales in Tagyi works, I demonstrate that legal uncertainty does not prevent residents from exchanging land or, in de Soto's (2000) words, turning untitled land into capital. Residents trade using locally evolved practices for transferring land without a title. Untitled land trades are frequently labelled as informal, as opposed to formal—which implies compliance with legislation, appears to be structured and has official acknowledgment (McFarlane 2012). Such informal landholding is frequently associated with precarity and tenure insecurity, especially in the context of developing countries (Payne 1997). From this perspective, informality is viewed as an issue that must be addressed. On this front, de Soto (2000) proposes that establishing individually named property rights can help to overcome the challenges of poverty and tenure insecurity. de Soto (2000) argues that areas without legal recognition are nevertheless deemed insecure and fragile. This "assumes a false dichotomy between formal, purportedly successful institutions on the one hand and their supposedly disordered and ineffective informal counterparts on the other" (Stacey and Lund 2016, 594). Following the strain of subaltern studies that question perceptions of informality as inferior and problematic (see Banks, Lombard, and Mitlin 2019), I argue that despite having ambiguous titles, residents have established a systematic means for exchanging land. Rather than considering their informal land dealings to be the result of a lack of access to formal channels, the situation of Tagyi demonstrates that residents prefer such uncertainty over a formal legal title.

Third, this chapter shows that informal land trades are competitions both for and of access between the wealthier and poorer residents, making the exclusion an intimate one at the local level (Kan and Chen 2021; D. Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011). Ribot and Peluso (2003), when

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[80] For examples of officials complaining about citizens' tax evasion in Myanmar, see Aung Min Thein (2018). For the relevant media portrayals of tax evasion in Myanmar, see Chan Mya Htwe (2018); Myat Nyein Aye (2014) and Myat Thura (2019).

discussing how people can claim resources, suggest that access is a broader concept than property.[81] If property is about the production of rights, then access, according to Ribot and Peluso (2003), is "the ability to benefit from things" (153) that are both tangible and intangible. This theory of access can explain situations where people have no legitimised right to a resource, yet can still benefit from it because they have access. In this sense, as Peluso and Ribot (2020) emphasise in the postscript to their original article in 2003, property rights are only one of the ways by which people can gain access. With residents who hold landslips enjoying only ambiguous land rights, what is actually being traded on the grey market in Tagyi is not absolute legal ownership or land tenure per se, but rather an urban location that residents believe will allow them to access better health care, employment, and education. It is this access that grants residents and their progeny an opportunity to flourish, even as they acknowledge the legality of their landholding is hazy at best.

Fourth, resettlement is not the end of displacement, but rather the beginning of a second displacement caused by land speculation and rising land prices in the neighbourhood. I use Zhang Li's term "accumulation by displacement" (Zhang 2010, 138) – which is defined as a mode of exclusionary urbanisation that operates by displacing the urban poor to the city's outskirts and freeing up land for more affluent urban dwellers to reside on and invest in – to argue that the displacement after the resettlement is induced by land speculation, which is facilitated by the legal ambiguity of landholding in Tagyi. This argument pushes us to consider resettlement not merely as a policy but also as a process that affects residents' lives even decades later. Accumulation by displacement in Tagyi can be interpreted as an "access failure" (Ribot 2014), and the sellers are those who were unable to compete due to the creation and structure of land trades in the local context.

After looking at the history of Tagyi in the previous chapter, this chapter contributes to the thesis by conceptualising the outskirts in a legal sense and questioning the role of legal ambiguity in accumulation and displacement. The following two chapters will investigate the social and political aspects of the outskirts through the practice of land subdivision and house construction. These studies of the outskirts—geographically, legally, socially, and politically—allow us to connect the politics of property and citizenship with the local experience of marginality and even displacement.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 5.1 includes a summary of

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[81] Ribot and Peluso's theory of access has been widely used in the discussion of land and natural resources. For a literature review on the theory of access, read Hansen, Myers, and Chhotray (2020).

Mandalay's formal laws on land transactions, which serves as an entry to the official narrative of informal land trading as a form of tax evasion, and the academic discussion of the procedural complexities that lead to people dealing without a land title. Section 5.2 contends that the rationale for informal land trading should be considered within the context of resettlement history and land allocation policy, rather than as a tax evasion strategy or a reaction to the perplexing official land ownership system. This illustrates that, as troublesome as landholding with landslips can be, locals perceive the landslips they have as nearly equivalent to a legal title, and this is one of the main reasons many did not bother to apply for a land title. Section 5.3 presents an account of the Tagyi land market to demonstrate how, despite the fact that most land exchanges occur without legal ownership, locals have evolved a systematic method which makes land trades based on landslips secure enough for potential buyers. I argue that the legal greyness of landholding in Tagyi has had two effects: it has allowed for faster transactions, which allow poorer residents sell their land quickly when under pressure; yet it has also meant that land can be speculated upon more easily. In this context, I argue in Section 5.4 that what people are truly buying and selling in Tagyi's grey market for land are not legal claims or legally sanctioned rights in and of themselves, but rather that buyers are purchasing an urban site regardless of its ambiguous legal status. To illustrate this argument, I use the instance of a wealthy resident engaging in land speculation in Tagyi to show how the desire to live in the city drives speculation and land prices on the outskirts, even in the absence of government or private development projects in the area. Section 5.5 then contends that the poorer residents have been displaced as a result of this speculative process, and that their displacement is not the result of a threat of force, but rather of access failure. Section 5.6 concludes.

5.1 A brief overview on legal procedures for land transfers

In Myanmar, a land transfer is only legally valid when a new land grant certificate is issued to the new owner to serve as a valid land title document. But to transfer land legally, the buyer and seller must complete two steps first: pay taxes, and register the transfer. For the tax payments, the seller is responsible for paying the capital gains tax at a flat rate of 10%.[82] The buyer has to pay income tax if the money the buyer used to pay for the property in question has previously evaded tax assessment. Given that Myanmar is largely a cash-based society and

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[82] For details of the clause, see section 27b, Union Tax Law, No. 10/2018. In addition, renters must pay a 10% tax for their rental income, which is listed in section 19b of the same law.

many people avoid income tax payments to the state as a matter of course, money used to pay for the property is frequently untaxed, and thus the buyer normally has to pay income tax for the property transaction.[83] Thus for legal land sales, the seller and especially the buyer incur a heavy tax burden for a legal transfer to occur.

Besides the capital gains and income taxes, the buyer also has to pay a stamp duty before registration to complete the legal transfer process. In Mandalay, the stamp duty for property transfers is 4% of the sales price.[84] However, for the current buyer to pay for the stamp duty and register the sales contract, all the previous transfers must be registered. And if any stamp duty violation is found, the buyer has to pay a penalty of three times the original stamp duty amount.

As Rhoads (2020a) points out, it is not uncommon for land transactions to go unregistered to avoid taxation and stamp duty, which makes it difficult for the latest buyer to register the land transfer without having to submit to several penalties first. Therefore, the formal procedures for land transfer work if, and only if, every transaction is already registered properly with the state. If one transaction goes unregistered, it becomes much harder for the next buyer to register and apply for a land title, on top of which there is already a very little incentive to pay taxes.

Officials in Myanmar often assert that urban dwellers trade land without a title—either in the form of trading with an expired land title, or by not applying for a new title after purchasing a plot—as a means to evade taxation and are thus abnegating their duty as citizens (Aung Min Thein 2018; Khin Hsu Wai 2014). But a counter argument has been made to suggest that such a complex system of land title application and registration has deterred many from applying (Rhoads 2020a; Soe Nandar Linn 2015). While I agree with the current discussion that the procedural complexity and the potentially high cost involved in the land registration process explain why informal land trades are common, this explanation may be too general and overlooks specific local contexts as to why people trade without a land title. Indeed, trading without a land title means different things in different contexts. In Tagyi, I argue that trading land without a title has a specific meaning–not trading land with an expired title or applying for one after land sales, but rather trading land with a landslip, which is the focus of the

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[83] For discussion on the income tax and tax amnesties, see Bo Bo Nge (2020).

[84] Prior to 2017, the stamp duty in Mandalay was 2%. According to the MCDC Law 2002, the municipality is entitled to collect a 2% surcharge of the stamp duty, but this section was repealed in 2016, which means that the stamp duty for a property transfer in Mandalay only incurs the basic duty of 2%. In 2017, a 2% surcharge was added to the stamp duty for property transfers in Mandalay, which brings the total percentage to 4% (Law Amending the Myanmar Stamp Act 2017; and Lincoln Legal Services (Myanmar) Limited 2017).

following section on resettlement history and land allocation policy.

5.2 Land allocation policy during the resettlement

Tagyi is not a slum, or an informal settlement, which are often labelled as illegal and even criminal by the municipality. Despite most of the ward being still considered "land under government's disposal" due to lacking a legal title, Tagyi, along with other resettlement wards in the city, has never been considered illegal by the MCDC. Thus the situation of resettlement wards like Tagyi is similar yet meaningfully different from the situation of slums and other informal settlements. This distinction largely lies in the fact that Tagyi residents, despite having no legal title, are at least in possession of landslips which serve as proof of legal land occupancy, and which pave the foundation for the legal ambiguity of Tagyi.

According to Parts II-V of the Land Acquisition Act 1894, the state had to provide compensation to "all persons claiming an interest" during land acquisition. This definition of "persons interested" is broad enough to cover anyone – not only the people who have legal land titles – who are deemed to be interested in the land acquired. The 1894 Act, while providing guidelines on the calculation of monetary compensation, undermines its own purpose by giving the state considerable flexibility in deciding either to compensate in money or in lieu. This discretion was used by the then military government when it evicted and resettled the population along the Irrawaddy riverbank in 1995. No monetary compensation was ever given to the population affected; instead, each household was allocated a plot of land for resettlement on the south-eastern periphery.

In Tagyi, former residents along the riverbank were entitled to plots of land based on their family registration forms. Family registration is unrelated to land ownership and concerns only the registered residence of a family. Therefore, it did not matter if someone legally owned a piece of land, squatted there, rented it, or if one did not even reside along the riverbank before relocation. So long as a family was registered in one of the affected wards along the riverbank, that family could get a plot of land in Tagyi. For example, one resident shared that her family, despite all living together in Aya Daw along the riverbank, received two plots of land in Tagyi because her family had two registration forms—one for herself and her parents, and the other for her three older brothers. This suggests that while the family registration record provided a list of residents living along the riverbank, using it as a basis for land allocation created unfair results and undermined the importance of a legal title from the existing residents' perspective,

which in turn informed their pragmatic views on ownership legality.

Those resettled to Tagyi were not given legal titles with their allocated plots; instead, they were all given a landslip once they had been sent to the ward. The difference between a title and a landslip lies in their legal status. A land title, aka a land grant certificate in urban areas, is backed by the laws and regulations of Myanmar. In Mandalay, the MCDC is responsible for issuing land titles. Each land title is composed not merely of the title deed itself, but also an ownership record of the land and a land map drawn by a government surveyor. All land in Myanmar is owned by the Union state under the 2008 constitution, and therefore holders of a land title are grantees of the state and have to pay a land tax annually in return for that lease, which is usually 30 years in most cities. A land title holder can sell, rent, and transfer the land freely, like an owner.

While such a land grant system has been in place since the colonial era, landslips are purely a product of the military government. Landslips were created as a tool to facilitate urban expansion and resettlement while bypassing all the legal complications of granting a title under existing land laws (figure 14). Since the landslip is not a legal product, holding it does not confer possession of a legal title. But according to the spokesperson of the MCDC, landslips do have some official and even legal status in Mandalay, because they were issued by the military government. As the MCDC spokesperson emphasised to me, "every government has to honour what the previous government did".[85] Therefore, even though holders of landslips are not legal owners of their land, they can continue to live on their plots as long as they have their landslips, just like a person with a land title.

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[85] Interviewed on March 28, 2019.
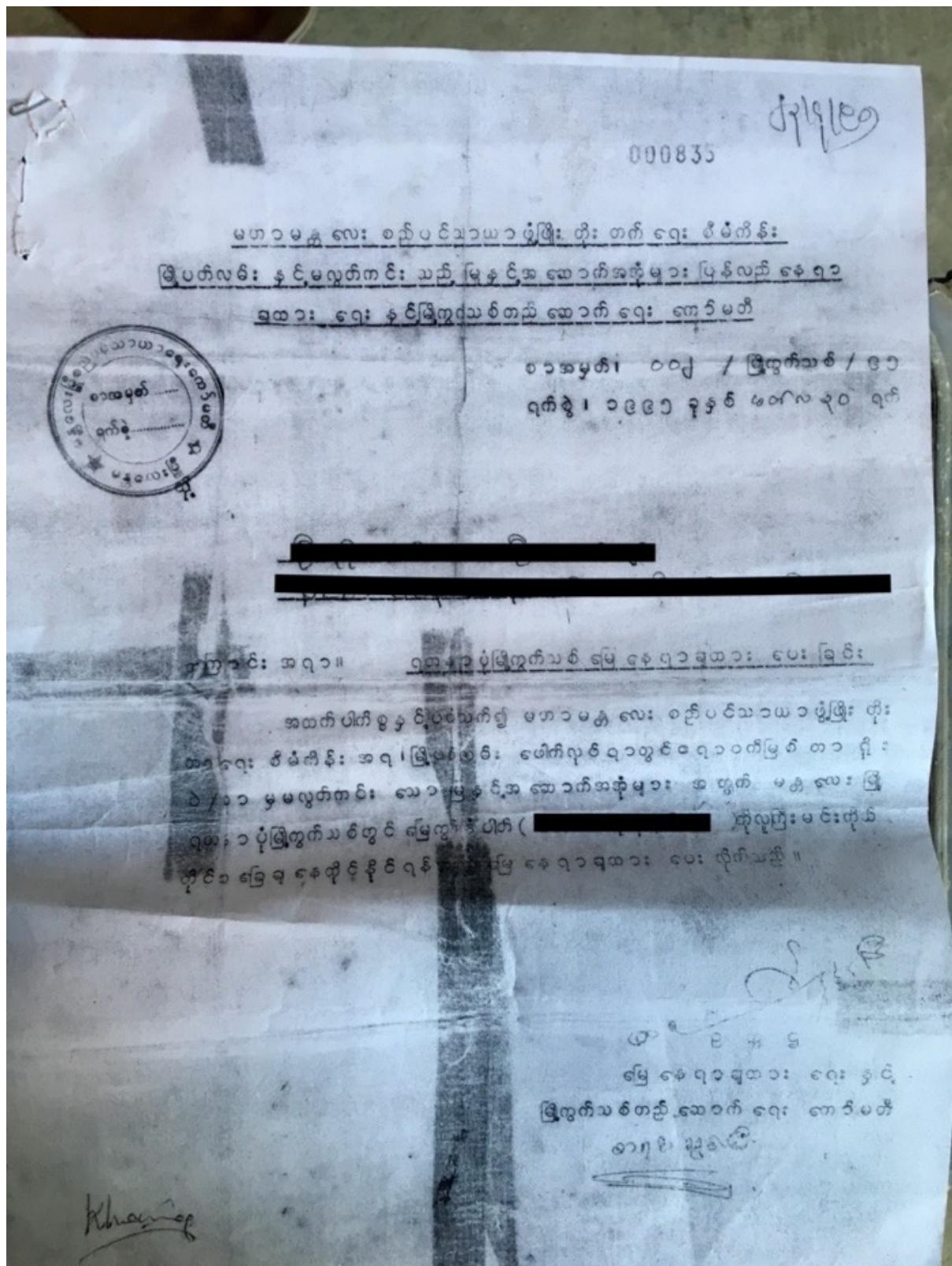
Figure 14 A copy of a landslip in Tagyi. The landslip indicated that because of the Strand Road expansion project under the Maha Mandalar Development Project, residents had to relocate from along the Irrawaddy riverbank to their allocated plots in Tagyi in 1995, and that these allotments were for residential occupation only. Each landslip has an individual file number and was signed by a military general with a "Land Relocation and New Town Building Committee" seal (photo by author).

Land laws in Myanmar, as Mark (2016, 445) argues, are stacked: "multiple layers of revoked and active laws layered on top of each other over time, often creating conflicts and

contradictions in the legal framework". While Mark's research has highlighted how the laws work as an inconsistent tool for providing legal protections, the case of Tagyi suggests another stacking problem in the country's land governance: the military government's creation of landslips which deviate from the legal framework has led to a situation where systems for land titles and landslips exist simultaneously in urban land governance, which creates a class of residents whose land is marked as government land but who are also protected from eviction under the rules of local land governance.

The issue of landslips is a classic example of what Roy (2012, 700) might call "the informalization of the state". In order to provide flexibility to change land use, determine zoning, and acquire land, Roy (2003a; 2012) argues that the state uses various informal practices, including deregulation and unmapping, in its favour. In this way, informality is used by the state as a tool for both accumulation and authority. However, I might add that, in the case of Tagyi, such informality in a way backfires, as it both provides the municipality with flexibility and limitations in land governance. In Mandalay, when the military government created the landslip as an ad hoc tool for land allocation, they made two things clear: landslip holders can only enjoy land use rights, and they must apply for (and buy) the corresponding land title using their landslip after the resettlement. For the military government, the instructions were a way to rectify the informality they had created with the resettlement that put the burden of formalising ownership on those who had been resettled. However, in reality, as of the time of my fieldwork, most residents in Tagyi were still holding onto landslips as their proof of land ownership, and many had been selling, renting, and transferring their land without a legal title.

In this sense, Tagyi has turned into a grey space in Yiftachel's (2009b, 89) sense: "positioned between the 'whiteness' of legality/approval/safety, and the 'blackness' of eviction/destruction/death". It is not entirely legal, but residents there do not face the constant threat of eviction, either, thanks to their landslips. Tagyi's greyness, however, is different from Yiftachel's example on ethnocratic cities in the sense that Tagyi's greyness is not entirely a product of state control, but rather a result of residents actively upholding such greyness through possession of their landslips. And it is under this context that we can see the residents' agency at work in an informal space.

Reasons for not applying for a land title

According to the residents, there were two main reasons why many had chosen not to apply for a land grant certificate.

First, many resettled in Tagyi said they could not afford the land grant certificate, particularly those who were daily wage labourers along the riverbank before the relocation. As a resident who had been relocated to Tagyi told me:

> "We were told to apply for the land grant, but we had no idea how much it cost. Some said it cost 5,000 kyats (12.5 USD), some said 10,000 kyats (25 USD). We had no money to apply for it. Only the rich could afford the grant. Us? No."

To put the expensiveness of land titles into perspective, Table 1 is an extract from the official fees scale from the CPLAD. For a resettled family in Tagyi to apply for a land grant would cost between 267,010 kyats (178 USD) to more than half a million kyats (338 USD) based on official rates, which is far too expensive for resettled households with monthly income of around 350,000 kyats (233 USD) to 450,000 kyats (300 USD). And even if one can pay the official fees, many residents said that the actual application would be even more expensive because tea money (bribes) is usually needed to move things along whenever a new officer becomes involved in the application, which makes the ultimate cost unpredictable. As one resident explained to me, if someone could not afford a land title in 1995, that person is unlikely to be able to afford it in 2019.

	Items	Fees (kyats)	Fees (USD)
1	Land grant application form	1,000	0.7
2	Form 105 (land map) application form	1,000	0.7
3	Form 106 (land history) application form	1,000	0.7
4	Service fees for new land grant application	10	0
5	Copy of Form 105 and Form 106	8,000	5
6	Land measurement for Form 105	16,000	11
7	Fees for conversion from government land	240,000 - 480,000[6]	160 - 320
Total		267,010 - 507,010	178 - 338

Table 1 Application fees for a land grant certificate (as of June 1, 2018).

Second, residents deliberately do not apply for a land grant because many do not see much difference between these official ownership documents and landslips. Residents told me that because the land allocation for resettlement was not based on land ownership, they were not motivated to apply for a land title that did not appear to provide any material benefits. More importantly, since only the landslip holder can apply for the land title of a plot, if a resident

holding a landslip never applies for a land grant certificate, that resident in effect blocks anyone else from ever claiming the land in question. Therefore, many considered their landslips to be secure enough documentation, even if they were less secure than a land title in theory:

> "Land grant is for ownership, land slip is also for ownership but is less formal, they are *ah-tu-tu-beh* (the same or interchangeable)."

The phrase ah-tu-tu-beh was used often whenever the difference between landslips and land grants came up during my fieldwork in Tagyi. Residents believed that landslips and land grant certificates are interchangeable because the municipality had never taken any measures to warn or even punish landslips holders. Many residents perceived this inaction of the municipality as giving them tacit approval to hold onto their landslips.

It is worth mentioning that in Mandalay, landslips are not exclusive to Tagyi. As mentioned in Chapter 4, one-third of the land in Mandalay was originally farmland that was converted into urban land between the late 1980s and early 2000s. These plots were all allocated to people, businesses, and institutions via landslips on the premise that those recipients would later convert their landslips into land titles. While there is no official data provided for the percentage of plots currently held through landslips in Mandalay, multiple official sources, including members of the MCDC and regional Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) lawmakers, confirmed to me that a substantial number of people were still relying on landslips–residents of other wards who probably did so for reasons similar to those given in Tagyi. This means a potentially vast amount of land in Mandalay that is officially categorised as "land under the government's disposal" but has in reality been inhabited by and traded among residents, possibly for decades. Thus, the issue of land ownership in Mandalay is not about informality, but the ambiguity in the formal/ informal binary.

I began this chapter with an extensive discussion on landslips detailing residents' opinions because they highlight the most fundamental feature of the land market in Tagyi: how land had been traded mostly without the use of legal titles. Following de Soto's (2000) claim of seeing titling as the solution to poverty and tenure insecurity, reviews on the relationship between land titles and tenure security have been mixed (Durand-Lasserve and Selod 2009; Payne 1997) and even point to the possibility of "market-based evictions" (UN Habitat 2007, 126). Despite the uncertain effects of land titles, Varley (2017) suggests people still tend to seek them because evicting those who possess one appears to be more difficult. However, perhaps the real question for those who are considering whether to obtain one is not what titles can or cannot do for them,

but whether they can get one in the first place. In debates on the effectiveness of formalisation and titling, scholars have long noted that the process of obtaining a legal title can be challenging and costly, which bars many, especially the poor, from getting legal recognition of their landownership (Bejaminsen and Lund 2003).

In the case of Tagyi, residents considered land titles both too expensive and not worth the time and money needed to obtain them. Their pragmatic view on land titles and the issue of legality suggests that the lengthy process of application has deterred many residents from obtaining them because they did not consider the attendant legal protections to be sufficient (see Choplin and Dessie 2017). As demonstrated in this section, landholding in Tagyi does not include a legal land right, but a recognisable land use benefit. Those who received the landslips believed they were the owners of their land. This belief had the effect of making their land documented and visible to trade, leading to the creation of a land market that facilitated land-based accumulation and speculation on the outskirts of Mandalay.

5.3 Exploring the informal land market in Tagyi

Most land in Tagyi, according to de Soto's (2000) arguments in *The Mystery of Capital*, should be considered "dead"—that is, it is land without a legal title that should be revived by the official system and turned into liquid capital that people can benefit from. However, as Li (2014) reminds us, the commodification of land is enabled by different ambiguities such as insecure land rights, plots without titles, and a lack of registration. This is exactly what happened in Tagyi: land trades were made possible despite the absence of legal titles. Land trades in the ward, despite being informal, have their own procedures that serve to formalise the informal. They follow a set of local rules that mimic the official ones.

Even though many land transactions in Myanmar ignore legal procedures, both urban and rural residents have used a variety of documents to support their informal land ownership. Documents such as land tax receipts and farmer booklets are used in rural areas (Boutry et al. 2017; Faxon 2017), whereas in urban areas residents hold onto previous sales contracts for their land to establish themselves as the latest link in a chain of ownership (Boutry et al. 2016; Rhoads 2020a). In the case of Tagyi, the landslip a resident received for the resettlement is the single most important document supporting their ownership claim in informal land trades, and it is usually the first page in a lawyer's land transfer folder—like the one handed to U Kyu for inspection at the beginning of the chapter.

Land transfers in Tagyi also involve different informal institutions to provide more security to the trading parties, allowing buyers to check the ownership status of land when there is no official registration record available. First, *pweza* (brokers) are usually involved in land transactions.[86] The brokers' duties are not limited solely to connecting potential buyers and sellers; perhaps more importantly, they often bear the duty of checking (as best they can) whether the seller's ownership is "clean". In Tagyi, this would mean the broker often inspects the seller's landslips, visits the plot, and asks the neighbours and even the 100-household leaders in the vicinity if they have heard of any disputes involving the land in question.

Second, while a lawyer's involvement is not a must, most buyers and sellers prefer to hire one to handle the land trades. The lawyer is chiefly responsible for preparing the contracts. While these land trades are informal, trading parties always use official sales contracts purchased from a lawyer's office, which come with revenue stamps meant to indicate that a stamp duty has been paid—though the amount on the stamp does not usually match what would really be owed on the property in question (figure 15). The lawyer is also responsible for preparing a general power of attorney to transfer the land without paying taxes.[87] While the involvement of the lawyers or the documents they prepare do not make the sales with landslips legal, a lawyer's presence and the contracts they prepare do make the informal trades look more formal, and provide more confidence to the trading parties.

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[86] In Myanmar, given that formal channels are not easily accessible to the general public, much research is conducted to explore the roles of brokers in political, social, legal, and cultural aspects. For discussion on the roles of brokers as middlemen in helping people navigate formal space, see Brac de la Perrière (2014) and Thawnghmung (2019). For discussion on the role of the broker as an informal justice provider in the absence of formal justice in Myanmar's land system, see Rhoads (2020). For discussion on the role of the broker in the context of Myanmar's rule of law framework, see Simion (2021).

[87] In Myanmar, it is a common practice for the trading parties to sign a general power of attorney to transfer land, on top of signing a sales contract. The general power of attorney is used to transfer the management power over all property from the principal to an agent. It is used as a tool to evade tax as the transaction entails a transfer of management power, rather than the property itself. For more discussion on the use of the power of attorney and informal land trades in Myanmar, see Myat Nyein Aye (2015); Myat Nyein Aye (2016); Phyo Wai Kyaw (2016); and Zay Yar Lin (2016a, 2016b).
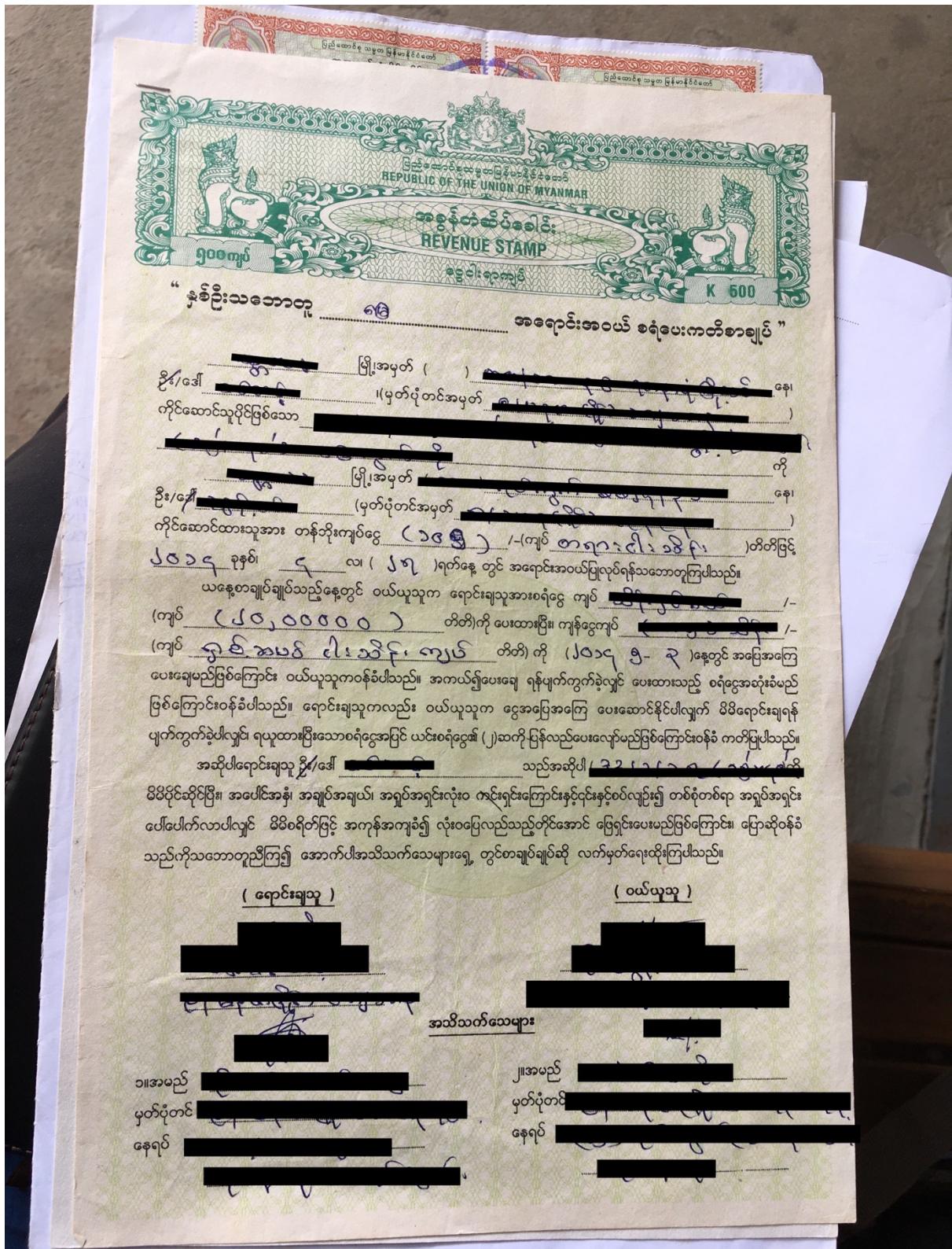
Figure 15 A land sales contract in Tagyi. The land sales price was 2 million kyats (1,333 USD). According to the relevant laws, the stamp duty should be 40,000 kyats (27 USD), but the stamp printed on the contract was only 500 kyats (0.3 USD), which suggests the use of a stamped land contract in this instance was performative (Photo by author).

Third, the land contracts are always signed at the ward administration office, with the presence of U Kyu, the ward administrator. The ward administrator's role is to check if the lawyer has

prepared all the necessary documents, including the landslip, the sales contract, and the power of attorney contract. Then the ward administrator asks the relevant 100-household leaders to declare there are no known land disputes over the plot being sold, and the trading parties sign the sales contract in front of the ward administrator to finalise the deal. As was hinted at the beginning of this chapter, U Kyu's presence and the checking of documents are both rather performative. He also intentionally did not sign on any of the papers he reviewed, even if his betel-juice fingerprints sometimes betrayed him. U Kyu insisted that he should not sign his name on any such contract because he knew these land sales were not fully recognised by the MCDC, and for that reason he did not want to leave any written record of his presence.

In addition to the above steps, sometimes the buyer would go to the Land Registration Office of the Department of Agriculture Land Management and Statistics (DALMS) to register their new general power of attorney contract. During interviews, some buyers said they did so even though they knew it did not amount to a land deed registration, in the hope that it would provide extra security against the seller in case of a future ownership dispute.

Literature on property has detailed how residents without legal titles can use different tactics and institutions to formalise their informal landholdings, making themselves more visible to the state as legitimate occupants, if not landholders (see Appadurai 2001; Chatterji 2012; Lund and Rachman 2016; Nurman and Lund 2016). But while these discussions often focus on slums and informal settlements, the situation in Tagyi is substantially different, as the ward is neither. Accordingly, the land transfer procedures outlined above are instead intended to provide more confidence and security for the trading parties in Tagyi. The residents I interviewed shared the view that the municipality would not evict them even though the legality of their landholding and the land transfers were ambiguous at best; they also insisted a land title would not help them avoid eviction by the state. After all, even legal owners of land along the riverbank had been evicted and resettled to Tagyi. But in practice, these informal procedures help make the ward look more legitimate and established. And although the municipality does not recognise these trades as legal, it also tends to ignore their existence, providing tacit approval in the eyes of the sellers and buyers that also facilitates land speculation and accumulation within the ward.

Prices, sellers, and buyers

Although land in Tagyi became transferable and commodified in the course of resettlement, there was initially little outside demand for it. Those who were forced to relocate to Tagyi

recalled to me how rural the ward was when they arrived and how land prices remained low in the years that followed. One land broker told me "a plot [of 60x40 square feet] in Tagyi was sold at 30,000 kyats (75 USD) in 1995", while a resident remembered buying his 40x60 square-foot plot for 80,000 kyats (200 USD) in 1996, a price which he considered at the time to be the cheapest he could afford in Mandalay, where the price for a similar plot in a more central location would easily cost three times as much.

It was only in the late 1990s and early 2000s that land valuations began to seriously rise. Under the SPDC, economic liberalisation policies allowed those engaged in illegal businesses to find new channels where they could direct their illegal gains: foreign exchange, banks, and the land market. More and more money from illegal drug and gem sales was poured into the land market in big cities like Yangon and Mandalay, sending land prices soaring to levels well beyond the reach of many residents (Mya Maung 1994; Thant Myint U 2006). That sharp increase in land prices has led to what Mya Maung (1994) described as the second wave of relocation to the outskirts in the 1990s—the first wave being the forced evictions by the junta.

In the absence of better alternatives, land has become a popular investment option for those who can afford it. In Tagyi, land buyers usually are from outside of the ward and typically are interested in properties due to their speculative value. Those unable to afford the exorbitant land prices in central Mandalay travelled to the periphery and, like other resettlement wards, Tagyi began to gain a reputation for its ample supply of relatively cheap land. Many residents, especially land brokers, still have vivid memories of what they often referred to as the "crazy old days" of land sales.

"In 1997, land that used to be 100,000 kyats (250 USD) became 300,000 kyats (750 USD). In 2007 it increased to a million kyats (2,500 USD) and in 2010 it rose further to 50 million kyats (125,000 USD) and even 60 million kyats (150,000 USD), and in 2015 the price decreased a bit, but was still very high," U Kyu, the ward administrator in Tagyi, recalled.[88]

Amid rapidly rising prices, the informal land market helped residents to sell more quickly and buyers to speculate. Without the need to go through onerous legal procedures, land trades in

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[88] In his research on land value in Mandalay, Hla Kyaw (2010) found that the land value in Tagyi was high compared to other wards on the outskirts, despite being in "the extreme periphery of Mandalay" (75). Hla Kyaw argues that Tagyi's high land price is a result of land speculation in the ward, which was motivated by its proximity to industrial zone (1). It appears that Hla Kyaw's narrative is similar to the official one (see Khin Hsu Wai 2014). But local brokers disagreed with the official reasoning and Hla Kyaw's (2010) assertion, because few industries were interested in in the industrial zone (1) due to its lack of services.

Tagyi could be completed within days.[89] This gave poorer residents a fast means of making a substantial financial gain they could never earn from their daily wage jobs.

Since most land sales are done informally without registration, the MCDC does not have data on land prices, nor do they try to keep track of them. While there is no reliable official data on market prices for land, accounts from Tagyi residents and land brokers suggest prices in Tagyi are determined by the following factors: size, location and building materials. During interviews, I tried to gather information on land sales and prices from residents. While some of them were willing to answer, most were unwilling to talk about land prices, or only provided me with a rough estimate. Nonetheless, one message was clear: land prices in Tagyi had increased a lot since the resettlement (Table 2). For example, one could buy a plot of 30x40 square feet with a concrete house for 500,000 kyats (1,250 USD) in 2005, but five years later the same amount would only fetch a bamboo house half that size.

Year	Land size (sq ft.)	Main/ side road	Building	Land sales price (kyats)
1998	30x40	Side road	Bamboo	40,000
1998	60x40	Side road	Concrete	350,000
1999	37x40	Side road	Bamboo	65,000
2000	30x40	Side road	Bamboo	300,000
2000	30x40	Side road	Concrete	500,000
2001	30x40	Side road	Bamboo	150,000
2003	15x40	Side road	Bamboo	100,000
2005	30x40	Side road	Bamboo	240,000
2005	15x40	Side road	Bamboo	500,000
2005	30x40	Main road	Concrete	1,500,000
2006	25x40	Side road	Bamboo	800,000
2007	60x40	Side road	Bamboo	30,000,000
2008	30x40	Side road	Bamboo	600,000
2008	30x40	Main road	Bamboo	13,000,000
2008	30x40	Main road	Bamboo	35,000,000
2009	30x40	Side road	Bamboo	600,000

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[89] In 2020, the World Bank issued a report about doing business in Myanmar stating that it takes 65 days to complete a legal land transfer. While the report only uses Yangon as an example, based on my experience in Mandalay, a legal land transfer can take around two to three months. This lengthy process is another reason why some buyers would prefer to give up a legal title in pursuit of making a quick profit from speculation.

2009	15x40	Side road	Concrete	700,000
2012	15x40	Side road	Bamboo	12,500,000
2013	15x40	Side road	Concrete	7,500,000
2014	15x40	Side road	Wooden	17,000,000
2015	15x40	Side road	Bamboo	12,000,000
2016	60x40	Side road	Concrete	80,000,000
2017	15x40	Side road	Bamboo	12,000,000
2017	15x40	Side road	Concrete	14,000,000
2017	30x40	Side road	Concrete	30,000,000
2017	60x40	Side road	Wooden	65,000,000

Table 2 Land sales prices in Tagyi, 1998-2017.

Starting from the 2000s, those buying land and moving to the ward were no longer poor migrants but instead urban dwellers who had already lived in Mandalay for a while and were looking for cheaper land and bigger plots in which to live and invest. These urban dwellers, who become the second generation of land buyers in Tagyi, were well off enough to purchase land from those who had been resettled to Tagyi as well as residents who had bought plots in the early years after resettlement.

Thus, land buyers in Tagyi became increasingly wealthy, even including some professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers, who preferred a large but expensive plot in Tagyi to a comparatively cramped apartment in central Mandalay. By the time of my fieldwork these buyers, who represent the ward's new middle class, had begun acquiring more land, especially near the ward's centre, while the working poor who remained in the neighbourhood had been forced to cluster by side roads on the ward's eastern side, nearer to the slums. Most plots in Tagyi had already changed hands multiple times over the previous two decades, and many residents who had originally been resettled in Tagyi were either no longer living there or had already moved within the ward multiple times seeking cheaper land.

This is a situation in which, as U Bhant said at the beginning of Chapter 1, the rich are "outsmarting" the poor. The poorer residents are also emotionally displaced. They, like U Bhant, constantly felt like they were being taken advantage of while also treating it as natural that whoever had money should be able to buy land. But this idea, which works as an economic principle, embodies the symbolic violence in the ward's land market.

Following Ribot and Peluso (2003), I argue that what Tagyi residents are trading when they

buy and sell land is not legal rights to it per se, but rather a legally ambiguous title with the motivation of obtaining access—specifically, a plot of land located within the city. They are purchasing the location of the land despite knowing that they have only limited rights at best.[90] Many Tagyi residents believe that living in the city, even on its outskirts, provides them with more and better opportunities for work, education, and health care, and these are the benefits they seek (Ribot and Peluso 2003).

5.4 Land-based speculation and accumulation

Here, I need to explain two concepts before moving forward: accumulation by dispossession, and symbolic violence.

David Harvey (2004) characterises the transformation of land from a non-capitalist use to commodified private property as a process of "accumulation by dispossession". By this, Harvey means to update Marx's capitalist "primitive accumulation" to describe the crisis of over-accumulation which leads to spatial expansion across different spectra: North and South, core and periphery, urban and rural. Such over-accumulation leads to the production of new and surplus products. In this sense, new assets, such as real estate, are developed specifically to offer a spatial-temporal fix for capital over accumulation.

This creation of new assets, however, does not happen without violence. As Hall (2013) points out, accumulation promotes the dispossession of the public (and typically the poor) of their land and wealth over time and space through the use of numerous extra-economic techniques. Extra-economic here means land acquisitions that involve the use of legal or political power and/or force (or the threat thereof), often contrasted with economic force, which is seen as "voluntary" in the sense that people are not coerced or obliged to sell. On an urban scale, accumulation by dispossession has been observed in the processes of gentrification and urban development (Banerjee-Guha 2010; Ghertner 2015; Harms 2011; Zhang 2010), the transfer of public land into private sectors (Mbiba 2017), as well as in the demolition and eviction of slums (Datta 2012; Doshi 2013; N. Smith 1996).

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[90] Nielsen (2008) has made a similar argument about people buying land for its location but not for legal recognition in his thesis on house building in Mozambique. In my research, while I also see the same argument applying to the case of Tagyi, I distinguish Tagyi from Nielsen's field site in peri-urban Maputo, as those relocated to Tagyi shared a strong sense of entitlement because they saw their allocated land as compensation from the government, for which reason they did not believe the municipality would evict them. In contrast, in Nielsen's research he does not look into the reasons behind his informants' confidence in not being evicted.

However, the boundaries between economic and extra-economic forces driving accumulation and dispossession can become blurred (Akram-Lodhi 2007; Woods 2020), meaning that the two are often interrelated in how they facilitate dispossession. Moreover, while the distinction between voluntary and coercive can be made readily on paper, it is frequently difficult to make in practice. In exploring accumulation in urban settings, much of the literature on urbanisation and dispossession has focused on the role of the state in the Global South as a land grabber itself and/or as a land broker which helps businesses and developers to take land from the poor (Goldman 2011; Levien 2011; Mbiba 2017; Zhang 2010).This ties to the second concept I would like to discuss here, symbolic violence.

Symbolic violence is the feeling of being out of place and anxious. According to Bourdieu (1991), symbolic violence occurs when individuals who are dominated internalise dominant beliefs, values, and rules without questioning the uneven power relations that produce them. It is "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 167). This is because people who feel this way are both objectively unable to take the right actions (because they do not have the resources to do so) and subjectively obligated to, in the sense of recognising the rules of difference by which they are excluded and dominated. Such symbolic battles obscure the systemic roots of personal sorrow, perpetuating structural injustice and violence.

I would argue what Harvey (2004) terms "accumulation by dispossession" or what Zhang (2010) describes as "accumulation by displacement" offers a useful analytical lens to understand how capitalist accumulation leads to land speculation or new grounds of enclosures on the outskirts of Mandalay. At the same time, the discussion so far has focused on areas subjected to public and private development projects (Desai and Loftus 2013; Harms 2016; Kan and Chen 2021; Levien 2012; Zhang 2010), or in peri-urban areas where agricultural land was changed into urban land (Goldman 2011). However, land speculation in Tagyi is motivated by neither, because neither exists. Rather, land speculation is motivated by general anticipation about the future: Mandalay will continue to progress, its population will grow, and land prices will rise. Thus, land sales in Tagyi are not simply abstract financial investment—residents and buyers are also speculating on the future of Mandalay. And while land ownership in Tagyi may be legally ambiguous, this does not stop people from buying and selling land in the ward.

Ko Tin is one such person. Ko Tin was born and raised in the north of Mandalay, in a slum near Mandalay Hill, and moved to Tagyi as a boy when his father bought a plot of land from a settler in 1995. Now in his early 40s, Ko Tin, who is working as a jade merchant and a

moneylender, owns two plots of land in the ward—one was inherited from his father, and the other, which is just opposite to the original plot, he bought himself around 2004 from a family who had been resettled in the ward due to the Strand Road development project along the Irrawaddy riverbank. It was around this time that Ko Tin began buying up and selling smaller plots in Tagyi as he saw that the land prices continue to rise.[91] He made a fortune out of these land sales.

During my fieldwork, Ko Tin was working with a land broker to buy another plot of land in Tagyi. Ko Tin thought this might be his last investment in the land market for a while, and complained to me that land prices had risen too quickly—the land in question was expected to cost up to 35 million kyats (23,333 USD). But this was a purchase that he wanted to make not for himself, but for his children:

> "I can receive rent from the houses and save that money for my children. **[Me: How old are they?]** They're in elementary school... the international one… I need to think ahead, and land is a good option. It's like planting trees for your children now so when they're old enough, they can enjoy the fruits."

Ko Tin said his bid was quite competitive and he was confident that the family who lived there would sell their plot because they were facing financial difficulties. "My money can help them, but they need to sell their land in return," said Ko Tin before stepping outside of the office to make another phone call to his land broker. "Every deal is a fair deal. I'm an honest man."

When I asked Ko Tin if he had applied for land titles for his two plots, he explained, like most of the residents quoted in section 5.2, that he saw no need because he already had the landslips.

My talks with Ko Tin occurred relatively early in my research into Tagyi's land market, and it soon became apparent that the other land buyers I met in the ward were not really purchasing a sanctioned land claim (Lund 2016) *per se*, but rather usage rights for an urban area that would give them access to better opportunities for health, education, and employment, as well as a brighter future they hoped would ensure an "ability to benefit" (Ribot and Peluso 2003). That was why, despite the lack of a legal title, he had already spent millions of kyats on land purchases and planned to do so again to secure a plot for his young children.

Ko Tin's story can serve as an example of the mentality prevalent among wealthier land buyers

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[91] I later realised that the so-called "buying up" did not actually refer to Ko Tin buying the land; rather, he ran a money lending business, and whenever a debtor could not repay him, he confiscated their land and resold it (see Chapter 6).

in Tagyi—how they view land as an investment for themselves and their children. They are not developers or the state; they are normal residents who are simply wealthy enough to pour some money into the land market as an investment. Buyers like Ko Tin consider themselves fair and honest people who are helping less fortunate sellers. Yet even in the absence of a physical threat to force poorer residents to sell their land, a form of coercion is visible when considering the obvious imbalance of economic power.

Other land buyers whom I interviewed also acknowledged there was a difference in wealth between themselves and most sellers, who tended to be relatively poor. While not every land buyer owned multiple plots, they shared Ko Tin's expectation that land prices in the ward would continue to rise, for which reason they bought property in Tagyi when they could afford it. They all told me prices in Tagyi were higher than other wards on the outskirts, but added that the area looked more developed than the others thanks to residents' efforts to make it more liveable. They also believed that the ward was "quiet", by which they meant there was little expectation the municipality or a large real estate group would want to develop it. This gave them confidence that they would be able to hold onto their land and pass it on to the next generation.

When Cross (2014) writes about land speculation induced by the development of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Southern India, he acknowledges people who are engaging in a speculative market are speculating on different things: some are merely speculating on rising land prices, while some are speculating on a better future promised by the development of a new SEZ. The same can be said of Tagyi even in the absence of any such development nearby. While there were some speculators who only sought to generate quick returns and quickly left Tagyi, most of those who had been buying and selling land in the area were people who wanted to live in the ward. Their motivations on "intimate exclusion" (D. Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011, 145-166) went beyond pure profit, and included goals like securing a place to live for future generations. This is important because neighbourhood speculators like Ko Tin were not merely predators prowling Tagyi's land market; they also took up duties in developing the ward through donations related to various local affairs.

In Tagyi, as in many places in Myanmar, potential buyers do not contact potential sellers alone; they always hire a local land broker for each deal. Different land brokers I interviewed initially emphasised how they merely connected buyers and sellers, verified the land ownership status of the seller, and helped the two parties reach an acceptable price. While these assertions echo the findings of existing studies on brokers in Myanmar (Brac de la Perrière 2014; Rhoads

2020a), they omit the covert roles land brokers play in setting market prices. It was only after a few visits with U Aung, the local elder and land broker who was introduced at the beginning of this chapter, that he mentioned his role in setting prices (probably because he had decided I was not actually a potential land buyer).

During one interview, U Aung recalled his first deal: he pushed the seller to accept a lower price: the family selling the land had asked for 500,000 kyats (1,250 USD) but U Aung pushed the price down to 400,000 (1,000 USD) kyats, telling the family that even 400,000 kyats was "higher than the market price for land with a title". U Aung's implication was that the family should accept the offer because they could only provide a land slip. His motivation for doing so was to earn the difference between the offer and bid prices, in addition to his 3% commission, through an arrangement he had been taught by U Kyu.

The reality was that the buyer had agreed to pay 500,000 kyats with no expectation of receiving any money back from U Aung if the actual sales price was any lower. Thus, the lower U Aung pushed the sales price, the greater the share of the 500,000 kyats he could take for himself. [92]

"I earned it—the price difference, that happened because I worked hard to set up a negotiated land price. That required a lot of talking, you know," U Aung told me in a reassuring tone, as if he needed to convince me of his hard work to justify the practice. That information asymmetry, together with the motivation to press for a wide margin between the sales price and the previously agreed-upon buying price, that allowed local brokers to get rich from land trades in Tagyi. From speaking to several land brokers in the ward, I later learned that they typically ploughed their commissions back into land speculation—either by buying more plots, or building new houses on their own land to enhance its value. But setting this aside, the price manipulation enabled by such information asymmetry – one of the key features of land sales in Tagyi – reveals something important: land sellers are almost always at a disadvantage.

In her research on the rising middle class and spatial politics in China, Zhang (2010) argues that evictions and displacement in China are increasingly related to capitalist accumulation, as real estate developers acquire more and more land on which to build new residential areas and gated communities. The result is that many poorer, typically working class residents are forced to move out to the peripheral areas of a town where the gaze of developers has not yet reached and land is cheaper. Zhang's research echoes Levien's (2017) research in India, which suggests

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[92] U Aung's story here reinforces what U Kyu said at the beginning of this chapter, that having a title or not does not seem to affect the land price. But when communicating with the sellers, brokers often told the sellers their land was worth less because of lack of legal title.

how the role of the state has changed from a direct force of dispossession to that of a land broker for real estate developers which helps them disenfranchise the poor. In the case of Tagyi, while we can observe a process of accumulation by displacement similar to that described by Zhang (2010), the process is not for the sake of real estate development, and is not actively facilitated by the state (Levien 2017). The land speculation in Tagyi is motivated by wealthier residents' desire to obtain land before prices rise in order to secure an investment or place to live for their children. As Chapters 6 and 7 will show, this one significant consequence of this behaviour is that the ward has become increasingly stratified. But the most direct effect of this intensified commodification of land is the displacement of poorer residents by the richer, and even by the local land broker living in the same ward, making the exclusion an intimate matter (D. Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011).

5.5 Displacement

By the time I arrived in 2018, the pace of land sales in Tagyi had dropped from "three to four deals a day" to "once a week", according to U Kyu. Prices continued to increase, but the land being sold had usually been subdivided into smaller plots of 15x40 square feet. The land market in Tagyi grown quiet, U Aung said: "the people are no longer playing with the land market, and that's no fun". He compared the old days of more frequent sales to "swimming in a pool of cash" , in contrast with the relative drought being experienced when we spoke. Yet U Kyu also recognised that "one deal a week" did not mean Tagyi's land market was dead; just reflected how the land market had been "really crazy" before.

As the pace of land sales in Tagyi slowed and stabilised, a related phenomenon emerged: the poorer residents became concentrated in side roads, with more living in subdivided plots on the eastern part of the ward closest to the slums just outside the city limits; meanwhile, better off residents usually lived on main roads and typically owned bigger plots with concrete buildings. This was not reflective of any sort of design inherent to the resettlement, but rather a natural outcome of land speculation within the ward that led to spatial stratification (Zhang 2010).

In her research on state violence in Myanmar, Rhoads (2018) argues that the state uses mechanisms such as eviction and forced relocation to impose control over land and people. Under these state practices, the poor are particularly vulnerable to displacement and marginalisation. While Rhoads is concerned with the application of state force to displace

urban residents, the situation in Tagyi suggests that those excluded by the state's practices continue to be displaced even after their eviction and relocation. Among a growing number of urban studies focused land in Myanmar, I choose to focus on the formation, transformation and operations of an informal land market post-resettlement. During my fieldwork, I discovered that forced resettlement is not the end of displacement, but rather its beginning. Many of the working poor who were relocated from the riverbank to the city outskirts experienced their first displacement during resettlement, and then a second displacement when they sold their land.

In principle, an increase in land values can benefit all landowners in a given area, but in reality this is rarely the case, because the need to purchase another plot of land can eliminate any gains from the previous sale. As Mitchell (2008, 262) argues, in this sort of situation, "only those holding property not for their own needs but speculation would benefit". This reality is reflected in the story U Bhant and Daw Ning. Their story is a long one, but it captures the struggles of the poorer residents in Tagyi in numerous respects, and so is worth telling.

Pouring water on the sand

When I met them U Bhant and Daw Ning had been married for over 20 years and had four daughters, all of whom were unmarried and lived together with them. The couple married in 1994 and at the time both worked at a sand brick factory, whose owner sold them a small plot of 20x10 square feet located just behind the factory near the Irrawaddy riverbank—the site of their first home. However, less than six months after spending all of their money – 50,000 kyats (125 USD), including loans from relatives and friends – the couple was forced to relocate to Tagyi. There, they received a 60x40 square-foot plot next to a muddy sideroad close to a main street.

U Bhant and Daw Ning, however, were not able to keep that plot for long. They lost their jobs because of the relocation, on top of which they still owed money to relatives and friends from their previous land purchase. These financial pressures soon forced the couple to sell their allocated land via a land broker only three years after their forced relocation, at a price of 70,000 kyats (175 USD). They initially asked for around 80,000 kyats (200 USD) but were talked down by the broker, who told them "that's above the market price and would scare the buyer away". After selling their allocated plot, the couple and their children then tried to move back to the riverbank, but were caught by police officers stationed there and sent back to Tagyi, where they had no place to live. Knowing they could not afford anything near the riverbank or

within the city proper, U Bhant and Daw Ning accepted that they should remain in Tagyi. They bought a plot of 40x30 square feet near 57ᵗʰ street from a fellow settler for 40,000 kyats (100 USD). At that time, U Bhant and Daw Ning believed that they would settle down on that plot and raise their daughters there.

However, in 2003, the family came under strain from financial difficulties and sold the land for 220,000 kyats (550 USD). They then moved to a plot of land behind a local factory near 55ᵗʰ street, where they paid monthly rent of 20,000 (50 USD) kyats. As the sole breadwinner, U Bhant worked as a part-time daily wage labourer at the factory during the day, and as the on-site security guard at night; meanwhile, Daw Ning stayed home to take care of their four daughters, all of whom were by now school age. At that time, the family could barely afford their daily expenses and cover the rent, let alone save up the kind of money needed to repurchase their old plot. But there was hope: U Bhant and Daw Ning believed that once their daughters were old enough, they could start working and contribute to the family's savings.

Yet in 2015, just a few months after their eldest daughter began waiting tables at a nearby restaurant, the factory owner sold his land to a businessman, forcing U Bhant, Daw Ning and their daughters to move yet again. This time they moved to the plot where they were living when I met them, paying monthly rent of 40,000 kyats (27 USD) to live on the 40x30 square-foot plot. By this point three of their four daughters were working, with the youngest still attending a college in the north of Mandalay—a fact that made U Bhant and Daw Ning quite proud, because their other daughters had dropped out of school early to support the family.

When we met the family of six had a monthly household income of around 400,000 kyats (267 USD)—a big improvement that was made possible by their three working daughters. But buying a plot of land remained a distant dream. During one of our interviews, U Bhant mentioned he had heard that a plot of land in Tagyi about as large as the one they were renting that faced a side road and which came with a bamboo house could easily cost 30 million kyats (20,000 USD). He emphasised that "All land sales are paid for in cash—the first instalment as a deposit, and the second [instalment] after signing the sales contract. You must have all the cash ready when you want to buy a plot."

He paused to take a sip of hot tea, then added, "there was another problem":

> "The other thing is… the land prices increase too fast and too much. Rich people pour money into the market. Our income can never catch up with the increase in land prices. That's why we can never purchase land. All our efforts to save money … is like *pouring*

water on the sand.[93] We don't get anything in return."

During interviews, the couple frequently blamed their own short-sightedness, much like Daw Ning had. She had believed it was inevitable for poor residents like herself to sell their plots and be "outsmarted" by brokers and wealthy residents, a scenario exemplifying the symbolic violence in the ward that had been sugar-coated under the guise of voluntary market transactions:

> "We were not smart enough… we couldn't see beyond the grass, sand and muddy roads here. Tagyi was just empty farmland. But we were also so poor at that time, and had to sell whatever we had to support family. We didn't even argue with the broker. We wanted to get money fast. When everyone was relocated here [in 1995], even the old ones believed that this place was worthless because it's so far away. If you ask around… ask those who sold their land early, they will all be regretting it, like us."

Daw Ning's recollections reflect how it was impossible for her and many others who were forcibly relocated to anticipate that plots of land in a resettlement ward like Tagyi might one day be worth tens of millions of kyats. None had ever visited the ward or even Pyigyidagon township before the resettlement, and they saw no potential in the outskirts. And because many residents came under financial strain due to the resettlement, they tended to ask for less when selling and did not bother to negotiate much or at all with land brokers or buyers. Effectively, the prices asked for by settlers after the resettlement reflected their dim expectations for Tagyi and their own futures there, and was not a thorough evaluation of the land's value. As U Bhant added:

> "I think our first land is now worth over 50 million or even 60 million kyats (33,333-40,000 USD). And we sold it for 70,000 kyats (175 USD) [in 1998]. Imagine how much richer we could be if we held onto that land. And the second plot we had here [of 40x30 square feet], is worth a lot more now, like 30 million kyats (20,000 USD), I believe, and we sold it for 220,000 kyats (550 USD) [in 2003]. Each time we sold land we made some money, small money, but it has become increasingly impossible to use that small amount of money to buy another plot of land here. We can never win."

As we were chatting, U Bhant and Daw Ning's youngest daughter returned from school. The other three daughters were all still at work. The youngest daughter was curious what we were talking about, but she kept silent and sat near the back of the room, sometimes looking towards

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[93] "Pour water on the sand" is a proverb in Myanmar meaning wasted efforts.

us, sometimes glancing outside the windows. After a while she said she was going to meet a friend, and after she left Daw Ning whispered to me, as if her daughter might still somehow overhear her: "If we didn't sell our land early, if we were smarter, we could have left her and other girls more money and a better future."

U Bhant and Daw Ning's story was typical among the working poor in Tagyi who were forced to sell their land for money. Following on from the earlier discussion on access, this market-induced displacement might be reconceptualised as "an access failure" (Ribot 2014). When he sold his plot at a low price, U Bhant did not have access to information about the land market, which was why Daw Ning said they and other locals had been outsmarted by wealthy residents and brokers. Land brokers took advantage of this vulnerability by convincing the poor family to accept a so-called "market price" that was significantly lower than what the buyer was actually willing to pay, then pocketing the difference. Thus, the land market in Tagyi failed the poor not because they lacked land titles (cf de Soto 2000) but because of two asymmetries: information asymmetry, in which land brokers controlled vital information; and financial asymmetry, in which wealthy speculators able to afford the rising land prices enjoy substantial leverage over sellers. This demonstrates how displacement occurs on the ground in ways that are largely ignored by existing research on land in Myanmar. The land market is, as U Bhant said, a game the poor simply cannot win. No matter how hard they work, save and dream, rising land prices will always outstrip the amount they can make in a single lifetime.

The above stories shared by residents about Tagyi's land market show that those who were displaced by the state – those who had to relocate to the outskirts because they lived in an area designated for use in a government project– continued to be displaced after resettlement, only by local land brokers and speculators instead. This subsequent displacement is due to their disadvantaged position relative to local land brokers and speculators, who have the information and financial resources necessary to persuade poorer residents to sell their land at a lower price and either move elsewhere in Tagyi or leave the ward. In telling these stories, this chapter raises the question of how the urban poor can be displaced while engaging in "voluntary" land sales. It rejects the claim that "it only makes sense to talk about a 'grab' when land is expropriated using means other than voluntary market purchase" (Levien 2012, 941), and argues that in a situation where the relocated working poor are under financial hardship and duress, their ability to negotiate for reasonable land sales prices is reduced and is subject to manipulation by local land brokers, who use so-called "market prices" to persuade sellers to accept an artificially low bid that does not actually reflect the buyer's asking price.

Yet at the same time, some sellers view this kind of "land grab" and the resulting displacement as lifesaving. The grievances of those forced to sell their land at lower prices were often not directed at the land market or the prices at which they sold *per se*, but rather at the poor economy, their low wages and the government's inability to control the market. In reality, most sellers are daily wage labours with unstable jobs, such as construction workers, shop keepers and truck drivers. They typically view selling their land chiefly as the result of their own failures.

The difficulties of those forced to sell their land at artificially low prices are compounded further by those doing the buying. Starting from the 2000s, the people buying land and moving to Tagyi were no longer poor migrants but urban dwellers who had already lived in Mandalay for a while and were looking for cheaper land and larger plots to live on and invest in. It is these urban dwellers who become the second generation of buyers in Tagyi, replacing those who were resettled or who had moved to the ward in its early years.

As this chapter has already shown, these disadvantage sellers once again became buyers looking for another plot of cheaper land. Those forced to sell plots located along the ward's main roads often bought plots next to side roads. These intra-ward movements resulted in more and more better-off buyers living on the main roads (such as 62nd or 58th street) running through central locations in Tagyi, whereas the worse off land sellers became concentrated along side roads, and often moved further south or east to less developed or more remote areas in search of cheaper land. These trends in turn created a subtle spatial segregation within Tagyi, wherein the better off occupy land that is more accessible thanks to proximity to the ward's paved main roads, whereas the poorer are pushed out to less accessible areas where the roads are muddy and bumpy.

This chapter also puts a human face on local land speculators through face-to-face interviews. In Tagyi, speculators are not big real estate developers, international businesses, or corporations related to the military; nor do they invest in the hope of profiting from real estate development or construction projects in the ward (Zay Yar Lin 2016b). Instead, they are often fellow residents looking for cheaper land for their children, as section 5.4 suggests. Unlike businesses or the state, which engage in large-scale land confiscations, these individual speculators are usually looking for an additional one or two plots of land for investment purposes, and usually live near their purchases. These neighbourhood speculators are also well-known residents who make donations for local social events.

These and other factors complicate how working-class locals think about speculators and their actions: they do not like speculators buying land and pushing up prices; but at the same time, these neighbour-speculators do provide money to those who need to sell their land due to financial difficulties. In addition, speculators and local sellers have something in common: the desire to leave behind something valuable for the next generation. The key difference is that the former actually can—and do so at the expense of the latter and their progeny, making this struggle an intergenerational problem (Mitchell 2008).

These small scale, individual land sales on the ground level are a paradigmatic site in which to observe the crisis of land and housing under neoliberal capitalism, and the state's weak administrative and land governance capacity. This rebuts the oversimplified explanation offered by the state in Myanmar, which often claims urban residents avoid applying for a land title as a means of tax evasion and blames them for being uneducated or lacking discipline. It also lends support to a claim made by Burmese historian Thant Myint U (2020) that the military junta, despite its brutality in cracking down on protests and suppressing the people of Myanmar, was indeed "a weak state":

> "It had few instruments to craft policies and bring about actual results. Its instincts were to avoid confrontation and allow society to go about its business, unless its own survival was at stake… The state didn't collect taxes on rental income or property. They didn't enforce regulations. It was up to the people living in the building to find a modus vivendi." (342)

Thus, in the course of Mandalay's rapid urbanisation, the working poor living on the outskirts are constantly being exploited by local land brokers and speculators and are for the most part ignored by the state, which provides no assistance to those it has relocated and has made little or no effort to control or regulate the resulting informal land sales. The only real policy introduced with the intent to regulate and restrict speculation came in the form of a substantial hike to the city's property transfer tax (Fink 2015b), which resulted in more urban dwellers trading land without a title and made land held with only a landslip – like that in Tagyi – even more attractive, as discussed in section 5.1.

The Burmese phrase "pouring water on the sand" – used by U Bhant to describe the impossibility of ever being able to afford another plot – refers to efforts which, however sincere, are squandered due to circumstances in which people are powerless against the forces of nature. In urban Myanmar, a weak government, savvy local land dealers, and speculative neighbours

are such forces of nature. Due to a lack of access to information and financing, low-income residents like U Bhant and Daw Ning are forced to leave their homes (Ribot and Peluso 2003). In contrast, the children of Ko Tin will be afforded substantial advantages thanks to his purchase of additional plots. As a result, Myanmar's urbanisation serves as a prime example of accumulation by displacement, and shows how such displacement can become a cross-generational matter.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explain how Tagyi, a place with a legally ambiguous status due to its resettlement history, has produced an informal land market that aids in the formalisation of its continued existence. Informal land exchanges in Tagyi are not simply the result of ordinary people's lack of education or discipline—a discourse frequently used by the government to condemn the poor for breaching official restrictions on land transfers. Rather, they are part of a complicated system created by the government through resettlement and sustained by the efforts of numerous parties in the land market. The widespread usage of landslips as proof of ownership during land exchanges in Tagyi demonstrates that people on the ground have a pragmatic perspective on land titles and ownership. None of the residents I spoke with believed that land tenure security was absolute, even if one could secure a legal title—a lesson many learned under military control, particularly those whose tenured property was taken during relocation. Indeed, many Tagyi inhabitants regard formal and semi-formal tenure as virtually identical.

Thus, the resettlement and the haphazard land allocation policy used by the military dictatorship have facilitated a land market that is legally ambiguous, a "grey space" (Yiftachel 2009a, 2009b). Most of the land being traded lacks a title, yet is not illegal, which means these plots are not treated as slums or some other form of illegal occupation, and thus are not under any immediate threat of eviction by the municipal government. This enables faster land trades, which have allowed many poorer residents in Tagyi to cash out of the only real compensation they received for their resettlement, while also facilitating land speculation by the rich within the ward.

Due to Mandalay's rising land prices, many urban dwellers have sought out land on the outskirts, where prices are cheaper due to the remote location and limited social services. In this chapter, I borrow the term accumulation by displacement (Zhang 2010) to examine how

those relocated have continued to suffer from displacement even after their state-initiated involuntary resettlement. By joining the literature on land speculation from below (Kan and Chen 2021; 2020; Leitner, Nowak, and Sheppard 2022; K. M. Woods 2000), I argue that displacement occurs not only due to the exercise of state power or the involvement of corporate real estate developers, but also thanks to local land brokers and wealthy buyers who can determine how much poorer residents can make from selling their plots, making the exclusion an intimate one (D. Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011). In doing so, the land market of Tagyi fails its poorer residents not because they lack the legal titles necessary to "unlock" the capital embedded in their land (de Soto 2000), but rather because of the land market's structure and how it functions: operating on the basis of asymmetrical information that is effectively controlled by land brokers, with hot money flowing in from wealthier urban dwellers who speculate on land prices—factors which act in tandem to displace the poor through voluntary land trades. This problematises the voluntariness of these land sales and suggests that they are indeed examples of accumulation by displacement, demonstrating how "voluntary" land sales can imply symbolic violence against poorer residents within a local land market.

By examining a local land market on the city outskirts and the phenomena of small-scale accumulation and displacement on the ground, this chapter sheds light on the broader issue of peripheral urbanisation in Mandalay in three ways.

First, it challenges the assumption that people trading without land titles do so completely outside of the official system. These informal land trades are essentially enabled by the state and have tacit approval, which can be explained by the fact that the state was previously weak in terms of land governance and preferred the status quo—except for cases where authorities wished to engage in land grabs. This means that in Mandalay, land trades are never merely formal or informal, and can sit somewhere between the two, which is indeed exactly the case for many plots on the outskirts. The legally ambiguous land tenure represented by the landslips traded on Mandalay's outskirts echoes what urban studies scholars have advocated for in looking beyond the binary of "formal" and "informal" (see McFarlane 2019; Varley 2013) so as to better understand not only how these two categories have always been blurred in practice, but also the ramifications of such blurriness.

Second, this chapter adds to the current research on resettlement by looking into the phenomenon of post-resettlement market-led displacement. This chapter sits at the intersection of resettlement and land trades, illustrating how resettlement is merely the beginning of other forms of displacement—none of which are ever fully recovered from. It is also important to

note that not everyone suffers to the same degree during resettlement. Those who already had more financial resources and better connections, like U Aung, can deal with the move well enough, while poorer settlers, like U Bhant and Daw Ning, cannot. The disparity between U Aung and residents such as U Bhant and Daw Ning demonstrates that not everyone has the same means to reap the benefits of urban transformation; the crux, as Harms (2011) points out, is whether they can manipulate the economic potential of the city outskirts where they live, or are themselves manipulated. In the context of my research, many in Tagyi considered themselves to have been outsmarted or believed they lacked knowledge and vision, blaming themselves for selling their land at a low price. Their grievances are examples of the symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991) they have to endure when being put in a disadvantaged position within the local land market. This echoes the concept of access, which helps explain poorer residents' sense of having been manipulated or outsmarted as a result of lacking access to information and financing (Ribot and Peluso 2003).

Third, while the land sales tales in this chapter may look unique to Tagyi, they are an increasingly prevalent aspect of contemporary Myanmar's urbanisation. Land sales are a cross-generational issue for cities, producing a new type of inequality. Land commodification is a tendency that will affect future generations' ability to access urban benefits, not merely the here and now. Given rising property prices in many cities and the country's changing economy, the urban poor are finding it increasingly difficult to hold onto their land—and it is even more difficult to secure another plot after selling the first, as the story of U Bhant and Daw Ning attests. At the same time, wealthier urban dwellers plough money into land market for the sake of future generations, too. Huard (2020) refers to his research in a village in central Myanmar, where land landownership has intensified due to commodification of land, and ownership has increasingly become a temporal question of who owns the land in the future within a family. In my fieldwork, such questions of who gets what in the future also exist, but the scope of such temporal issues covers not just one but many different families, and occurs in the context of richer families buying land for their children at the expense of the poorer residents, whose loss of allocated land compounds the difficulty of buying another plot to leave for their own children. All of this combines top make the inequalities of resource allocation and poverty in urban Myanmar a cross-generational problem.

Having been labelled "the last frontier" in Asia, Myanmar has long been a popular place for land grabs or other such confiscations. Many scholars have argued that the booming of the real estate market in Myanmar has been motivated by metropolitan promises of "redevelopment",

"new development" or making a "smart city" (Kyaw Ko Ko 2017; Rhoads 2018; Than Than Nwe 1998; Wittekind 2021), and has been further encouraged by the use of Facebook and access to the internet during the political transition (Wittekind and Faxon 2022). In such cases, a ward far from the city centre where no development plans have been laid out yet would seem to be the antithesis of displacement. After all, who wants a plot of land on the outskirts? But the land market in Tagyi represents another reality: one where the working poor have to struggle to hold on to their land, not in the face of the state or big businesses, but rather local land brokers and fellow speculative residents. It is through looking into these small-scale land speculations occurring beyond the remit of grand development plans that we can see the displacement taking place within the city at the ground level, where the disadvantaged struggle to simply stay put—a story which is part of the broader urban land question that continues in the following chapters.

Chapter 6 Differentiation by subdivision

It was a Saturday afternoon and I had just arrived at Daw Aye's house for our Burmese practice. "The cows are peeing in front of my gate again, see, it's bad," complained Daw Aye while watering roses in her front yard. "It all started a year or two ago. I already moved my roses to over by the windows, far away from the front gate, but the cows still like the floral smell." (figure 16)

"It's time to do something," said Daw Aye. "Do you have time today?" I nodded. She then put down her green watering can, went to the living room to pick up her mobile, then headed out to the street. The cattle owner was a middle-aged man living with his family a few blocks east of her house. Daw Aye sometimes saw the man herding his cows on the street.

But this time, Daw Aye was heading north. She went straight to U Kyu's office. The ward administrator was chitchatting with the other 100-household leaders and smoking when Daw Aye arrived.

"The cows are peeing in front of my house again," Daw Aye said, "how can we end this? The owner is responsible for keeping his cows away from others' houses. He should keep his cows on his own land. I have already done my part to move my flowers from the gate to keep a distance from the cows. What else can be done?"

"Daw Aye, please take a seat," U Kyu pointed at a plastic chair in front of his table while putting down his cigarette. "Ko Phy [the cattle owner] said the cows are free animals and he can't control where they go. Besides, we all know that, unlike you, U Phy lives on a tiny plot, if he keeps the cows on his land all the time, his family will have no place to sit!"

"But he should do something, the pee smells," Daw Aye softened her tone but continued with her complaints.

"I'll ask Ko Aung to talk to Ko Phy.[94] But I can't guarantee anything. You know, Ko Phy lives in Tagyi too."

"We all live in Tagyi," Daw Aye responded. "But people living on the smaller plots have a lot of issues, they are making our ward crowded and messy." Daw Aye launched her final

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[94] Ko Aung is U Aung. U Kyu used Ko Aung because he was older than Ko Aung. I used U Aung because U Aung is older than me.

complaint before heading out, "people are being more and more irresponsible these days!"

When we went back to Daw Aye's house, the cow pee had already dried out but the smell remained. "Let's just practice on the second floor today, at least we can't smell anything there," said Daw Aye. When we were walking to the living room, Daw Aye turned back to lock the gate. "Too many people, you know, too many people in Tagyi," she said, looking outside of her house.

Figure 16 Daw Aye's roses. Daw Aye moved the flowers and plants from near the front gate to by the house windows (Photo by author).

That wasn't the first time Daw Aye complained about the cows. It was a recurring topic that she bought up almost every time we met. But the above incident was different: it was the first time I saw Daw Aye put her anger into action. It was also the first time that it was clear to me that she was not just upset about the cows, or U Phy the cattle owner, but that she was upset about the increasing population in Tagyi, and the "messiness", as Daw Aye emphasised, that they bought to the ward. I asked Daw Aye why there had been an increase in the population of Tagyi, and Daw Aye replied, "because there's not enough land for everyone! Many people here sell or rent out subdivided land among themselves. One plot of land becomes two plots, two plots become four plots. So one family becomes two, two becomes four. And our government

doesn't care."

As Chapter 5 has shown us, despite having an ambiguous legal status, land has been commodified and speculated on in Tagyi since it became a resettlement ward. I have argued that the forced resettlement was not the end of displacement but rather the beginning of it, thanks to the local speculation and accumulation by wealthy residents, despite the absence of the state and real estate developers. Continuing this inquiry about land in Tagyi, in this chapter, I explore the practice of informal land subdivision in the ward. In Tagyi, land subdivision, as Daw Aye suggests, is common. It is mostly conducted informally between buyers and sellers, rentiers and renters, and does not involve the municipality because of the lack of legal land titles. I argue that land subdivision in Tagyi does not only indicate insufficient housing and high land prices, but also differentiates and stratifies residents based on their ability to purchase living space, which embodies the struggles of both land ownership and urban citizenship.

While land ownership is rarely a prerequisite for obtaining the legal status of citizenship, it has become an important indicator of social status and one's entitlement and access to rights. Existing literature on exploring the relationship between ownership and citizenship has suggested that owning a plot of land or living in a legalised residence is the foundation for being seen and treated as a citizen (see Hammar 2017; Holston 2008; Roy 2003b). Roy (2003b) argues that the idea of propertied citizenship works as an exclusionary paradigm that marginalises social groups – such as the homeless – as undeserving and undesirable and not worthy of citizenship rights; whereas Hammar (2017) maps out the struggles homeowners have despite obtaining legal residency as a paradox the urban poor are unable to escape. People who are "unpropertied" (Ghertner 2015, 52), such as slum dwellers or illegal occupants, are often seen as having a lower social status and being somehow improper. It is in the context of these discussions has developed the assumption that propertied-citizenship excludes homeless or other property-less or property-insecure individuals from space- that property relations set the boundaries of citizenship.

Propertied citizenship is frequently assumed to imply "formal property rights" (Roy 2003b, 475). To be property-insecure means to lack a land title or any legal form of acknowledgment. This is why Roy claims that formality is exclusionary. In regard to this research, the overall argument of this chapter is that while property relations determine the boundary of inclusion, they are flexible and can include residents who do not have legal property rights as citizens. Thus, the problem is not simply whether one is excluded or included, but where one is on the exclusion-inclusion spectrum.

This chapter presents an ethnographic account of land subdivision with four arguments. First, by exploring how informal land subdivision works on the ground and why people engage in it, housing is seen as a personal duty but not a right in Myanmar, and people are expected to rely on themselves to secure a place to stay in the city with no state assistance. In this view, the "right to the city" (Lefebvre 1996) is a personal duty of housing that might even become penal to the impoverished.

Second, the informal land subdivision differentiates residents into groups based on the size of land they own and that these differentiations contribute to a stratification along a spectrum of personal wealth. Putting this into the context of Tagyi, how much land a person owns, while a matter of personal wealth, is seen as correlated to one's ability to be responsible and a proper resident. Those who are living on tiny subdivided plots in Tagyi are seen as the "moral other" (Pow 2007, 1541) by those owning bigger plots.

Third, many scholars have examined the relationship between different stratification systems (such as class or caste) and spatial production, especially the making of the middle-class, which has led to spatial segregation in the forms of displacement, gentrification, and gated communities in distinctive contexts (see Harms 2016; Low 2001; Zhang 2010). Despite the differences in context, these studies share one thing in common: social stratification has led to privatised segregated spaces based on different interpretations of civility. While differentiation by land subdivision has led to an increasingly stratified Tagyi, this stratification has not turned the ward into a gated community because Tagyi is not a real estate development project. Instead, spatial segregation happens organically by residents installing individual fences and gates on their plots, and the concept of civility has been expanded from a moral standard to a material one reflected on the value of the property one owns.

Fourth, the informal land subdivision expands the scope of propertied citizenship to non-legal owners and renters, which subverts the norm of propertied citizenship requiring legal ownership. In this context, I diverge from Roy and Hammar's accounts that urban dwellers with no legal ownership or rentership are mere subjects sitting at "the edges of exclusion" (Roy 2003b, 464), and have failed to obtain "properness" (Hammar 2017, 84). Land subdivision is not merely a housing inevitability which the urban poor has no choice but to accept, but an active practice by which more residents can be included in the city and redefine the terms and boundaries of such inclusion. However, I also show that in practice, this expanded inclusion ultimately reinforces the hegemonic discourse of property ownership as a precondition for being considered a proper member of society. Informal land subdivision, as a property practice,

thus both reinforces and subverts the hegemonic discourse of propertied citizenship.

In a broader sense, this chapter relates to the discussion of the peripheral urbanisation (Caldeira 2017) which argues how residents develop and build their neighbourhoods on the outskirts. The outskirts are not something permanent. While Chapter 4 explores the formation of the geographical outskirts by looking into the historical transformation of Tagyi; and Chapter 5 explores the legal outskirts where the residents rework the ambiguous legal status of their landholdings; this chapter explores the social outskirts where the residents – usually the poorer ones – try to hold onto their land as a way to maintain a certain social status. It builds on the existing scholarly discussion of the relationship between property and citizenship – in which the struggle for one implies the struggle of the other (Sikor and Lund 2009)– by interrogating residents' endeavours to be propertied and be seen as proper urban citizens.

This chapter is structured as followed. Section 6.1 provides an overview of the scale of land subdivisions in Tagyi. It suggests the because land has been informally subdivided in Tagyi, the increase of plots and population in Tagyi have not been captured by any official data, which suggests that informal land subdivision an issue hidden in plain sight in Mandalay. Section 6.2 examines why and how Tagyi residents subdivided their plots of land through interviews and survey results. I argue that residents engage in land subdivisions because they see housing as their own responsibility under the doctrine of self-reliance. Section 6.3 shows that land subdivisions differentiate residents into groups based on land sizes they own. Section 6.4 continues the discussion of differentiation by subdivision by showing how it makes Tagyi an increasingly stratified space where residents' social status is related to the land size they own, which is related to the concept of civility. This is followed by section 6.5 which argues the practice of land subdivision both subverts and reinforces the discourse of propertied citizenship. Section 6.6 concludes.

6.1 The scale of informal land subdivision in Tagyi

In Myanmar, informal land subdivision is a common practice on the ground yet little attention has been paid to the phenomenon itself in research. It is often subsumed as a topic by concerns about the bigger picture of a low-cost housing shortage and policy failures, being described as "illegal" or "unauthorised" (see Forbes 2019). These framings treat subdivision as matter of fact, rather than a social issue to be examined in its own right. Yet there is no information in existing literature on the scale of subdivision, what the underlying causes of subdivision are,

how subdivision is carried out, and what subdivision means to individuals, families, and communities.

This lack of attention to the issue of land subdivision is troubling, given that research has consistently documented that the working class often have problems in finding an affording housing--the social, economic and emotional impacts of which can be drastic and detrimental (Sabrié 2019; UN Habitat 1991). Informal land subdivision is frequently but only briefly mentioned in recent literature on land and housing issues in Myanmar, which depicts it as the simple result of rising land prices or a complicated issue related to laws and regulations; a predictable outcome, or an unintended reality, as an act of accumulation or as a survival strategy (Astolfo and Boano 2020; Boutry et al. 2016; Forbes 2019; Kyed 2019; McVitty 2015). These framings treat subdivision as matter of fact, rather than a social issue to be examined in its own right.

Part of the reason why residents living on informally subdivided plots of land are overlooked is that they are not considered the most vulnerable group within the urban populations, especially compared to slum dwellers. According to Forbes (2019), based on her research on slums in Yangon, the population living on informally partitioned land and homes is three times that of those living in slums (99), although the phenomenon is widely neglected because those living on subdivided land are perceived as facing no immediate threat of eviction. As a result, there is a significant gap in current research on urban housing. To expand on Forbes' (2019) observation in Yangon, I propose that we can observe a similar situation on the outskirts of Mandalay where many residents have been living on informally subdivided plots, and I would add that this population has not been precisely captured in official data due to their informality, as shown below.

Looking for the number of households in Tagyi

One of my early tasks in Tagyi was to figure out the number of households in the ward, to get a better understanding of its size and importance relative to the rest of Mandalay. So, in our first meeting in late 2018, I asked U Kyu a question I thought should be straightforward: "How many households are there in Tagyi?" The ward administrator, after taking a few drags on his cigarette, eventually replied, "It's difficult to tell." After finishing his cigarette, U Kyu told me to ask the Pyigyidagon township administration office, which could give me a number.

On U Kyu's recommendation, I went to the Pyigyidagon township administration office a few

days later to get the census data for Tagyi. After checking my approval letter from the Chief Minister of the Mandalay region, the township administrator, U Kyu's superior, gave me a table that showed the number of households and population in Pyigyidagon township. On the list, it said that there were 3,054 households with a population of 15,767 in Tagyi as of November 2018. However, the figures did not ring true based on what I already knew. They were far smaller than those in the 2014 national census report (Department of Population of the Regpublic of the Union of Myanmar 2015), according to which Tagyi had 4,833 households and a population of 26,062 residents.[95] While I understood there was a four-year gap between the two data sets, I could not help but wonder: How could the number of households have dropped by 36% between 2014 and 2018 even though many resident I had spoken with told me the ward's population had increased dramatically?

The last set of data I relied on came from the official land maps of Tagyi. Based on the maps in the ward administration office, there are 4,709 plots of land in Tagyi. Given that each plot was assigned to one household, there should be at least 4,709 households living in Tagyi. That immediately puts the reliability of the 2018 figure of 3,054 households in doubt. But the more I visited and spoke to the residents of Tagyi, the more the number of 4,709 households seemed too low. As U Aung explained:

> "I can't give you any official data, but I can tell you I've seen this with my own eyes and we can calculate… originally most sub-wards only had 72 plots of land, so only 72 households living in a sub-ward, that's why we have 60 sub-wards in Tagyi but only have 30 100-household leaders, since there's one household leader for every two sub-wards… In most sub-wards, mine included, each side of a street originally had nine plots of 60x40 square feet. But see, just that side [he pointed at the street opposite to where we were standing] of the street has like 14…15…16 houses, and there are eight street sides in a sub-ward, so if you calculate… it would be like 120 houses in a sub-ward. To be more accurate, I should be called a 200-household leader!"

Based on U Aung's account, the number of household in Tagyi could easily be double or even triple of the official number of 4,709 plots. His account also lines up with Daw Aye's account, namely that most people in the area were indeed living in subdivided plots and which

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[95] The 2014 census was Myanmar's first census in over 30 years. While it provides more up-to-date data and insights into Myanmar, scholars have criticised it as problematic because the military used the census as a tool to hide ethnic inequality and justify repression (Callahan 2017; J. M. Ferguson 2015). While most criticisms of the census are focused on matters of ethnicity and religion, they reminded me to take the census data on Mandalay and its townships with a grain of salt.

recognised a significant increase of households in the ward.

To illustrate the residents' assertion of growing intensity of land subdivision in Tagyi over time I have included three maps below. Figure 17 shows the official land plan of sub-ward 52 and sub-ward 53 in Tagyi in 1995. In each sub-ward, there are 72 plots of land in total, representing the 72 households moved there by the state in 1995. Figure 18 and Figure 19 are satellite images of the same two sub-wards 2006 and 2019, respectively. On top of these images, I have superimposed grids of red squares to represent the original floor plans as seen in figure 17.

As can be seen from figure 18, in 2006 there was usually one or two buildings on each plot of land, and some plots were even vacant. But in 2019, most plots had multiple buildings—as many as three or four, with much of the previously vacant land having been occupied (figure 19). Thus, although there are no official data available for the scale of subdivision of land in Tagyi, these satellite images provide tangible, physical evidence to support my own observations and the first-hand accounts of many residents from Tagyi about the growing popularity of these subdivisions of the ward. They also provide a visual evidence of Daw Aye's complaints about the neighbourhood being increasingly crowded.
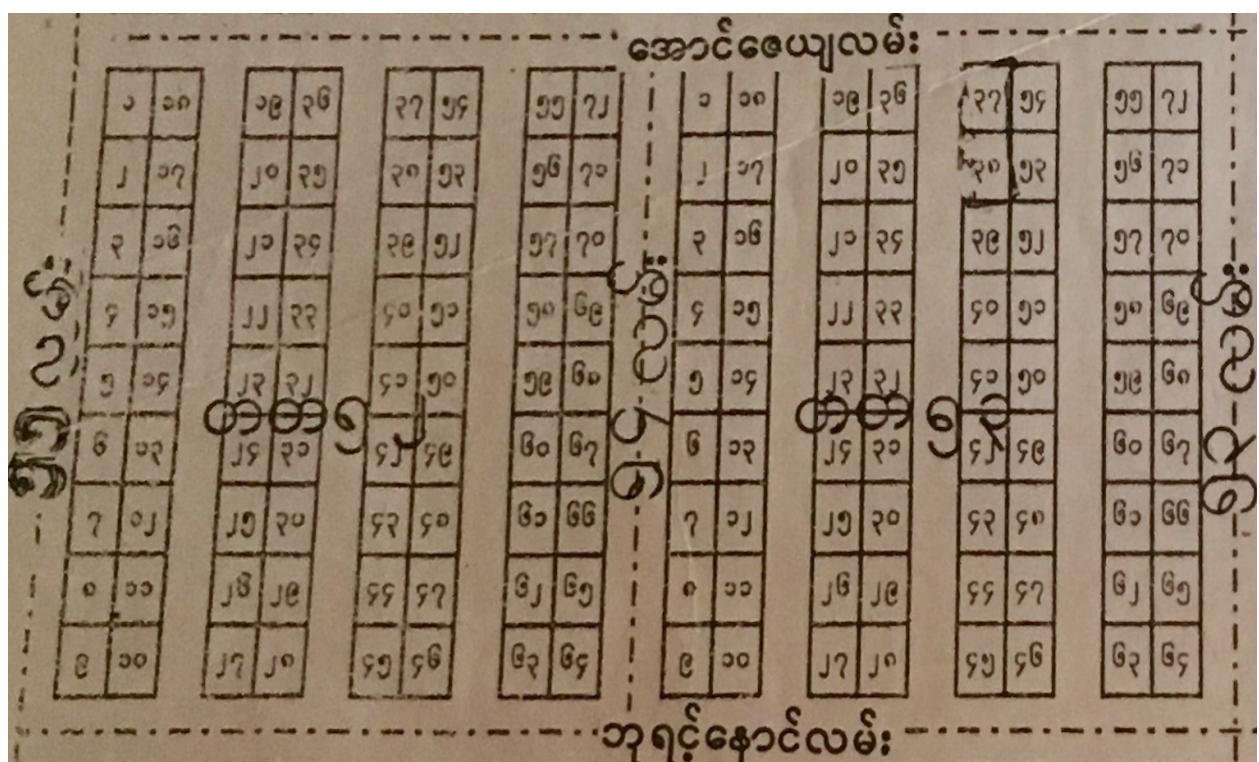
Figure 17 Floor plan of Tagyi sub-wards 52 and 53. This picture was taken from a book of maps at the Tagyi ward administration office. All the maps were drawn in early 1990s by the GAD (Photo by author).

Figure 18 A satellite image of sub-wards 52-53 in 2006 (Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies).
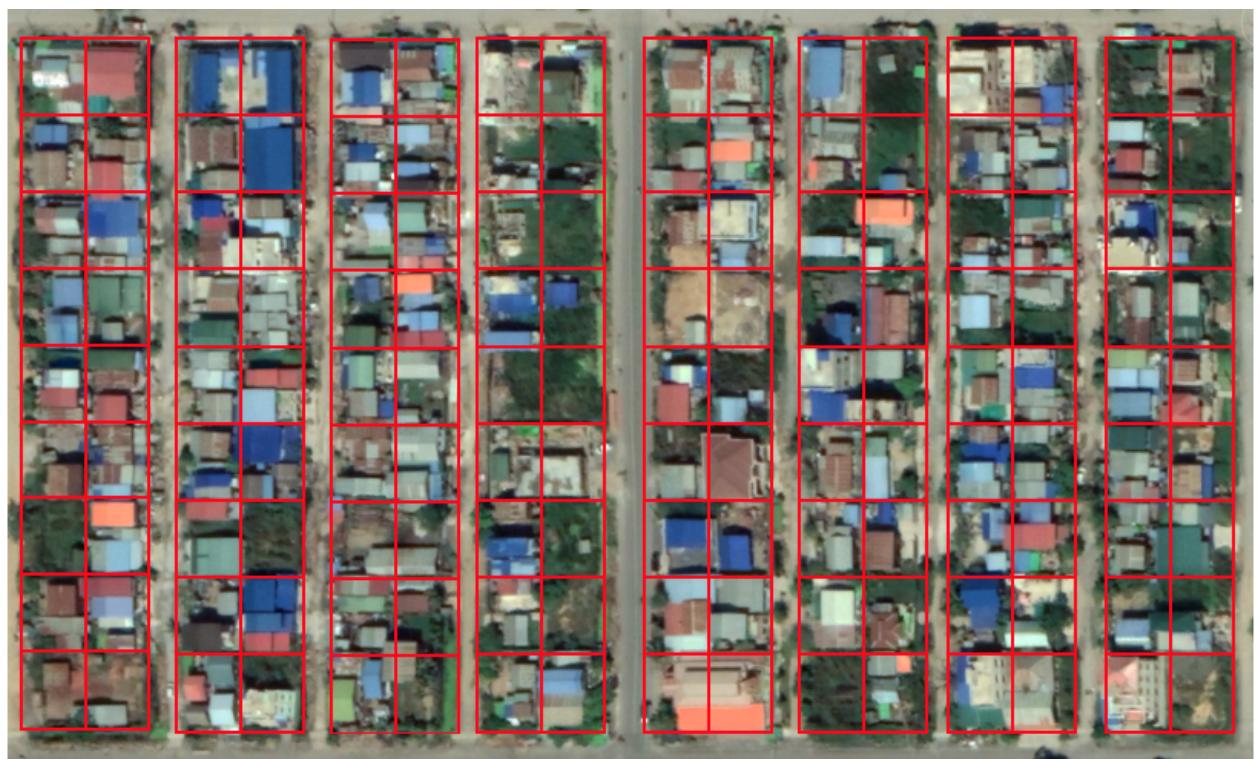
Figure 19 A satellite image of sub-wards 52-53 in 2019 (Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies).

The difficulties in identifying the number of plots and households in Tagyi highlight not only that state agencies do not share data, that the data they have are inconsistent, or that the data

collection methods used may be problematic[96]; more importantly, they raise a point that many urban dwellers are indeed living in not merely unregistered plot, but informally subdivided plots on the outskirts.

6.2 Informal land subdivision as self-reliance

In this section, I seek to understand the why and how of informal land subdivisions among Tagyi's residents, and to demonstrate that land subdivision is not merely a self-made solution to the housing shortage, but rather is related to the discourses of housing as a personal duty in Myanmar, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 1. To this end, during every survey and interview I conducted with residents I asked about their moving history, the procedures and reasons for subdividing land, and their perceptions of the ward. During my fieldwork, I interviewed 79 residents in Tagyi, 42 of whom were men and 37 of which were women.[97] Among these, 66 claimed to be landowners while 13 were renters.

An informal action

Indeed, most of the time we (Sai, Shwe Yee, and I) could easily judge with our own eyes whether a respondent was living in a subdivided plot by looking at the size of the house and the fenced areas. Our observation was that many residents were living in subdivided plots, which matched the survey findings below.

Table 3 provides some background data on the land subdivision situation in Tagyi. Only a small group of residents enjoyed the privilege of living in an unsubdivided plot, while 87% of them (69) were living in subdivided plots of either 30x40 square feet or 15x40 square feet,

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[96] Some Tagyi residents shared that for the 2014 census, while there were government workers and volunteers to visit the ward, these data collectors did not interview all the households nor count the number of houses. It is suspected that the 2014 census just copied and pasted the official number of plots in Tagyi with a minor adjustment. And both data failed to capture the realities on the ground.

[97] See more about the research methods and data collection in Chapter 2.

which were respectively half and quarter of the original plot size.

What is your land size?		What land documents do you have to prove ownership?	
60x40 sq ft	13%	Land grant certificate	5%
30x40 sq ft	45%	Landslips (original)	33%
15x40 sq ft	38%	Landslips (copies)	46%
Others	4%	None (renters)	16%
How did you come to own your current subdivided plot? (56 residents)		How many times have you subdivided your current plot? (56 residents)	
Resettlement	36%	None	75%
Purchase	64%	1	9%
		2 or more	12%
		Not sure	4%
How did you get permission for land subdivision? (12 residents)		If there was no need to seek permission, why is that? (9 residents)	
Apply at the MCDC	8%	Allocated land for resettlement	33%
No need to seek permission	75%	Purchased land	67%
Don't know	17%		

Table 3 Tagyi residents' participation in land subdivision.

In the survey, 56 residents claimed to own subdivided plots either through resettlement or land purchases, and their proof of ownership was the landslips they held – either the originals or copies. Among those who had subdivided their current plots (12 residents), 75% believed there was no need to seek any approval – whether from the MCDC or even local authorities like the ward administration office – to subdivide their land, because they were already owners of their plots by nature of holding landslips. And as owners, they believed that they could subdivide their plots however and whenever they wanted without permission.

The above results suggest that most land was subdivided informally in Tagyi, and the reason for this may sound straightforward: most land in Tagyi simply does not have a land title. As I argued throughout my discussion of land allocation policy during resettlement in Chapter 5,

many residents chose not to convert their landslips into legal land titles because of the complexity of the application process, high fees, and the fact that their landslips are de facto land titles in the local context. As most land in Tagyi has no title, the owners cannot officially subdivide their land at the MCDC, making most of the land subdivision informal and thus not recorded by the government. This explains why none of the official data on the number of households (see section 6.1) in Tagyi is reliable—put simply, the official figures completely fail to capture the movement of residents who are living on informally subdivided plots.

In the formal procedures of land subdivision, the land owners must apply for land subdivision at the MCDC, which will, after checking the land title records, survey the land and issue a separate title for the subdivided land. As a result, the original plot is officially divided into subplots with updated land records and maps.

But since the MCDC is not involved in informal land subdivisions, residents have to measure and divide the plots by themselves, which usually means using simple tools such as measuring rope or tape. Despite the absence of professionals to survey and measure the land, residents do not seem to worry or complain about measuring land between themselves for subdivisions. In Tagyi, when people subdivide land informally they have much greater flexibility in deciding the size of the subdivided land – usually in 30x40 square-foot or 15x40 square-foot segments. In contrast, formal land subdivision requires the resulting plots to be at least 1,200 square feet (either 30x40 square feet or 20x60 square feet), the minimum size for which one can apply for a land title.

Given the impossibility of obtaining a separate title, how can the owner of a subdivided plot prove their ownership? The answer is by photocopying the original owners' landslips and giving a copy to the subdivided plot's owner as proof. As most land is subdivided informally in Tagyi, many residents hold on to photocopies of landslips to prove their ownership, a phenomenon clearly evident form the findings outlined in Table 3. While Hull (2012) asserts that photocopies of land documents do not carry the same authority as the originals because they do not bear an official signature, in Tagyi, photocopies of landslips appear to share the same status as the originals. Holders of landslip photocopies can further subdivide, sell and rent their plots – the same as those holding original landslips. In this context, the photocopies become as important as the originals, which further establishes landslips as the *de facto* land title document in Tagyi.

As a result, the more subdivided a plot of land is, the more documents about it enter circulation.

Depending on the sequence of land subdivisions and land sales, landowners can hold many different documents attesting to their ownership despite living on a single allocated plot. Figure 20 illustrates the complexities inherent to the sale of subdivided land in Tagyi. It shows how the land sale documents in circulation in Tagyi increase whenever a plot is subdivided, with the new documents going to the buyer – mostly in the form of copies related to the land sold by the original landholder. This suggests that even though land subdivision and the subsequent land sales are informal in nature, they nonetheless follow a set of rules that regulate who gets what documents and in what form (original or copy), all to ensure that it is possible to comprehensively trace residents' land ownership in the absence of any official records for verifying ownership claims at the MCDC. In this sense, informal land subdivision and the subsequent land sales are, in fact, rule-making instead of rule-breaking in nature (Roy 2003b).
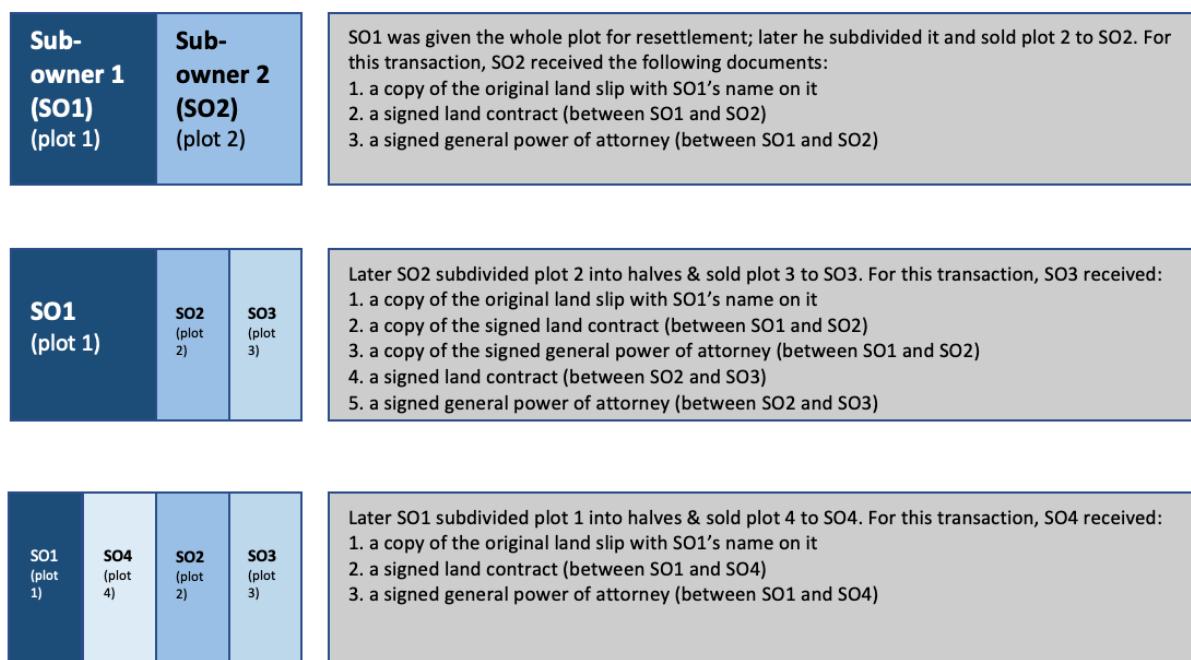
Figure 20 Diagram illustrating the repeated subdivision of a plot in Tagyi and the necessary documentation for each step.

Self-reliance for housing

Table 4 provides Tagyi residents' answers to why some owners subdivided their land, and the reasons why some bought or rented subdivided plots. Among the 12 residents who had subdivided their land but still lived on a part of their old plot, all expressed the desire to continue living in Tagyi but said they had been forced to sell part of their land for financial reasons, among which raising funds for house building (see more in Chapter 7) was the most common. And while money was the major driving factor behind landowners subdividing their

plots in Tagyi, at the same time it was also an important pull factor luring outsiders to move into subdivided plots. Given the subdivided land owners' struggles in striking a balance between making quick money and retaining a residence in Tagyi, and the buyers and renters' dilemma of wanting to live in a residential ward but struggling financially, subdivided land appeared to be providing a win-win solution to all parties.

Why did you subdivide your land? (12 residents)		What is the most important reason for you to buy or rent a subdivided plot in Tagyi? (57 residents)	
Unemployment	17%	Money	42%
Debt repayment	17%	Tagyi is a residential ward	28%
House building	41%	Avoid living in slums	26%
Medical expenses	25%	Small household	4%

Table 4 Tagyi residents' rationales of engaging in land subdivision.

While money is a major reason for people to sell, buy or rent a subdivided plot, it is important to read beyond the price tag and get a deeper understanding of their perceptions of land subdivision as a practice. Since the survey questions I used were open-ended, respondents used their own words to answer them, which gave us more context on what a simple answer like "I want cheaper land" might really mean. As it happened, when respondents talked about the issue of land subdivision, they often also expressed how they considered housing as a problem they had to deal with on their own – that is, they viewed housing is a personal duty.

Here it is useful to hearken back to U Bhant and Daw Ning, from Chapter 5. When we spoke about the rent they paid for their current residence, I asked the old couple what they wished the government could do to help them. U Bhant shook his head and said, "nothing; the government can't help with housing. **[Me: Why?]** Because we have to rely on ourselves." Then Daw Ning suddenly said, "If we don't work, we have nothing to eat; if we don't work, we have no place to live. It's always like that in our country. We can't rely on the government. We *kothukotha* (stand on our own)."

Kothukotha, commonly understood as "self-reliance" in English, is a widespread ideological concept in Myanmar. It is heavily related to state violence during the military era (G. McCarthy 2019). As Cheesman (2015) argues, rights in Myanmar "began and ended in the moment of sovereign decision" (107). From the sovereign's perspective, rights are seen as conditional privileges granted by the state (Cheesman 2015). And for the general public, rights are, as Prasse-Freeman (2015) argues, understood in everyday usage as "opportunities" rather than

universal entitlements. Thus Myanmar is often referred to as a "law-of-status" society (Maung Maung Gyi 1983, 170–71), where people are treated differentially and primarily based on their position in a social hierarchy. These discussions about rights and entitlement in Myanmar hint at how they have not been developed or understood as a protection for ordinary people. And I argue that in this context, housing is not considered a right in Myanmar, but rather a personal duty for which people must *kothukotha* against all odds.

During interviews, I sometimes asked residents if they had applied for government-provided affordable housing. None did, and most claimed they would not qualify since competition would be too intense given that the supply of affordable housing was extremely limited. This reflects how the lack of affordable housing has long been a chronic problem in Mandalay. It is a result of both the rising population and the population's housing needs not being catered to by the state. The population of Mandalay has been growing by around 2.5% annually for the last two decades, and the state's inadequate response to this urban population influx has led to a situation in which around 5,000 to 7,000 squatters are now removed in the city annually (Kyaw Ko Ko 2018), with estimates indicating that at least 6,000 to 7,000 new housing units would be needed per year to meet the resulting need for accommodation (Asian Development Bank 2016). Yet actual construction of housing falls far short every year, causing the existing chronic housing deficit to snowball.[98]

Since 2013, the Ministry of Construction has built several affordable housing estates in the periphery of Mandalay as part of a 30-year urban development programme. Yet the name "affordable housing" is misleading as we argue in Chapters 3 and 4. During one of my interviews in Tagyi, a female renter recounted a visit to the MCDC to get an application form for affordable housing, during which one of the government staffers completely ignored her after a quick look. "The staff could probably tell that I couldn't afford [government] housing because I wore cheap clothes," the female resident recalled, "and she was right. I couldn't afford anything. But I still went because I wanted to see how far I was from getting government housing."

What she ultimately realised was that if she could not even afford to buy the 15x40 square-foot plot she had been renting in Tagyi for more than a year, she could not afford a government housing unit. A few residents also shared that they had heard of affordable housing but had not

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[98] For a general discussion on the shortage of affordable housing in Myanmar, see Su Su Nwal and Panuwatwanich (2018). For a more specific discussion on housing shortage in Mandalay, see Asian Development Bank (2016); Reuters (2012).

applied, because they believed that affordable housing was not really for the poor and that if one wants to find real affordable housing, one must rely on themselves.

Informal land subdivision, thus, appears to be a solution for those struggling economically to obtain both some property and a bit of social status. Many Tagyi residents were included in the urban economy as workers in the city, but their incomes were barely high enough to support their day-to-day household expenses. Their low salaries meant that they could not afford additional ad hoc expenses such as those of house building or medical bills unless they sold part of their most valuable asset: land. Informal subdivision thus becomes a common method for those grappling with financial difficulties to quickly secure an economic benefit. At the same time, informally subdivided plots on the outskirts have become a reliable source of cheaper housing for the working population in Mandalay. With land prices rising and the lack of affordable housing, residents have to look for subdivided land instead of full plots. Land subdivision thus means that their urban residency is based on whether they can afford to take land and space from their fellow citizens.

The importance of living in Tagyi

Table 5 shows Tagyi residents' perceptions of the ward. Over half of residents had noticed an increase in the population of the ward due to the construction of new houses in their neighbourhood. When talking about their future plans, only 4% (3 respondents) said they were planning to move out of Tagyi within five years because of work or family relocation, whereas an overwhelming 96% of those interviewed said they had no plans to move. Finance was the top reason why residents did not consider moving, with most saying that they would not be able to afford a better place if they moved out of Tagyi. 28% of respondents preferred to stay in Tagyi because they were satisfied with the ward. Family appeared to be another major reason why residents expected to remain in Tagyi.

Have you noticed an increase of the population in Tagyi?		If so, how did you notice?	
Yes	52%	More houses	68%
No	32%	See new faces	25%
Not sure	16%	Noise	7%
Do you plan to move out in 5 years?		**If yes, why?** (3 residents)	**If no, why?** (76 residents)
Yes	4%	Job opportunity 33%	Can't afford a better place 37%
No	96%	Family relocation 67%	Satisfied with Tagyi 28%
			Family is here 35%
Do you like living in Tagyi?		**How would you describe living in Tagyi?**	
Yes	97%	Safe	61%
No comment	3%	Convenient	37%
		Boring	2%

Table 5 Tagyi residents' perceptions on Tagyi.

When asked if they liked living in Tagyi, most residents (77 respondents) responded positively. They mostly said that living in Tagyi was "safe", a word that here has several meanings. Some residents said they felt safe in Tagyi because there was no robbery; others said it was because there were no drug addicts in the ward; still others said it was because there were no illegal businesses. Regardless of the context in which the topic came up, residents all tended to compare Tagyi with the slums outside of the ward. Residents felt safe because they believed Tagyi was a residential ward with no robbery, drug addicts, or illegal businesses, all of which they believed were common in the slums.

But the largest difference between Tagyi and the slums, based on interview responses from residents of the ward, appeared to be the differences in land use. It was clear to residents that Tagyi had been designated as a resettlement ward for residential purposes, and the issuance of landslips supported this claim. In contrast, Tagyi residents considered those living in the slums to be trespassing on government land, a narrative that can also be found in official discourses

stigmatising slum dwellers and justifying slum demolition in Myanmar (Roberts 2020). Government officials tend to suggest that inability to secure one's housing and living in slums are related to certain level of personal deficiencies (Phyo Wai Kyaw 2013; 2018). This echoes the *kothukotha*, or self-reliance-based justifications given by residents for why they engage in land subdivision or dismiss the idea of affordable housing—namely, they see housing as a duty, not a right, in Myanmar.

The widespread subdivision of land among those living on the city's outskirts not only highlights the shortage of affordable housing faced by the working class; it also lays bare their constant struggle to continue living in the city. When talking about their subdivided land during interviews, residents in Tagyi almost always also mentioned the slums just outside of the ward and beyond the city limits of Mandalay. They constantly compared their status living on subdivided land within the city to that of people living in slums outside of the city, expressing concerns that one day they might be unable to keep living in Tagyi and instead have no choice but to move to the slums. On the basis of these interviews, I argue that residents living on subdivided land tended to align with the state's position on housing as being a matter of self-reliance; this also served to reinforce the belief that slum dwellers' inability to secure their land was due to personal deficiencies. As subdivision has become normalised, residents' struggles with housing have been subtly transformed into determinations made to distinguish themselves from the "undeserving" (see McCarthy 2019) slum dwellers "outside of" the city.

In this section I have explained land subdivisions are informally conducted due to a lack of legal titles, and how despite this, said informal practice is meaningfully standardised and, in a way, formalised at the local level. Informal land subdivisions are fuelled by residents' conception of housing as a personal duty with no choice, and their desire to live in a residential ward in order to distance themselves from the undeserving slum dwellers who they view as trespassing on government land. Having unpacked how and why informal land subdivision occurs in Tagyi, and having linked the practice to broader issues – namely a lack of rights and the popular conception of self-reliance in Myanmar – in the next section, I will explore the tangible impacts of land subdivision and how it both subverts and reinforces the paradigm of propertied citizenship on the increasingly stratified outskirts.

6.3 Differentiation by subdivision

The practice of informal land subdivision, as we have discussed so far, increases the supply of

land, which allows more people to move to and stay within the city. It has also allowed more residents to become propertied. As argued in Chapter 5, property ownership has become a source of wealth as land prices have increased but, at the same time, it has also led to the displacement of poorer landowners, who have little leverage available to deploy in the local land market. Yet, as much as " the nature and value of particular properties—and property more generically—are shaped through active articulations with different authorities and differentiated citizens" (Hammar 2017, 884), the reverse should hold true as well—that is, the relative size of property holdings also shapes the social status of differentiated groups of residents. In this section, I argue that the practice of land subdivision has led to a differentiation of residents based on the amount of land they own in Tagyi. These differentiations are important because they suggest stratification is not merely based on whether one owns property or not (though this remains a key factor); it also depends on how much property - in the case of Tagyi, how much land - one can own.

While Daw Aye's complaints about Tagyi's growing population and the owners of small (subdivided) plots were my first hint of social stratification in Tagyi, U Aung was the first person who gave me real insight into how heterogeneous the residents of the ward are, and the degree to which differentiation is based on the amount of land they own. In his experience both as a land broker and a local elder, U Aung had both witnessed and heard many stories related to subdivision and selling of land. One afternoon when Shwe Yee and I asked U Aung for his opinions on land subdivisions in Tagyi, he told us:

> "It's [land subdivision] just like eating your own body to survive. The poorer subdivided their land too early for too little money, so later, when they needed money again, they had no land left to subdivide. The rich can resist all this and never have to subdivide their land. People like me are a bit above average. We have land [plots] of a decent size and we just have to avoid subdividing and selling it as much as we can. Because once you start subdividing your land, you cannot undo it, and the land you have to live on will only get smaller and smaller."

U Aung's metaphor of self-cannibalism provides a grisly but realistic view of how locals in Tagyi conceptualise the practice of land subdivision: it is a double-edged sword which on one hand allows more people to live in the ward, but on the other, eats away at their available space and resources. Here, I borrow U Aung's metaphor and use it as a guiding tool to categorise residents based on how much land they own: the full-plot owners (60x40 square feet); the half-plot owners (30x40 square feet); the quarter-plot owners (15x40 square feet); and the renters.

By providing a breakdown of these different groups of residents in Tagyi, I seek to explore their composition, and argue that while more people can live in Tagyi because of informal land subdivision, such inclusion does not result in greater equality and instead creates hierarchies among residents.

The full-plot owner

It is perhaps not surprising that many of those living on whole plots are successful businessmen capable of making a small fortune from the remoteness of Tagyi. For example, since 1995 Ko Shing's family has been running a water-selling businesses in the south of Mandalay, including Tagyi, following the government resettlement. After being moved to Tagyi, Ko Shing's father came up with the idea of selling water in the resettlement ward due to its poor water quality. Ko Shing and his father's business has been quite a success, earning them not only enough to buy two imported cars and a three-story concrete house, but also the ability to hold onto their whole plot of land for more than two decades.

Ko Tin, from Chapter 5, is another full-plot owner in Tagyi. Ko Tin used the money he made from his jade trading business to start a moneylending business. When people failed to pay what they owed him, Ko Tin would confiscate their land, resell it, then reinvest the proceeds in his moneylending business. Thanks to his selling of confiscated property, he was one of the few residents I knew who had unambiguously benefited from the rising land prices in Tagyi. With the stable income from his businesses, Ko Tin did not have to rely on selling his own plots to raise money; in fact, when we spoke he was negotiating to buy two subdivided plots that were located next to each other, hoping to buy both and combine them back into a full plot which he could then give to his children, as discussed in section 5.4.

While Ko Shing and Ko Tin represent the story of self-made men escaping misery and poverty to become rich, other full-plot owners were already quite well-off before moving in, and living in Tagyi had little to no effect on their businesses. One such resident is Daw Aye. While her three sons were working in the family's jade trading business before the family even moved to Tagyi, Daw Aye's two married daughters and their husbands all ran different businesses in town—nail and beauty salons, clothing stores, mobile phone accessory shops, and more. Their diverse income sources allowed the family to not only afford a three-storey concrete house on a 60x40 square-foot plot, but also to purchase appliances that cannot be found in their poorer neighbours' homes: two air conditioners, a fridge, a power generator, a TV, and even a

treadmill. The treadmill had fallen into disuse, however, and mainly served as a place to hang shopping bags by the time of my visit.

By avoiding land subdivisions, full-plot owners have made themselves a rarity in Tagyi (see Table 3). The common theme among these families, despite the differences in their backgrounds, is that they have been able to turn the unfavourable location of Tagyi into an opportunity, or at least neutralised its most serious disadvantages such that it is not a barrier to their continued accumulation of wealth. Most of them are self-employed business owners and have secure income streams, which means they do not come under pressure to sell their land when facing financial difficulties. Instead of relying on the land market to raise money like many of their poorer neighbours, full-plot owners actually pour money into the land market and invest for the future as discussed in section 5.4. These richer residents in Tagyi are comparable to those better-off residents living on the outskirts of Saigon in Erik Harms' (2011) research, in which he argues that the rich was those who were able to make use of the marginality of the outskirts to make money, i.e. to invest on land in the peripheries. In Tagyi, the same can be said for those wealthier residents who are benefitting from the rising land price in the ward.

The half-plot owners

In contrast to the full-plot owners, half plot owners had subdivided their land for sales or rental income. Based on observations and interviews, half-plot owners were usually not as wealthy as the full-plot owners, but they were by no means poor. Households living on 30x40 square feet usually have multiple working members. Some of them are sole proprietors of small businesses such as tea houses or food stalls. Many of the land brokers and professionals (such as lawyers and engineers) I knew in Tagyi were in fact half-plot owners. Many of them were born in Mandalay, and usually had already lived in other parts of the city before moving to Tagyi.

In the early days of the resettlement, half-plot owner U Aung made a fair amount of money by renting his front yard out for bicycle parking, and when he started working as a land broker he made good money from of the ward's burgeoning land market. Despite earning so much as a land broker, U Aung's gambling habit cost him a fortune. A few years before we spoke, U Aung had been forced to sell half of his land to pay for his father's medical expenses and cover construction costs on a new house. While he was still upset about selling half of his land, U

Aung's finance became more stable. He expanded his brokerage to cover other services and helped out at his sister's small tea shop for a while, working as a waiter. U Aung said jokingly that he was not worried about the possibility of being forced into further land subdivisions "unless I become very unlucky".

Other half-plot owners I met were more insecure about their finances and believed they might have to subdivide their land again. Ma Yi, for one, had bought a 30x40 square-foot plot from U Aung after closing her tea house business near Mandalay University in early 2000s. Now retired, Ma Yi relied on her two sons, one of whom was a private tutor and the other a clerk, to support the family. They had been saving for years to build a house but still did not have enough money to get started, and Ma Yi admitted that she might have to sell half of her land for the construction because based on her sons' daily wages the family would never be able to afford to build their own house. Other than that, however, Ma Yi did not think her family had any serious financial pressures worth worrying about.

As seen from U Aung and Ma Yi's accounts, half-plot owners appear to be far from the wealthiest residents in Tagyi, but neither are they underprivileged. And while some like Ma Yi expressed worries about the possibility of subdividing their land again, the general belief among residents was that these half-plot owners were doing relatively well and that in any event, selling a subdivided plot was not a life-or-death situation. In short, half-plots owners can be considered something akin to Tagyi's middle class.

The quarter-plots owners

The next group of residents are those I call quarter-plot owners—residents who own and live on 15x40 square-foot plots of land in Tagyi. Compared to the other owners, quarter-plot owners' household income is usually low and unstable, and they are generally viewed as relatively poorer residents within the ward. The owners of quarter plots are usually daily wage labours, with men often serving as construction workers and drivers and women working as tailors or cleaning staff. Many are also rural migrants who moved to Tagyi for the cheaper land. During interviews, quarter-plot owners expressed far more concern about having to sell their current plots, and worried about the possibility of having to move out of Tagyi and live in the slums.

After originally buying a 30x40 square-foot plot, Ma Shine subdivided her land and sold half of it to a buyer to get her unemployed middle-aged son a taxi to drive in 2017. When I met her, the wooden house Ma Shine's family had built when they moved in had been divided into two:

one half on Ma Shine's land, and the other half is on the buyer's. Without much space, Ma Shine often sat on her wooden bed opposite the main entrance (she'd given up her bedroom as part of the subdivision) while her son's family lived upstairs. Now with a plot of only 15x40 square feet, Ma Shine complained her land and her life had been downgraded. Between her son's flagging taxi business and the fact that she could no longer subdivide her plot, the ageing woman worried that she was just one step removed from sleeping on the street.

Similar stories are common not just among outsiders who move to Tagyi but also among those who were forcefully relocated. Daw Thida's family was relocated to Tagyi and over the years had already been forced to sell three-quarters of their allocated land. Daw Thida was upset about the subdivisions but also at a loss for better alternatives—after all, what else could she do? She and her husband earned less than 400,000 kyats (266.7 USD) a month working as a tailor and a truck driver, but they needed 100,000 kyats (66.7 USD) every month to cover medical expenses for her ailing parents, build a new concrete house, and to pay off her husband's debts. Now holding onto the final quarter of their original plot of land, Daw Thida's only hope was that her daughter could get an office job and support the family. Otherwise, she believed selling off the final quarter of their original plot was inevitable.

These stories reflect a dilemma facing many residents holding onto 15x40 square-foot plots in Tagyi. Similar to those who living on 30x40 square-foot plots, many quarter-plot owners see land as the most valuable asset they can sell. But unlike the former, those holding onto quarter-plots cannot further subdivide their land for sale because their plots are too small. They are left with no means but to sell the plots they are living on should they face financial difficulties. For many quarter-plot owners this would mean either moving further south, or even moving outside the city borders of Mandalay to live in the slums.

The renters

If quarter-plot owners are concerned about their ability to stay put in Tagyi, their position is still far less marginalised than those who do not even own any land in the ward—the renters. The renters must rent housing from a landowner and are thus excluded from the land market and are unable to raise money quickly by selling subdivided land. They typically lack a stable stream of income, often working as underemployed daily wage labours, or are retirees who rely solely on their savings and limited pension payments to get by. Many are rural migrants.

Ma Nwe and her husband are two of such renters. They moved to Tagyi in 2015 and began

renting a 15x20 square-foot subdivided room from Ma Nwe's step-grandmother. Although she constantly complained about the size of the subdivided room – which barely had enough space for a wooden bed and a tiny Buddhist shrine in the corner (as shown as figure 5 in section 2.3)– Ma Nwe's biggest complaint was land prices. With no land or title, Ma Nwe felt powerless in Tagyi. Her step-grandmother was constantly threatening to increase their already high rent, which Ma Nwe believed that she would have no choice but to pay because she did not have money to move somewhere else—unless the family moved to the slums, which was the last thing Ma Nwe wanted.

The feeling of being powerless due to owning no land and the fear of being forced to leave their current plots because of rent increases were common sentiments shared by the renters during interviews. Returning to U Bhant and Daw Ning from Chapter 5, the couple told me during our final interview that their landlord had visited just a few days ago to announce that he would "modestly increase" the rent from 40,000 kyats (27 USD) to 60,000 kyats (40 USD) following month—a truly massive jump of 50%. If the couple could not afford it, he said, they would have to move out soon. 20,000 kyats (13 USD) a month might not sound much to landowners in Tagyi, but for the retired couple whose three daughters had all dropped out early from school and earned very little, the rent increase could mean further postponing their dream of buying their own land.

These stories from renters suggest that land subdivision has created a rentier and a renter class, with the former maintaining part of their plots for self-use and renting out the rest, relying on rental income from the latter. The renters in Tagyi also show that the practice of subdivision serves as both a means to remain in the city but also a barrier that bars them from land ownership. During my fieldwork in 2018-2019, I never once met or even heard of a single resident who had managed to save up enough money to finally buy a plot of land while they were also renting a place in Tagyi. Buying and renting, theoretically, are not mutually exclusive, but for Tagyi's poorest residents they are very much so in practice.

We have seen so far that the practice of informal land subdivision has differentiated residents into four groups based on their wealth, which is expressed in terms of the size of the land they own. These differentiations underscore heterogeneity of the citizens living in Tagyi and rebuts the narratives I often heard from government officers in Mandalay- especially those from the MCDC, that people living in resettlement wards are often poor and problematic. But what can the differentiation tell us about incidents like Daw Aye's complaints about owners of subdivided land in the ward? And what can informal land subdivision tell us about propertied

citizenship on the outskirts? These are the questions that I aim to answer in the following two sections.

6.4 An individually gated neighbourhood

As previously noted, scholars in Myanmar studies have argued that rights as protection and entitlement are a missing concept (Cheesman 2015; Prasse-Freeman 2015). Housing, which is seen elsewhere as a fundamental human right, is seen as a personal duty in Myanmar. In her discussion on the American paradigm of propertied citizenship, Roy (2003b) argues that property rights have become a prerequisite for citizenship rights, which leads to stigmatisation and marginalisation of homelessness. While Roy (2003b) shows us how the paradigm of propertied citizenship has justified the stratification between the propertied and the homeless, which leads to "ineradicable patterns of sociospatial segregation" (471), I argue that in the case of Tagyi, there has not yet been any such clear spatial segregation. Tagyi is still a community where one can easily find the rich, the average, and the poor living on the same street on different-sized plots of land. And it is because of the proximity of these different groups of residents that we witness the clashes and conflicts among them.

Daw Aye, introduced at the beginning of the chapter, often complained about her neighbours, who subdivided their land for sale, because she believed that subdivision bought in more people and cows to her neighbourhood, making it nosier and overcrowded. She believed that Ko Phy, who owned the cattle, should be responsible for their behaviour because it reflected what kind of person he was. Since the cows kept urinating in front of her house she blamed Ko Phy for being irresponsible, and saw this dereliction as being directly related to the fact that he lived on a small, subdivided plot. In short, Daw Aye, a full-plot owner, viewed the financial situation of her neighbours as being directly linked to how responsible and civilised they were.

And she was not alone in doing so. U Aung and other half-plot owners also complained about the growing prevalence land subdivision in the ward. Despite being subdivided plot owners themselves, half-plot owners considered their subdivision acceptable because a plot of 30x40 square feet land is still quite sizeable by local standards. They often commented that the increase of rural migrants living in subdivided plots of 15x40 square feet or less had made Salome more "rural" and "messy".

This association between personal wealth and quality of character is commonly found in

discussions on civility in neoliberal settings.[99] People living in slums or poor neighbourhoods are often stigmatised as problematic and having failed to behave somehow, which transforms the basis of civility from something moral into whether one can secure a proper residency – i.e. whether one is propertied. In line with this discussion on civility and property, I argue that we can see a similar phenomenon in Myanmar.

In Burmese, civility is translated as *jinkjei*, which also means being polite and cultured. As Cheesman (2002) argues, civility in Myanmar requires a strict sense of subordination to superiors: elders, teachers, parents, and the state. While generally accepting this political explanation of civility in the context of Myanmar, I argue that outside of its use as a political tool, the concept of civility has also become tied to one's housing status. While this may be nothing new in a global sense, the stigmatisation of slums and the building of gated communities go hand in hand in cities (Arabindoo 2011; Srivastava 2014). But the case of Tagyi is intriguing exactly because it is not a slum, nor a gated community. The informal land subdivision in Tagyi has led to differentiation among residents based on their wealth. And while the poorer residents, who are usually living on 15x40 square-foot plots, are conceived as problematic and even uncivilised, the stratification has not turned Tagyi into a completely segregated community. Instead, because Tagyi is not a gated community project owned by any corporate real estate developers, the spatial production in the ward is carried out by residents in the form of individual gates and fences surrounding their plots.

With the increasing subdivision of land in Tagyi, more gates and fences can be seen in the ward. Gates and fences are used often seen as an expression of ownership and exclusion, but they are also used to create privacy and a distance between those inside from those outside of the property (Caldeira 2000; Low 2003). Both can be found in Tagyi, and the wealthier the family, the bigger their gate and taller the fences or walls. For example, Daw Aye's house had a metal fence surrounding it and a gate which was about two meters tall. Combined with the many tall potted plants she had put in front of it, the tall fence made it impossible for people outside to see what people inside the house were doing. In addition, her home's windows were made of etched glass, so even after passing through the front gate outsiders still could not see what was going on inside (Figure 21). Some wealthier landowners, such as Ko Tin, had even installed security cameras on their gate. Ko Tin explained with the increase in population in Tagyi, he was a bit worried about crime, so he installed the security cameras for his family's safety.

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[99] See Harms (2016) for a discussion on civility and property in the context of Vietnam, and Zhang (2010) for a similar discussion in the context of China.

Figure 21 A picture of Daw Aye's house from the outside (Photo by author).

The construction of fences on subdivided plots can also be a source of dispute. During one of my interviews, I was sitting in a bamboo house on a 15x40 square-foot plot of land (the bamboo house on the left-hand side of Figure 22). The bamboo house was extremely dark even on a

sunny day, and the reason was that a wealthy family recently moved in next door and constructed a three-storey concrete house on the adjoining 45x40 square-foot plot, which blocked most of the sunlight. The bamboo house family said they complained to U Kyu who responded that he could not do anything. "We have to use more electricity because our house gets dark all the time," said an old lady living in the bamboo house. In addition to the lack of sunlight, the family living in the bamboo house expressed how they felt like being treated as criminals because the wealthy neighbours also built a tall concrete wall to separate the two houses, the front portion of which had barbed wire strung along the top. "Do you see that they have six air-conditioners?" asked the old lady again. "They are that rich, and we only have a fan, so they look down on us by building all these wired walls and fences." The old lady concluded, "because they build the concrete fence, we built one too, a bamboo one, just to show that we have our own space too."

Figure 22 A three-storey house in Tagyi (Photo by author).

Gates and fences or walls can be found on almost all plots in Tagyi, with different building materials which correlates with the family's financial status. All of this suggests that land subdivision has led to stratification within the ward, which is manifested through the spatial segregation carried out by individual residents. The result is that, instead of being a gated

community, plots in Tagyi have been individually gated to create space and distance among different residents based on their financial status.

6.5 Subverting and reinforcing propertied citizenship

In this section, I further examine differentiation in Tagyi, and use it as an example to explore how informal land subdivision works as a double-edged sword for residents—both subverting and reinforcing the importance of property ownership in conferring urban citizenship.

Through the practice of informal land subdivision, Tagyi's residents broaden the meaning of propertied citizenship by including those who are not legal landowners but appear to have recognisable relations to land by local standards. That includes those who are holding original landslips, copies of landslips, or even renters whose landlords have a landslip. In Tagyi, since landslips are seen as a local form of land ownership documentation and *de facto* land titles, those holding onto an original or a photocopy of landslips from their parents or previous owners are considered legitimate landowners, including the many owners of subdivided plots. Renters who have no landslip are included as legitimate residents in the ward because they are renting from landowners who do have them.

Being recognised as a resident in Tagyi is important because, at the local level, many everyday affairs require an address—for example, applying for an electricity meter, applying for a water meter, or updating one's family registration form. On top of such affairs, many Tagyi residents need proof of residency when buying expensive goods such as cars, motorbikes, smartphones and other appliances. This is because local stores tend to allow payment through instalments if the buyers can provide some sort of residential proof. Thus the most pertinent questions become:

1) How can a resident prove their address?

2) What are the acceptable forms of residential proof?

The answer, in short, is to get a recommendation letter from U Kyu, the ward administrator. At the ward level, administrators are responsible for keeping track of people moving in, moving out, selling land, buying land, and more. When Tagyi residents need proof of their address, they go to U Kyu and ask him (for a fee) to issue them a recommendation letter saying they truly live in Tagyi. As U Kyu told me, "As long as you can show me that you're a resident in Tagyi – landowner or renter – and have a land grant certificate or a landslip, you can come to

my office to get a recommendation letter" (see figure 23). Being propertied thus means being creditable and reliable in circumstances when evidence like bank statements or other financial proof does not yet exist, as most residents did not have a bank account.

Figure 23 A sample of a ward administration office recommendation letter. The letter says that the ward administrator confirms that a person is a resident in the ward.

However, the importance of holding onto a landslip, or at least having an access to one, reinforces the idea that owning or renting property must be credentialed to be considered a proper form of residence. One can only get a recommendation letter if one can show a landslip. And the landslips and photocopies thereof circulating in Tagyi as a result of land subdivision are accepted as land ownership documents because they were originally issued by the state.

As much as informal land subdivision expands the scope of who can claim residency and recognition in Tagyi, it also continues to reinforce the idea that it is important to be propertied, which is seen as a resident's personal duty.[100] In the ward administration office, there are multiple frames with different Burmese sayings and slogans hanging on the walls, reminding residents to be self-reliant, loyal to the country, and responsible citizens (see Figure 24). At first I thought of these motivational sayings as mere propaganda given their placement in a government office. After all, who was really reading them? But I later realised that even if they were government propaganda, these beliefs about self-reliance are indeed part of the lived experience of people in Myanmar.

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[100] see section 6.2.

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Figure 24 Motivational sayings framed on the walls of the Tagyi's ward administration office, all of which focus on responsibilities of the people. On the left the text says, from top to bottom: "What's a human: be honest, be respected, and be trusted"; "The difference between a leader and a follower: a leader acts without an order; a follower only acts when ordered"; and "Reasons for failure: 1. Wake up naturally [without an alarm]; 2. You only work if someone ask you to; 3. You don't pick up what you drop; 4. You don't find what you lost; 5. You don't repair what's broken; 6. You spend too much money; 7. Not being clever; and 8. Being lazy. These are the eight reasons why you're not succeeding." The text in the frame on the right says: "Five guiding principles: 1. Mind; 2. Discipline; 3. Loyalty; 4. Solidarity; 5. Achieving high performance". Similar motivational sayings are commonly found in other government offices in Mandalay, underscoring the state's promotion of responsibility as a core element of being a citizen in Myanmar (photos by author).

Tagyi's understanding of propertied citizenship is not so much about seeing housing as a right to be provided by the state, but rather that citizens are supposed to be responsible for finding their own land and housing. This understanding of seeing property ownership as a basis of participation in society – in a situation where legality is ambiguous and difficult to achieve – continues to reinforce the idea of propertied citizenship as one that sets the boundary of exclusion and inclusion. In this case, quarter-plot owners are often worried about the fact that they have no more land to subdivide when they need money, which could mean losing their home in Tagyi. Renters are made extra vulnerable due to their conditional access to property— if they fail to pay rent, they lost their homes. And Tagyi's residents, despite being differentiated by their landholding status, share the view that those who are living in slums are uncivilised, undisciplined and undeserving members of society due to their lack of access to a landslip.

Indeed, residents in Tagyi are well aware of this paradox—how, despite their efforts to expand the scope of what being propertied means through informal land subdivision to make it more inclusive, they are still fundamentally reinforcing the hegemonic discourse of propertied citizenship that also marginalises them. During one interview Ma Shine expressed how she was

only able to own her current plot thanks to land subdivision:

> **Ma Shine:** In Tagyi, you can own subdivided land. We could never have enough money to buy the whole plot, but we could afford a smaller [subdivided] plot. Many people are like that here. Buying subdivided plots.

> **Ma Shine's daughter in law:** People are always flexible.

> **Ma Shine:** Because the land price is too high in the city! Rich people, bigger plots. Poor people, smaller plots.

> **Ma Shine's daughter in law:** In my village, the land prices are so cheap, we just own large plots of land. There's also no fences between plots, so I often walk from my parent's house through my neighbours' [plot], to get to the main street. Here [in Tagyi], fences and gates are everywhere, plots are small, and people are…

> **Ma Shine:** You can't compare your village to the city! Land prices are too high here!

But during the same conversation, Ma Shine, while acknowledging the high land prices in Mandalay, insisted that housing was a personal responsibility that citizens should fulfil:

> **Ma Shine:** But you know, we can only rely on ourselves, for everything, including where we live. The government can't really help us. We have to help ourselves. Land is expensive, so we work hard, very hard, to earn [money for] it. It's my biggest achievement. So I'm happy to say I live here because I own land. I have a government paper [her landslip copy]. You need to work hard to own your own place. Some people cannot understand this logic, so they end up living in slums. Who else can they blame but themselves?

Ma Shine is caught between her belief that housing is a personal responsibility, and the fact that housing is barely affordable, and indeed unaffordable, for many in the city. She is both complaining about high land prices but at the same time affirming that it is a personal responsibility to overcome them. She acknowledges that land subdivision can help more people to find cheaper land, but the practice of land subdivision does not challenge the core idea of the importance of being propertied. Instead, the former reinforces the latter.

In so doing, residents effectively affirm the top-down view that there is no such thing as a universal right to housing, but rather that one has to rely on oneself for accommodation. Differentiated groups of the population are included in the city, but those who are struggling to afford urban housing are included in an "asymmetrical form" (Perlman 1975, 131), meaning

that they are accepted only on unfavourable terms. This has created a situation in which the residents living in the resettlement ward are pitted against the even poorer slum dwellers who reside just outside of the city. Meanwhile within the ward, those who can afford more land are marginalising those who cannot through manipulation of the land market. Binaries such as exclusion and inclusion, propertied and landless, are both being reinforced and challenged in Mandalay's outskirts.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explore propertied citizenship in Mandalay with a focus on subdivision of land. Governments in Mandalay, past and present, have never truly catered to the housing needs of urban dwellers, instead viewing housing as a privilege. Distribution of government resources is not based on people's needs but rather the government's preferences. Only certain groups of people can benefit from government housing, such as retired civil and military servants, teachers, and those wealthy enough to pay for the "affordable housing" constructed by the MCDC. In Lefebvre's (1996) definition, the city's working poor population does not have the "right to the city". In this perspective, housing is viewed as a personal obligation rather than a universal right.

In her study of resettlement in Mazwi, Hammar (2017) has argued that resettlement created a "paradox of propertied citizenship", saying that resettlement of a "surplus" population to a remote area has made them (almost) property-owning citizens even as their material livelihoods and living standards remained fragile. Whereas Hammar is concerned primarily with how structures of authority are involved in the wider framing of urban displacement, in this chapter, through the stories of differentiated groups of residents living on subdivided plots of land in Tagyi, I show that those marginalised by the paradigm of propertied citizenship are also its enforcers. However, they do not merely enforce the hegemonic paradigm of propertied citizenship, but also work to widen the meaning of what being propertied means to serve their own interests—not only including those who have legal residency but anyone who has a *de facto* land ownership.

Yet land subdivision still creates differentiation and stratification among residents in Tagyi. Residents are differentiated in terms of wealth, which is reflect by how much land, if any, they can own. In this context, differentiation by subdivision is becoming a key mechanism in which both exclusion and inclusion happen simultaneously on the outskirts, and where the threat of

displacement endured by the poorer resident is compounded.

Citizens' claims to the right to the city (Harvey 2003; Lefebvre 1996), the right to shelter and even the right to have rights (Arendt 1976) are all absorbed by property rights in this way. These findings back up Roberts' (2017) claim that citizens are never enfranchised in Myanmar, and that the state not only does not enfranchise the general people, but that the general public does not believe they are right-bearing subjects.

By exploring the narratives of those resettled, those who bought land and those renting land that has been subdivided in Tagyi, this chapter provides multiple insights into the politics of propertied citizenship in Mandalay's urban question.

First, subdivision of land is not an exceptional case but rather an increasingly common pattern of how the working poor cope with the challenge of remaining in the city. Faced with rising land prices and no state assistance, the poor are left on their own to secure their place as their numbers grow and the increase in available space to live within the city fails to keep pace. They are confronted with the prospect of being forced to leave the city not as the result of state eviction but an inability to afford their own land. This leads to a discussion of the state's role in new ways of dispossessing the working poor. Specifically, by omitting the right to housing, the state has dispossessed the poor of access to the market. Dispossession does not necessarily take a physical form or entail the threat of force, but can also result from the state failing to take address people's housing needs. And in Myanmar, this failure is sugar-coated with platitudes about duty, self-reliance and civility.

Second, the interwoven battles of property ownership and citizenship are becoming more prominent in contemporary Myanmar spatial transformation and urban development politics. Inclusion does not come in a singular form but rather on many different terms, and these different terms of inclusion interact with each other, resulting in new kinds of spatial politics in the urban. In recent years, enhancing city inclusiveness has been a major theme in Myanmar's official urban development. There are many projects working to make its cities more inclusive. Yet inclusiveness by the state's definition rings hollow. The middle class is included on welcoming terms while the working poor can only live in subdivided and increasingly cramped spaces. This gives rise to a social stratification based on personal wealth, as reflected in one's ability to own land, and the size of that land.

Third, residents, while enforcing the hegemonic discourse of propertied citizenship, are also trying to challenge it by widening the scope of what being propertied means via the practice of

land subdivision. Residents in Tagyi are not merely enforcers or victims of the paradigm of properted citizenship, they are both. And they attempt to problematize the paradigm by including those who are not legal owners as properted, which also covers those who are holders of landslips – whether originals or copies – and renters who pay a landslip holder for housing. These different groups of residents are not legal owners of their land, but under the local practice of land subdivision their residency is considered at least recognisable among residents. The constant tension between residents' criticism of the nearby slums and their fear of being cast out into them has incentivised them to align with the elite's discourse of properted citizenship. Residents do not fully embrace elite views on property ownership, yet they cannot completely resist their draw. At the same time, when reinforcing the hegemonic discourse of properted citizenship, residents also assert that housing is a duty, not a right. This suits the purposes of the state just fine, since it does not view housing Myanmar's citizens as its responsibility.

This chapter expands the existing literature on the multi-faceted struggles the working poor face across different cities and countries. In Vietnam, Harms (2012) shows how the working poor evicted on the grounds of improving urban beauty actually endorsed the same concept. In the US, Purser (2016) shows that those evicted are often day laborers working on eviction services themselves, who share managements' criticisms of those being evicted. In India, Rao (2010; 2013) shows how the concept of a "world city" both gives aspirations to the poor but also demolishes their houses. And in Mandalay, by basing their entitlements on property ownership, residents are strengthening the state's authority by engaging in the subdivision of land. Each subdivision is not an act violating or bypassing state authority but rather, each time land is subdivided, the state's authority is reinforced through individuals' efforts to be seen and recognised as proper citizens. Yet at the same time, as this chapter has shown, residents have made the paradigm of properted citizenship more inclusive by widening its scope. The result is an inclusion that exists tentatively, and can easily be turned into exclusion when financial difficulties render one unable to even hold onto a subdivided plot.

As argued by Roberts (2017), the right to the city in Myanmar remains a basic question of requesting social services, which is far from insistence on citizens' participation in decision-making. But this chapter further suggest that staying put is no easy feat, either. The most fundamental basis of the right to the city and the right to stay put – the ability to live in the city – is omitted by the state in Myanmar. Therefore, subdivision of land becomes a self-help remedy for the lack of low-cost housing and high land prices. It provides people with a means

to stay in the city through a temporary rather than long-term solution. It is, paradoxically, through their propertied citizenship, without state assistance, that the working poor are able to carve out a space for themselves in the city—while at the same time being included in it on unfavourable terms. A citizen's value, how much space they are afforded within the city, and even their relationship with the state have thus become property issues in contemporary Myanmar.

Chapter 7 House construction in transitional Myanmar

It was a sunny afternoon in January. Daw Den, a 68-year-old long-term resident of Tagyi, was sitting in front of her unfinished concrete house, on which construction had been halted because of a building violation. I had noticed Daw Den's house (as mentioned in Chapter 1) while visiting Ma Nwe, who lived across the street. Concrete houses were relatively rare in Tagyi, and while it was not uncommon to take months to finish building a house, during my fieldwork, I never saw anyone working on the site. The exterior walls were constructed, but the windows were just holes in the walls. No doors were installed yet, and the front was merely covered by an iron sheet acting as the door.

When Shwe Yee and I finally spoke to Daw Den, she invited us to have a chat in her unfinished house. The floor was barren, there were no lights installed, and two of the walls inside the house were only half-built. There was no electricity, and at the back were a well and a dry toilet. The house was mostly empty except for two wooden chairs and a mattress on the floor under a mosquito net. On the far right there was a small picture of a pagoda, which served as the only decoration in the unfinished house. We asked a neighbour to lend us a plastic chair so the three of us could all sit down and chat. Daw Den and her younger son Ko Wa's family had lived in a wooden house on the same plot since the resettlement, but recently only Ko Wa slept here at night while the rest of the family had moved to live with Daw Den's older son. Sitting on one of the wooden chairs, Daw Den shared that she wanted to keep the chairs in the new house. "I used to sit on the same chair here, facing south when I watched TV with my grandson in our old house. Now I don't know when we'll be able to watch TV here again. I started building this house because I'm determined to stay in Tagyi. But now I don't have a home I can call mine to rest."

Daw Den's family had been avoiding the MCDC for more than four months regarding her new house- the very government that she supported. Before Daw Den's family started building their new concrete house, they were not aware that the MCDC required them to first get a building permit, for which they were issued a penalty of 1.54 million kyats (1,027 USD), about as much as four months of their household income. The family was not allowed to resume construction until they had paid the fine, so the house remained unfinished.

In a place like Tagyi where legality is ambiguous (Chapter 5) and social status is differentiated along personal wealth (Chapter 6), I have so far established how residents consolidate their informal property ownership via establishing local rules on land sales, and that the meaning of

properted citizenship has been expanded and reinforced via their practice of informal land subdivision. In a place like Tagyi, owning land- regardless of the size, is not the end of residents' stories on property and citizenship. Residents have to build their houses on their allocated plots for resettlement, and it is in their house building journey where they encounter the state the most, and their struggle for land and citizenship has been further extended into struggles for houses and belonging, which are the focuses of this chapter.

Daw Den's case was just one of the many stories I have heard in Tagyi about conflicts between residents' house building activities and the enhanced regulations that have occurred during the period of political reform in Myanmar since 2011. Although this process of reform had been going on for only seven years by the time of my fieldwork, its political effects have been tremendous. In terms of national politics, the NLD's victory in the 2015 elections meant that Myanmar officially had a new, civilian-led government after half a century of military dictatorship. In Mandalay, following the 2015 elections, the municipality held its first-ever election in 2016 to allow residents in the six townships to vote for their representatives in the government.

At the centre of this "transition" or "period of political change" (Girke and Beyer 2018) are the struggles to come to grips with changes in policy, governance and implementation of reforms in the local context (Suhardiman, Bright, and Palmano 2021). Since the 2016 elections in Mandalay, the new civilian-led municipal government[101] has pushed for greater enforcement of regulations- including construction, as part of reforms meant to enhance local governance. This is one of the ways that the new government has tried to distinguish itself from the previous military regime and establish its legitimacy. While the MCDC have justified strict enforcement and heavier penalties as a means for enhancing local governance and Mandalay's reputation, urban citizens, and even the local lawmakers, had mixed comments on the increase in building violation fines.[102]

The greater enforcement of building regulations is not simply a matter of improving constriction safety or an endeavour of the new municipal government to gain legitimacy. It is

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[101] After the election, Dr Ye Lwin, an eye surgeon with no military background, was appointed by the regional government as the new mayor of Mandalay. The MCDC is composed of 13 seats, of which six were elected by the people. This arrangement, which allowed people to vote for their representative, is considered more democratic but not entirely so. See Zarni Mann (2017) for criticisms from the elected members.

[102] Dr Ye Lwin's administration also increased the fines for littering and other violations, as well as carried out numerous city improvement projects, to meet his goal of turning Mandalay into a smart city, which received mixed reviews from the urban citizens and regional lawmakers as the MCDC rarely consulted the public for their policies. See Nan Lwin (2018b) for news reporting.

also a matter of remaking state-people relations and of residents' sense of belonging within the city. The responsibility of building housing has always fallen on the ward's residents, who often construct informally and at the same time link their aspirations and belonging directly to their homes. The changes in the building regulations have added heavy fines on top of the already expensive cost of building materials. Thus Mandalay's image of enhanced construction safety and a cleaner civil service is built on unfinished houses and debts of residents who are unable to chart their future in the city, despite the advent of political reforms which many had anticipated for decades.

In Myanmar, belonging is often studied in relation to ethnic politics and national belonging (Aung Naing Oo 2018; J. M. Ferguson 2015; Liyun Wendy Choo 2022; Rhoads 2020b). While acknowledging the importance of the studies above on ethnicity and belonging, little has been studied on subnational belonging—a point briefly mentioned by Roberts (2018) but which has yet to be truly explored. Here, I adopt Gastrow's (2020, 94) broad definition of urban belonging: "the means and processes through which people are incorporated into the city", which highlights urban belonging as an ever-changing process. Expanding on Simone's (2005) argument on the right to the city, urban belonging is not merely about having a place to live but is about the ability to pursue future aspirations in the city. Urban belonging thus represents claims and practices through which people pursue their goals and aspirations (Archambault 2018; Melly 2017). In this context, house construction is both an aspiration itself and a vehicle through which residents' other future aspirations can achieve, and through which residents construct their urban belonging.

This chapter is about house construction in Tagyi during the political transition. I make three arguments in this chapter. First, house building is not only a survival matter but an aspiration for the resident-builders and their future generations (Archambault 2018; Morton 2019; Nielsen 2011a; Stolz 2021a). Building, especially in the form of more permanent materials such as cement and concrete, also amounted to a claim of rights (Holston 2008; Körling 2020) and a claim to belonging (Elinoff 2016; Gastrow 2017). The issue of house construction, in this context, is often seen as an issue of gaining recognition and avoiding demolition. But in the case of Tagyi, residents' self-built houses, despite not having any official approval, were never in any danger of demolition. In this context, the struggle of house construction experienced by residents like Daw Den and Ko Wa is not simply "a reflection of the relationship between the ideal and its impossible but constantly attempted realizations" (Nielsen 2011, 400), or a clash of aesthetic concepts between the state and the people (Gastrow

2017), and it needs to be understood as sitting at the intersection of property, belonging, and political transformation in a broader context.

Second, through the incident of the tightened building regulations and increased fines for violations imposed by the civilian-led MCDC since 2017, I argue this change of policy is an example of the disconnection between the MCDC's policy and the reality of citizens facing house-building needs, leaving the MCDC's goal of improving the quality of housing in the city surface-level and inadequate. This change in building regulation fines was made to encourage urban citizens to apply for building permits from the MCDC. However, this shift in policy has caused certain issues; the people who cannot comply with the regulations, such as those without legal documentation, are left with little choice but to pay the fines.

Third, by recounting unsettling stories of house building, urban belonging in the political transition is indeed a struggle between the civilian-led government's ambition for order and legitimacy, and residents' inability to access the formal channel. Residents were eager for a change of government and believed that the resulting political changes had finally bought development, progress and modernisation to Myanmar. But the impact of these changes has perhaps been hardest for those who anticipated them the most, pushing them to the political outskirts they did not anticipate. Residents' claim to urban belonging depends on their ability to navigate the political situations in Myanmar while having a place to stay in the city. In this context, residents' inability to pursue their housing aspirations under the NLD government should be understood as a disconnection between national belonging and urban belonging. Forging a sense of urban belonging thus becomes a complicated matter of whether and how residents can envision a future for themselves and their families in the city in the changing political setting.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 7.1 discusses how residents link their aspirations to house building, how they understand urban belonging and how they aim to construct their belonging via house construction. Section 7.2 provides a primer on the new building regulations and penalties, and situates these local reforms within the bigger picture of political change at the national level. Section 7.3 then discusses, by focusing on two stories, how Tagyi residents' house building activities have been affected by the new building rules, and these rules' varied impacts on their house construction journeys. Section 7.4 further looks into this dilemma that arise from residents' house building activities and link it to the broader picture of the political transition. This suggests that despite political reforms that seem to have fostered a narrative of positive changes and a greater sense of national belonging among Bamar people

in Myanmar, this enhanced feeling of belonging does not necessarily hold true at the subnational level. Tagyi residents, through experiences of encountering the state via their house building activities since 2017, had a mixed feeling of political changes on the ground. Section 7.5 concludes.

7.1 Building houses and homes in Tagyi

Since most of my interviews were conducted in residents' houses, as my fieldwork progressed, I also noticed how the built environment of Tagyi was affected by the resettlement history, the land market, and the military government's negligence over the years. An examination of houses in Tagyi revealed how residents responded to these changing external environments in their house building activities. Such house building activities do not merely represent the construction of a structure for residents to live in, but also materialise residents' projection of their aspirations and sense of belonging in the city.

Walking down any street in Tagyi, it is impossible not to notice the variety of housing (Figure 25). Houses are built from all kinds of materials and come in many sizes and heights, reflecting the era of the construction, residents' financial conditions and social status. On a single street, one can find a three-storey concrete house standing next to a single storey bamboo house and a two storey tiny wooden house. Most houses are built of wood or bamboo, but concrete and brick homes can also be found nestled in between these, most often along the ward's main thoroughfares. Further out near the boundaries of Tagyi the brick and concrete vanish, and virtually all the buildings become single storey wood or bamboo homes—but even here there is a range of design and structure. As residents in Tagyi like to say, "No two houses look the same here."

Figure 25 A street view in Tagyi (Photo by author).

But what caught my attention was the different construction foundations- some houses were built with raised floors, while more were built on the ground. The houses with a raised floor are usually made of bamboo and thatch. The area below the raised floor was an open space of a few inches and sometimes up to five feet tall. Some families used that as a sitting and cooking area, while others just left it unattended and piled it with trash. These houses with raised floors are common in areas with flooding problems or the village. But Tagyi is neither, so what can explain the raised floors? "Houses with a raised floor were the old houses built along the riverbank. They need a raised floor to avoid the rise of sea level [of the Irrawaddy riverbank]," said U Aung. U Aung was referring to the resettlement history when those resettled were forced to dismantle their old houses and rebuild them on the allocated plots in Tagyi. "We were told that we must build fast otherwise the government would take our land back," U Aung added,

"so originally all houses here had a raised floor." (see Figure 26)

Figure 26 A simple sketch of a typical bamboo house with a raised floor in Tagyi. During my fieldwork, I rarely took pictures of houses because residents were conscious about me taking pictures, especially if they were living in bamboo houses.

However, these bamboo houses were not supposed to last forever—indeed they could not, as many of them were already pretty old and damaged by termites while they were still located along the riverbank. Also, many of the bamboo houses were poorly constructed by residents themselves for resettlement. After the resettlement, depending on one's financial status, some residents demolished their bamboo houses and started building wooden houses with zinc roofs. These wooden-zinc houses were more durable than the bamboo-thatch ones, and provided better protection to the residents during rainy seasons.

But wood and zinc were not permanent materials. Termites feed on the wood, and zinc roofs could become very hot during summer. So in the last decade, there was a new wave of concrete and cement house construction in Tagyi. Concrete is considered the most durable building material in the ward because termites cannot feed on it and heavy rain cannot destroy it, meaning houses built with cement or concrete can last way longer than bamboo or wooden houses. Besides being more resistant to natural disasters, concrete's firmness also symbolises a certain level of properness and gives legitimacy to the houses. This stands in sharp contrast

to the fragile bamboo houses in slum evictions in Myanmar (Roberts 2020). Concrete's appeal does not only rely on its durability but also on its association with modernity (Ferguson 2006; Forty 2012; Stolz 2021b). In Tagyi, U Aung shared that when he built a concrete house on his land, he was proud because the new house looked modern. "Bamboo houses mostly exist in the villages, and in the city, most houses are made of concrete," said U Aung. Other residents who were still saving money for house construction shared that they thought a concrete house meant a new way of life- thicker walls with better soundproofing, divisions of rooms that allow more privacy, and a bathroom in the house.[103] All of these suggest how the locals perceive concrete as a symbol of the modern and urban way of living they desire.

However, durability, security and modernity come with a heavy price. Compared to bamboo or wood logs, concrete is a way more expensive building material.[104] The burden of building a concrete house is so heavy that, as Chapter 6 suggests, it makes house building one of the most common reasons residents had to sell part of their land for money. For poorer families who are already living in a 15x40 square-foot plot, building a concrete house can mean years of hard work, savings and even loans because they cannot raise money by further land subdivision. Building a concrete house, therefore, can be a long-term journey that requires the contribution of the whole family to accomplish. The demolition of bamboo or wooden houses and the construction of concrete houses works as an index of social status, signifying upward mobility and indicating progress (Archambault 2018).

Theoretically, every house construction requires the approval of the Building Department of the MCDC. But in Tagyi, because most residents had no land title but only landslips, they cannot apply for a building permit from the municipal government. At the same time, the municipality during the military rule never actively enforced the building regulations, meaning that residents usually paid a small bribe to street-level officers for not reporting their informal house building activities to avoid visiting the government office- the last place they wanted to go. But despite its informal nature, residents were very serious about house building. These days residents usually hired construction workers to help with the construction. The wealthier residents even hired architects to draw construction plans- an official requirement for the building permit- despite not applying for one. These suggest that house construction is, while

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[103] In Tagyi, bamboo and wooden houses do not include bathrooms in the houses to keep the main house dry. Tagyi residents living in bamboo or wooden houses take a bath in the front of their houses where the wells are built. And the toilet is usually in a detached small hut at the back of the bamboo and wooden houses.
[104] During my fieldwork, residents said that a 50kg bag of cement could cost as much as 8,000 kyat (5.3 USD), equivalent to a whole day of labour.

strictly speaking informal and may be dangerous based on the government standard, in reality, the houses were built with great care and were safe.

As a result, house construction in Tagyi is incremental and heterogeneous. The building materials, the number of storeys, and the house sizes all depend on residents' wealth. The wealthiest residents could easily afford to build a concrete house early, while the poorer ones had to struggle financially for years before they could even start buying bags of cement. Therefore, given that house building is an individual journey, as the beginning of this section suggests, different kinds of houses- bamboo, wooden, and concrete, continued to co-exist in the ward demonstrating their different stages in house building. At the same time, the meaning of house building has also shifted over the years. Originally seen as a means to fulfil the resettlement requirement, house building is no longer seen as merely a claim to property but has also evolved to support residents' claims to belonging in the city (Elinoff 2016; Gastrow 2017).

In his research on house building on the outskirts of Maputo, Nielsen (2011) argues that "preparing and preserving the future" for one's children has been the biggest motivation for residents there to start cement house building. The same can be said about the house construction on the outskirts of Tagyi. For example, Daw Den's desire to build a concrete house was part of a larger effort of ensuring her sons and grandchildren have a better future. Daw Den grew up in a village and she migrated to Mandalay in the 1980s to avoid being a peasant like her parents were. Since then she has lived in different parts of Mandalay and worked as a street vendor. Daw Den believed that "it's better to be poor in the city than being rich in the village", because living in the city implies better jobs, medical services, education, etc, for her family. In the Burmese language, house and home share the same word- *hin*. House building is home building. In the context of Myanmar, building a concrete house provides a stable place for family members to fulfil mutual obligations and care in a long term (Huard 2020; Simone 2018).

Indeed family was the common theme across conversations on house building in Tagyi. During interviews, when I asked residents what motivated them to build a house in Tagyi, most replied that they wanted to provide a home for their families. Daw Thida was one of them. Same as Daw Den, Daw Thida, who was introduced in Chapter 6, received a fine letter from the MCDC for building a concrete house without a permit. While Daw Thida told us how building her current concrete house took away years of the family's savings and her gold jewellery inherited from her mother, she commented that she was happy that she and her husband could build a

new home and a new house for the family- not only for themselves, but also for their daughters. During our interview, we learned that one of Daw Thida's nephews from the village had been living in her house for a while as he needed a place to stay for his apprenticeship as an electrical technician in Mandalay. "My nephew said he would help me fix our busted wires once he graduates," said Daw Thida. Daw Thida's house, though tiny, was a hub for her immediate and extended family, both living in the city and the village, for providing mutual support and assistance for now and in the future.

Following Nielsen's (2011) argument about house building as a future-oriented activity for the next generation, paraphs the same can be said about people's sense of belonging in the city. Belonging here is not much about feeling "at home" (Yuval-Davis 2006) or creating a sense of sameness now (Bond 2006), but more about whether one can chart the future of themselves and their family in the city. Residents are motivated to invest in house building not because they already have a shared sense of belonging now, but because they want to foster a sense of urban belonging through building concrete houses (Gastrow 2017).

Ko Wa, Daw Den's younger son who was living alone in the unfinished house, came back during our interview, and when he realised we were talking about house construction, he added, "Of course I'm building a house here. I want to see my son growing up and studying in Mandalay. Maybe he'll go to Mandalay University one day!" With his family unable to finish the house building because of the official penalty, Ko Wa was frustrated because he had no idea how long he still had to live alone in the unfinished house. The unfinished house represents an incomplete attempt to claim "to belong" in the city, and for that, as Ko Wa added, it was all because of the new policies implemented by the new MCDC after the elections.

7.2 The new building regulations

On April 1, 2017, in the top right-hand corner of page 20 of The Mandalay Daily, there was a small government notice that would have been easy to miss: in it, the newly elected MCDC announced a new fine scale for building a house without a permit, and for construction beyond the permitted scale. The fine for building without permission was increased from 200 kyats (0.14 USD) per square foot to 15,000 kyats (10.7 USD) for a concrete house, and from 100 kyats (0.07 USD) to 8,000 kyats (5.7 USD) for a wooden or bamboo house. The new building violation fines were effective immediately. An official from the Building Department of the MCDC said in a related press release that the municipal government introduced the new fine scale to encourage urban citizens to apply for building permits from the department before

starting construction, a rule that had been largely ignored by the public and poorly enforced by the municipal government during the military era (Si Thu Lwin 2017). Later the MCDC lowered the level of fine from 15,000 kyats (10 USD) to 2,500 kyats (1.7 USD) per square foot for a concrete house, and from 8,000 kyats (5.3 USD) to 1,000 kyats (0.7 USD) per square foot for a wooden or bamboo one.

The problem of the then civilian-led MCDC was obvious: to make changes in governance after half a century of military rule which led to the deterioration of many aspects of the city. This becomes an important question because the MCDC's answer to how and what to change explains why residents living on the city's outskirts like Tagyi were happy with the change in national politics but felt unable to belong in the city during the transition. Change, similar to ideas such as development and progress, is arguably a buzzword that has "an absence of real definition, and a strong belief in what the notion is supposed to bring about" (Rist 2007, 486). Change has become such a keyword in Myanmar since 2015, as the NLD promised to bring changes to the country if they won the elections.

But the chanting of "we want change" does not guarantee what will follow, or the consequences of it. But perhaps the more pressing question is, whose changes matter? Change is supposedly a neutral word, but its working as a political discourse has often suggested an improvement, that the object going through changes would become better than before. The discourse of change resembles what Li (2007) terms "the will to improve": the problematisation of a situation and the provision of technical solutions from experts. To change is to identify a deficiency and to go through a course of process for a better outcome. This mindset has created of binary of those who make the changes, and those who are needed to be changed. In this context, the discourse of change is often used as a trope by those in a relatively more powerful position to impose new controls and policies on the disadvantaged people. Slum dwellers are considered rural people who needed to be changed to "cleanliness and responsibility" through demolition in order to belong in the city in India (Ghertner 2012, 1174), or homeless people can only be considered full citizens if they become propertied in America (Roy 2003b). Similarly, in Myanmar, we can see the discourse of change being used in urban improvement projects that justified an anti-poor attitude (Sanchez 2019).

But what makes Myanmar different from the existing literature on the change as a hegemonic discourse is that in the country, change has a strong connection to national politics- "whether the NLD can come up with a strategy to govern Myanmar effectively and bring peace, justice, and prosperity to its people" (Tin Maung Maung Than 2016, 258). Change in this context,

require two actions: it needs the people to provide the fuel of change and to vote for the NLD, and in return, the NLD provides the changes the people want- saying goodbye to the junta, and improving services and governance in the city, and bringing progress to the country. If the NLD needs the people's vote and passion to become the government, then for it to provide the changes the people anticipate- whatever they may mean, the NLD needs the people to follow its new direction. The old ways of doing things, such as bribing your way out, should be over now with the civilian-led government.

While Tagyi residents were complaining about the heavy fine of building without a permit, or the inaccessibility of such a document, the MCDC considers its directive on enhancing building regulation enforcement as a success. In March 2018, the MCDC hauled its victory by collecting a total of 30.7 billion kyats (20,467 USD) in fines for building violations in Mandalay (Maung Zaw 2018). Success here does not mean that no one breaks the building regulation ever, but that the MCDC has succeeded in distinguishing itself from the previous military government- the new MCDC did enforce the building regulations. When I interviewed U Win, the head of the Building Department of the MCDC in late 2018, he claimed that the fine has deterred many from even trying to break the laws, "now they're fined, they won't do it again [build without a permit]. Because they now know we are different from the previous government. We want to change".

As suggested by U Win, during the military era, building regulations were loosely enforced in the city, and residents easily skirted the requirement for a permit by paying bribes to street-level officers at the Building Department. But with the political transition in Myanmar, house building without a permit, and bribery in general, have been increasingly framed as problems associated with the military regime that the municipal government must handle urgently. Street-level and junior officers at the Building Department were told that they must issue fine letters and could no longer accept any bribes whatsoever. As one junior engineer at the department told me, under the new MCDC, if the mayor or the department head received any complaints about staff taking bribes, they would initiate an investigation. If the allegations were proved, the staff in question would be laid off.[105] For most street-level staff at the Building Department, this meant the risk of bribes outweighed the benefits. The MCDC has also began using drones and GIS to track new buildings on the ground and check whether building permits

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[105] Of course, as section 2.3 suggests, bribery continues to exist in the civilian-led MCDC. Many officers at the CPLAD continued to take bribes from residents when they applied for the land title or other land documents. These suggest that the MCDC's no-bribery policy was only partially executed and followed among its staffers.

had been obtained, enabling immediate follow-up visits by the MCDC to new construction sites (Nan Lwin 2018a). The goal of the MCDC was simple: Improving housing quality, enhancing rule compliance, and reducing the prevalence of bribery. And from a broader perspective, it was obvious from the beginning that Dr Ye Lwin's MCDC aimed to gain legitimacy and recognition from the urban population, and it has been a key motive pushing the urban improvement work and governance enhancement policies of the municipal government.

Yet for all the MCDC's efforts to improve building quality, its policy changes are not without issue. For residents who build houses without a permit, such as Daw Den and Daw Thida, they had to pay a heavy fine to the MCDC, but after the payment, they could continue with the construction. They were not required to apply for the permit or provide any building plan, and the MCDC would not examine the house after completion. So if the MCDC's goal was to enhance construction safety in the city, how can fining alone achieve such a goal? The so-called rationale for enhancing construction safety thus becomes superficial. In addition, the MCDC frames the issue of building without approval as a matter of residents not following the rules without ever addressing the difficulty of following those rules. My fieldwork suggests that the reality was way more complicated than that. The policy applies to the whole city, but arguably it is particularly troublesome for residents who hold no legal documentation of their land title, such as the residents living in Tagyi. Some Tagyi residents complained that they tried to apply for a land title after hearing about the heavy building violation fine but were rejected because the municipal government, without any public announcement, had stopped allowing landslip holders to apply for a land title since 2017.[106] It was only revealed later in an interview with an MCDC member when he suggested that such a suspension was decided by the municipal government as it was unable to verify the validity of most landslips circulating in the city. The ultimate effect is to create a punishment trap those who suffer the most cannot avoid.

In his research on the urban sanitation improvement project in Mandalay, Sanchez (2020) argues that while the NLD government implemented urban improvement projects, it picked up the legacy of the military government in its authoritarian practices in local governance. While sharing Sanchez's observation that in the political transition period the NLD government continued to ignore the real needs of the people much as the military government did, I further

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[106] As mentioned in section 2.5, later the MCDC relaxed its policy to allow landslip holders to apply for building permit.

inquiry about the impacts of such state blindness and argue that being ignored by the state does not mean status quo, but that in the case of house construction, it means a detriment to those being ignored, aka those who were barred from getting a building permit because of an inconsistency in policies, and that affects not only their house building but also their sense of belonging in the city.

As the country entered a transitional period, the MCDC under the civilian leadership was eager to mark a departure from the previous military government by changing policies and increasing enforcement. The changes in building regulation penalties and enhanced enforcement should not be seen as one-off moves but rather as a part of the MCDC's plan to improve the city in the post-junta era. However, as I have shown in the case of construction rules, the MCDC did not fully consider the reasoning behind the policies of the junta when making these changes. Many were forced to build informally, their reasons for doing so ignored by the municipal government. The changes to building regulations in Mandalay, which appear on the surface to be a positive move enhancing building quality, have in fact, as I will argue later in this chapter, further disadvantaged the residents living on the city's outskirts, disrupting their plans for the future and putting their sense of belonging in the city in question. Yet, these residents are ironically, also supporters of the elusive idea of change advocated by the civilian-led government.

7.3 Disrupted dreams

In his research on the peripheries of São Paulo, Holston (2009) argues that house construction is a way for the builder-residents to claim property and citizenship. He sees the claim to belonging as a right, similar to the right to the city. However, in a country like Myanmar where the military has ruled for most of its contemporary history and the concept of a right has been seen as a privilege (see section 6.2 for the discussion), Holston's rights-based interpretation of belonging seems misplaced. I argue that urban belonging is not based on rights or material aesthetics (Elinoff 2016; Gastrow 2017; Ghertner 2012), but rather it is based on whether one can see their aspirations to be fulfilled in the city. In this sense, house building is not merely about building a physical structure- it is about pursuing a particular future the builder-residents desire. In the context of Myanmar, urban belonging is a struggle between the civilian-led MCDC's desire to establish legitimacy and residents' inability to go through the formalities required.

The enhanced enforcement of building regulations and the increased fines may be only minor policy changes from the perspective of the MCDC, but for the people in Tagyi, these changes have led to the most visible impacts of the political reform they can feel and experience in their everyday lives. For residents like Daw Den and Ko Wa, the new policy meant a 1.54 million kyats (1,027 USD) fine, an unfinished house, and a yet-to-fulfil dream of building a home for the family. Residents like Daw Den experienced a "temporal disruption" (Ramakrishnan 2014, 763) in their house building journey: they believed that building a new house would mean upward mobility and better futures, but the enhanced law enforcement and increased penalty had pushed them back and disrupted their house building journeys in different ways.

But it is here, in the struggle for house building under the political transition where the plot thickens. While new regulations and the heavy fines that followed have made many unable to pursue their housing aspirations, ironically these changes in policies are also the political changes people have longed for. Tagyi residents expect positive changes after the 2015 election when the NLD came into power, only to find out that the change they anticipated is indeed leading to the hardship they did not foresee, as the case of house construction suggests. The house construction case shows that residents are caught in the tension between the urban belonging- a local one in the city, and the national belonging, which has made it hard for residents who are unable to pursue their aspiration of concrete houses to chart their future in Mandalay.

In the rest of this section, I tell the stories of Daw Thida and Daw Den about how their house-building journey has been affected by the new policies under the political change. I listened to their house building stories and their anger with the heavy fines in the city. During the same conversations, I also listened to their political views and their joy with the political changes in the country. And it is in unpacking all these tensions in their stories we can understand how the struggle for house building is not about physical construction but a struggle for belonging.

Living with bird poop

Daw Thida's house, unlike Daw Den's, was just finished construction two months before our first visit. It was a two storey concrete house with a kitchen and a sitting area on the ground floor, while Daw Den and her two daughters shared a bed on the second floor. Daw Den's elderly father-in-law originally had another bed on the second floor but recently he had trouble walking up the stairs, so the sitting area on the ground floor had become his bed at night. Now

as Daw Thida's nephew was also staying at her house, he took over the area where the father-in-law used to sleep on the second floor. "My daughters complained that he [the nephew] snores loudly at night. But there's nothing we can do. There's no door or anything to divide us," Daw Thida explained. A separate bathroom was built at the back of the house. On the front porch, there was a small area with a sewing machine where Daw Thida's eldest daughter worked as a tailor. Sometimes Daw Thida helped out too as she used to be a tailor herself, "but I'm getting old, I'm over 60... 65. My eyes aren't good anymore so I could only help a little," said the woman herself while she was sitting on a plastic chair next to the sewing machine, cutting some threads for Ma Cho, her eldest daughter, to use later.

As said in Chapter 6, Daw Thida sold part of her land to build a new concrete house. "This [concrete house] is the second house we have in Tagyi," Daw Thida added. Like other families relocated to Tagyi, Daw Thida's family was forced to dismantle their home along the riverbank and use the bamboo to rebuild in Tagyi. Five years after the resettlement, the house started to slowly collapse: holes appeared on the bamboo and the family discovered termites in the wood, allowing rain to come in from the rooftop. Daw Thida's family had been saving up money for a concrete house for years, and when a corner of their bamboo house finally collapsed following the heavy rains of 2017, the family realised it was time to start building one. The following summer, the family built the current concrete house we saw. The floor was barren, and the walls were not painted, but there were four windows in the living room so new that the manufacturer's stickers were still on the frames, and the family's new metal front door had been installed just days before we met. Building a new concrete house was always a dream of Daw Thida, because she wanted to make sure that she and her family could continue living in the city, as the village has nothing left for her after moving to Mandalay over 50 years ago, and that both of her daughters were born in Mandalay, "so it's important they have a house in their hometown," said Daw Thida, "and for me, I only feel settled when I finished building this new house."

However, underneath all her joy about the new house, Daw Thida was unhappy about the roof (see Figure 27). The thin iron sheet did not fully cover the entire house, and occasionally during our conversations tiny birds flitted in and out of the house, which the resident felines tried to play with (or perhaps capture). The second time a bird flew into the house, Daw Thida grimaced and said she had lost count of how many times she had found bird poop on her floor. She also added that because of the gap, they could feel raindrops indoors when it rain, which reminded her of the old house they demolished, "there was a big role on the roof of the old house. I

thought building a new house would solve the problem but not! When it rains at night we need to use a plastic cover to block the gap to avoid getting wet." Daw Thida sighed. The family clearly needed a new roof, despite the house was just constructed months ago. When I asked why the family had not installed one, Daw Thida explained that they could not, because the family was still owning money to the MCDC.
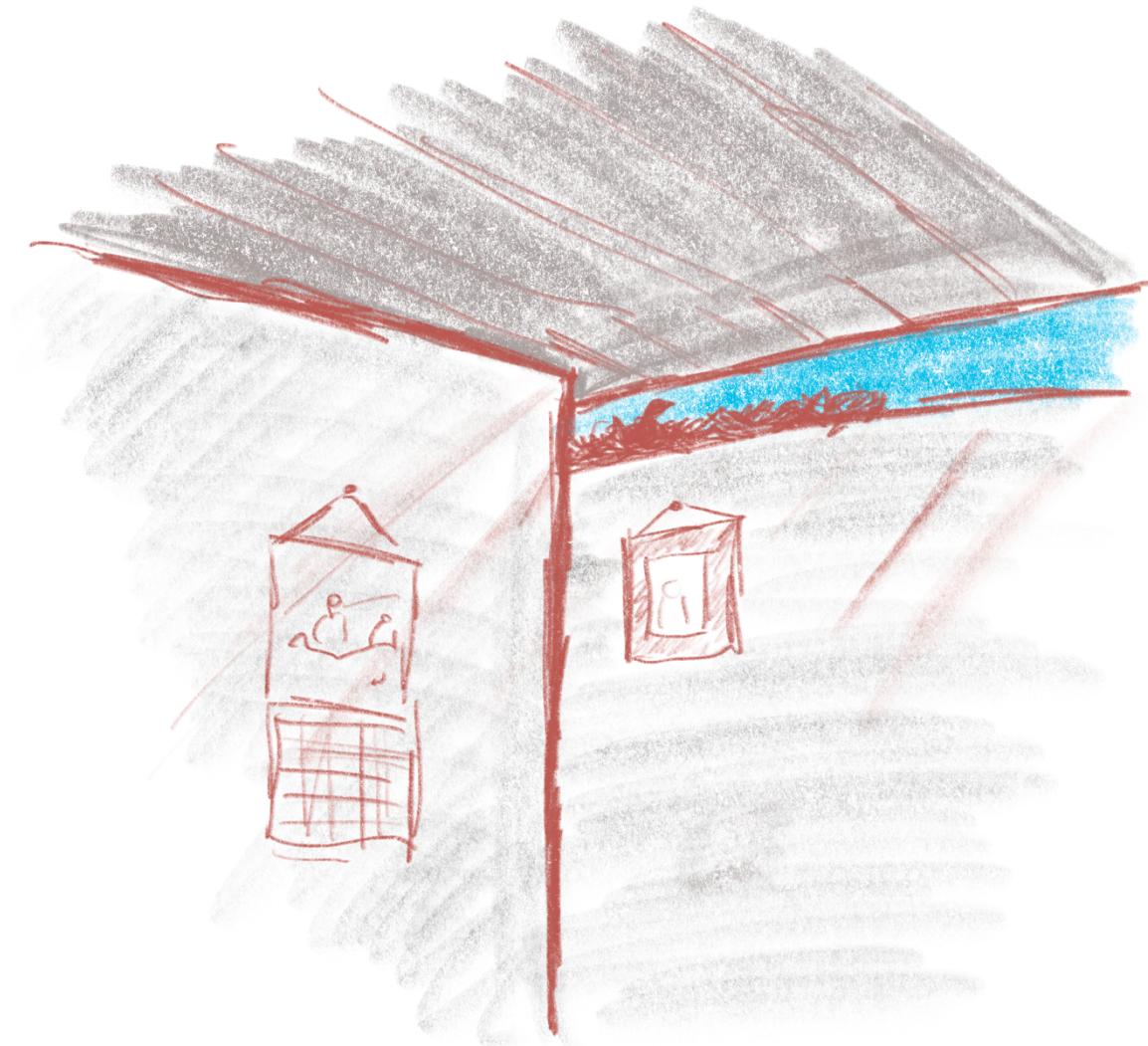
Figure 27 A simple sketch of Daw Thida's house.

A few weeks after she and her family began construction in 2018, a Building Department engineer showed up to check for a building permit, which the family did not have. Daw Thida tried to offer tea money to the engineer but was rejected. The engineer insisted that she had to report the violation back to the office but told Daw Thida that, technically, the family could continue building before they received the official fine letter, which might take days to arrive. The family rushed to complete the construction. They have accomplished a lot in such a short period: finished the outer walls, installed the window frames and door, and added a rooftop.

But at the same time, much work was left out because of the rush: the walls were not painted, the floor was barren, and most importantly, the rooftop did not cover the whole house. The family had planned to install a tile rooftop for its durability, but now had no time to order shingles. Since Daw Thida's youngest brother worked in a metal factory, he was able to get a thin metal sheet to install on top of the house, but time was so tight he did not even have a chance to measure exactly how big the new rooftop should be, and the sheet he brought home was just small enough to leave a 5-inch gap between the rooftop and the house.

Daw Thida's story is one of the many examples showing how Tagyi residents have been affected by the new building regulation by the MCDC since 2017. While residents anticipate an improvement of life when they build a new house, things do not happen as they wish because of the building regulations and fines.

But the story did not end here. In a week, the engineer returned to deliver a letter levying a fine of nearly one million kyats (657 USD) for building a two-storey, 600 square feet concrete house, an amount of fine that was equivalent to two months of Daw Thida's household income. As a last resort, Daw Den said the family would like to apply for the building permit, hoping that their late application would help them avoid the heavy fine. But the engineer said no because the MCDC had stopped allowing landslip holders to apply for the land title, which was a prerequisite for getting a building permit. Daw Den had never heard of the landslip ban before. "Sorry ah-ma," said the engineer before leaving, "but please visit my office for the payment soon."

It had been two months since the engineer left when we were sitting at Daw Thida's house. Daw Thida's family had yet to visit the MCDC office because they had no money to pay the fine. As the family scrambled to come up with a solution Daw Thida continued to receive letters from the MCDC which threatened to take the family to court. These letters had become a source of stress because they remind the family that they had a debt to pay and the government would not forget about it. But the letters also represented the fact that the family was unable to avoid the fine because they were not allowed to apply for the building permit. It was an error, as Daw Thida concluded, "the government didn't think about us when they implemented the new policies. If they thought about how many of us here have no land title, they may do things differently."

Complaints about the fine and the impossibility of getting a permit had slowly led to frustrations with the government- the new MCDC under the leadership of Dr Le Ywin. While

Daw Thida was more subtle about her complaints, Ma Cho was not. At one point Ma Cho, who had just came back from the market, said, "I thought our lives would be better under the new government!" when she started working on her sewing machine and using the threads Daw Thida prepared for her earlier. "The new government didn't think much about the poor. They just implement policies that make them look good," said Ma Cho before Daw Thida reminded her to be "polite" because there were guests (me and Shwe Yee).[107]

But our conversation did not stop there. While the mother and daughter continued to express their frustrations, they started appraising the engineer from the Building Department who personally measured their house, determined the amount of the fine, and sent them the letter. The conversation went on as followed,

> **Daw Thida:** I like the engineer, she looks young.
>
> **Ma Cho:** She's new! I have never seen her before. She looks like a fresh graduate, very smart, like you two (looking at me and Shwe Yee).
>
> **Me:** Did you try to give her [the engineer] tea money?
>
> **Daw Thida:** Of course I did! But she refused. She said, ah-ma, I am working for the government, I can't take your money. At first I thought I didn't give her enough…
>
> **Me:** How much did you offer?
>
> **Daw Thida:** 70,000 kyats (47 USD). Then I gave her 90,000 kyats (60 USD) saying that's all I've got. But she refused to take my money. She said, ah-ma, *we're at a different time now*.
>
> **Ma Cho:** She's clean. She didn't take advantage of her position, unlike other officers. I like her. Officers like her can only exist now, with the new [civilian-led] government.
>
> **Daw Thida:** I like her too. Our city will be better if we have more officers like her.[108]

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[107] Daw Thida didn't want us to hear Ma Cho's criticisms of the new MCDC or the NLD administration because she didn't want her or her daughter to be perceived as being unsupportive of civilian-led governments (both at municipal and national levels). This was not the first time during interviews that the respondent was concealing judgments against civilian-led governments while showing dissatisfaction with them. These encounters made me ponder how much different people's freedom of expression was if they didn't feel like criticising a government— a popularly elected one—when compared to the military era (see Skidmore 2004).

[108] I did get a chance to interview this engineer who gave Daw Thida the fine letter on May 6, 2019. The engineer joined the MCDC a year ago and she only wanted to work as a civil servant after the NLD won the national elections in 2015. She was, like Ma Cho assumed, a fresh graduate from university and seemed very sympathetic about landslips holders like Daw Thida who could not apply for a building permit. The engineer shared with me she helped Daw Thida by slightly reducing her house size for calculating the amount of fine. "Please tell Daw

> **Ma Cho:** That's why we support our government. They can attract good people to work for them. Because the government is also good.

At first, I could not understand the sudden change of topics and merely saw it as Daw Thida and Ma Cho sharing more details of how they received the fine letter. But something also felt wrong: the way how Ma Cho emphasised that a good officer like the engineer "can only exist now"- after the NLD took power and forming civilian-led governments at different levels. Daw Thida and Ma Cho were not only appraising the engineer, but also they associated the existence of a good civil servant as an outcome of the political change happening in Myanmar. The engineer here becomes a symbol of the kind of good changes Daw Thida and Ma Cho expected in the political reform era.

As I continued to ask more questions about residents' house building stories in other interviews, I started to realise that as much as residents were disappointed and even felt alienated because of the new policies, they still expressed their support for the new government, appraising it for bringing changes to the city. House building stories in Tagyi, thus, are not merely about personal hardship and struggles, but also reflect on residents' lived experience of the political transition in Myanmar and enhance our understanding of the transition at the subnational level (Middleton and Tay Zar Myo Win 2021).

Building a house one cannot live in

Daw Thida and Ma Cho were not the only ones in the ward who felt "haunted" by the government due to building violations. Recall Daw Den, the old woman I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. On a Saturday morning in March 2019, I found Daw Den and Ko Wa again in the same unfinished house. Both were sitting on the wooden chairs chatting. Ko Wa was still living alone in the unfinished house. As the weather was getting hotter, he found it increasingly difficult to sleep at night because there was no fan in the house, "we still don't have electricity here," explained Ko Wa who was about to leave. Daw Den happened to stop by as she just finished selling breakfast on the street. The unfinished house had become a brief stop for Daw Den during the day and a temporary shelter for Ko Wa overnight. None of these usages were expected when the family started the construction almost a year ago.

I asked Daw Den if there were any updates on dealing with the MCDC, even though judging

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Thida to visit me soon. We can work out the payment," the engineer urged me. I delivered her message to Daw Thida the next time when I visited.

by the unfinished status of the house it was hard to imagine any progress. Daw Den quickly said no. The family continued to struggle with paying the 1.54 million kyats (1,027 USD) fine to the MCDC. Daw Den continued to receive an official fine letter from the Building Department monthly, and each time at the end of the letter the office always threatened to sue if the family failed to pay by the deadline. For Daw Den, her biggest concern was not being sued, because she did not believe that the MCDC would take legal action for "just a fine". But she was worried, as she said while helping Ko Wa to fold his clothes lying on the mattress, that if she did not pay the fine the house would never be finished, and her family would not be able to move back.

Similar to Daw Thida, Daw Den had not known about the increased fines when she started construction, and in any case had believed that she could bribe her way out if she got caught. Really she had hoped that the government would not notice the building activity but, much to her surprise, a street-level Building Department official showed up just one week after the start of construction. That brought everything to a halt until they could pay it off. Daw Den tried to get away from the fine by telling the MCDC officer who issued her the fine letter that she would like to apply for the building permit late, but only knew that no matter what, the second she started building the house, she would not be able to avoid the fine,

> "We didn't apply for the land title before because we didn't think it's important, also it's expensive and complicated to get. Who wants to visit the government office under the military rule? If the new government wants to make changes, they should think about us- those holding onto landslips only! How can they both require us to get a building permit and bar us from getting one at the same time?"

Looking at the MCDC fine letter, Daw Den told me she had no idea how to pay her fine. Daw Den did not want to sell part of her land to pay the fine, because the house was still under construction. She had retired a long time ago and was supported by her two sons--one worked as a security guard and another in a factory, both low-salary jobs located in the nearby Industrial Zone 2. Until she somehow paid the fine, the house would remain half-finished and she could not move in.

"But don't get me wrong," Daw Den said when she finished folding the clothes, "I like the current government. I heard Dr Ye Lwin is a good doctor and a good man. I just hope that they can really think about us when they implement new policies or increase the fine." Daw Den paused for a second,

"I may be uneducated but I know our current government is good because it's not controlled by the military. I went to vote too. **[Me: which elections?]** All. I voted in 2015 for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi [of the NLD]. I also voted in 2016 MCDC election. Maybe the government… it is so new and it needs more time to know how to take care of the people! Dr Ye Lwin is a capable man, he just needs more time."

These interviews with Tagyi residents shared a similar pattern: we always began the conversation by talking about house building, but somehow inevitably the construction stories started to intertwine with their complaints about the new policies. The object of people's struggle has been transformed from financing their house building, to raising enough funds to pay the official fine. The residents' complaints about the enhanced building regulation enforcement and the penalty were not merely about the new policies *per se* but provided a rare chance for them to comment on the political changes in the country. They were able to express their frustration with the political changes in the country through the experience of house building.

Yet as much as residents were adversely affected by the new policies and were frustrated with the unexpected change the political transformation bought to their everyday lives, they continued to express their support for the new MCDC and the NLD government formed after the 2015 elections. They were upset when they saw the official fine letter, but at the same time, some residents also expressed how much they appreciated the officers for rejecting their bribe. However upset they were with the heavy fine or the impossibility for them to get a building permit, the residents saw the problem as a technical one the new MCDC made because of its lack of experience in governance. The residents continue to support the new MCDC and the NLD governments because they believed civilian-led governments could bring real and positive changes to the country and improve their livelihood. This sense of abjection has put the residents in a weird position of feeling rejected by the very same object they have imagined and longed for years (Chachavalpongpun, Prasse-Freeman, and Strefford 2020). And in a way, being fined becomes a mark of urban citizenship in Mandalay, and a mark of belonging in the new regime.

7.4 Ambivalence between the national and local belonging

During my fieldwork, among the 79 residents interviewed, 27 of them built new houses after the MCDC enhanced building regulations and increased the penalty in 2017, and their house

building activities were affected. In these interviews, four common themes stand out: First, the amount of an official fine was unexpectedly high. While some residents had less trouble with paying the fine, and some had no means to pay, they all felt being unfairly treated by the MCDC under its new policies. Second, residents tended to frame their frustration with the enhanced building regulation and the increased fine as caused by a technical error of the MCDC, and they still considered the elected municipal government a good one that would bring good changes to the city. Third, each household was affected differently by the new building policies despite being subjected to the same rules. Not everyone affected suffered the same as Daw Den with an unfinished house, or Daw Thida with a leaking rooftop. Those who were richer were able to pay off their fines almost immediately, and this serves as yet another example of how stratified the ward has been (as discussed in Chapter 6). Fourth, the change in building regulations may only be one of the many changes in local governance, but for the residents, it is the most visible change they can feel and experience in their everyday lives during the political transition period.

The most common complaint interviewees shared was that they were shocked when they saw the amount of fine on the official letter. One of the residents shared that he received a fine of 1.2 million kyats (800 USD) for building a concrete house of 480 square feet without a permit. He shared a common strategy with other residents: he tried to provide tea money to the Building Department street-level officers hoping to avoid the fine but failed. He believed that, even though he was wrong in terms of building without a permit, the punishment was too harsh,

> "We were shaking when we saw the amount on the letter, my wife and I. 1.2 million kyats (800 USD)! So much money. It's three months of our salaries. The government did not think about us before setting the fine scale. We're forgotten."

This sense of feeling not being properly considered is particularly strong among the poorer resident who has been struggling for years to save enough money for the construction. Many residents felt being unfairly treated because there was no way they could apply for the building permit. Remember Ma Yi, the former tea house owner who moved to Tagyi by purchasing a subdivided plot of 30x40 square feet from Chapter 6. She has been thinking about selling half of her land to raise funds for building a new house. During our interview, Ma Yi seemed to be well aware of the fine. She estimated hers could go up to two million kyats (1,333 USD) if she built a new concrete house. While the amount of the fine made her worried, Ma Yi was more upset by the fact that the punishment seemed inevitable. As a landslip holder, she was barred by the MCDC from getting a building permit, a document that she was asked to get by the very

same government to avoid heavy penalties. "What can we do? We're being punished no matter what. It's a trap," said Ma Yi before we left.

But as much as residents were upset about the inevitability of the fine and were frustrated with being ignored by the state, they nonetheless continued to express their support to the government, to a point that I almost felt it was forced. Here, I do not mean that the residents were forced physically or threatened to lend their support to the civilian-led governments both at the national and municipal levels. During interviews, it was clear that residents truly believed that the newly elected MCDC and the NLD governments were leading the city and the country to a better and brighter future. Residents seem to share the belief that, if they did not support the NLD and the civilian government it led, the country would fall back to the power of the junta who was always waiting around the corner to seize power, a scenario which happened on February 1, 2021. That was the reason why sometimes during these interviews I felt like residents were being forced to say good things and be supportive of the civilian-led governments.

In another interview, a female resident just paid off her fine for building without a permit in order to finish her house building. She did not think that the new building regulations and fine could really enhance building quality and it was all just window dressing, because based on her own experience, after paying the fine the MCDC just left her alone with the construction. The foundation and the house were never inspected for safety. As the female resident was sceptical of the meaning of the fine, she went on to have a short debate with Shwe Yee which was extremely rare during interviews because most of the time neither Shwe Yee nor I argued with a respondent,

> **Female resident:** How can issuing me a fine improve the building quality? The only effect of the fine is to make me poorer. If the government really sees me, it will notice I'm poor and the fine is too much. Da-mi [she was looking at Shwe Yee], you went to college and you're smart. Can you tell me what has the government been doing since the elections?

> **Shwe Yee:** Are you thinking about not voting for the NLD in the next one?

> **Female resident:** I love Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. I hate the military, they are bad. I'll vote for the NLD, of course, but I don't think I see any real changes yet.

> **Shwe Yee:** Ah-ma, our government is trying to repair the country. The NLD is working hard, so sometimes they make mistakes because they're new. The fine is heavy, and

I'm sorry, but the government is doing it to help our city develop.

Female resident: You're right. The new government is doing something new, something different from the old military one. We need to support it.

Shwe Yee: Ah-ma, you just need to be patient. Our country was broken for too long. Our country was like a cart with a broken wheel, and the NLD is now taking over the cart and it must repair the wheel before moving. The MCDC is also trying to develop Mandalay. Same principle. It takes time to try, and it takes time to change.

Here, putting aside the issue of Shwe Yee being a bit argumentative about what the female resident should do or think about the government, my point here is that even for a resident who was openly questioning the usefulness of the new building regulations and the increased fine, she nonetheless agreed that the new government was at least trying to do good and as a citizen, she had to support it.

But not everyone can be patient, or be equally patient. The impact of the enhanced building regulation and the increased fine creates individualised results for each resident involved. While most residents I talked to suffered a lot financially because of the fine or were forced to either postpone or alter their building plan from constructing a concrete house to a wooden one to lower the fine, a few of them were able to deal with the tightened policies enforcement without causing them an arm and a leg. For example, I interviewed a 100 household leader who built a concrete house in late 2017. But he was able to avoid the fine, which, based on judging the size of his three storey house, would be easily up to three to four million kyats (2,000-2,667 USD) if he received the fine letter. But that 100 household leader avoided the official fine through his connections at the MCDC. He hired a higher-level officer- the supervisor of the young engineer Daw Thida appraised, to help him get a building permit without a land title. The agency fee was not low but nowhere to be close to the millions of fines he could face if he built without the official paper. In a few other interviews, the better-off residents were able to pay off their fines quickly without much hassle, and their house building schedule was not affected at all, exemplifying how urban citizenship experience is differentiated (Butcher 2021) under the political transition.

The more stories I heard from the residents about how the changes in building regulations have affected their house building journeys in varying degrees, one thing became clearer: for the residents, the enhanced building enforcement and the increased penalty for the violation appear to be the most visible changes they can experience in their everyday lives in the then political

transition. This is not to suggest that the residents did not experience other changes in the transitional period, but those other changes appeared to be very abstract in people's everyday lives. During the same interview with the 100 household leader above, he was eager to share his views on current politics and how he believed that "everything is now back on track because of the change of government". But when we asked him how his life has been changed in the political transition, he paused for a few seconds, struggling to give us any until he thought of the building violation fine he almost had to pay,

> "Changes… what kind of changes are you talking about? It's such a broad term. I don't think anything has really changed since then [the change of government]… [paused for a few seconds, thinking] Ah! I had to apply for a building permit because of the new policies! Otherwise I would be fined like many others did! The military government did not enforce the regulation before and everyone could get away from it by paying tea money to the officer who came to inspect the construction site. But now things have changed. We need to get a building permit if we want to build. This is the change I can see in my life."

I was a bit surprised, if I was being honest, about his response, which turned out to be a common one shared by many Tagyi residents I interviewed. Because before and during my fieldwork, the feeling of "everything is changing and improving" was everywhere in Mandalay. When I visited the MCDC, the officers talked about new directions and policies they had to develop the city after the current MCDC was formed. When I was chatting with teachers at the anthropology department of Mandalay University, they talked about how they had more chances to interact with international researchers since 2015. And in my interactions with my research assistants and other students, they shared with me how they thought the country was doing better because now everyone has the freedom of speech and assembly, and the city was really developing judging by the number of public street lights working at night. But when it came to the conversations with Tagyi residents, this hype was nowhere to be found. Life felt almost the same as before the 2015 elections, except when it comes to the discussion on house construction. A few residents mentioned voting, but compared to building a house for the family, voting is far from an everyday experience and the happiness of voting is outweighed by the burden of repaying the building violation fine when it comes to thinking of changes they encountered in the transitional period.

Nothing is more important than staying with and providing for one's family- it is the message that I repeatedly got from all the interviews in Tagyi. The change in house building policies

thus directly interfered with the aspect of residents' lives they cared about the most. Residents want to secure a place for themselves and their future generations to stay in the city by building houses. They believed that city life was better, and it would get even better when it was under the leadership of the new MCDC and the NLD government in the post-2015 era. They projected their aspirations and sense of belonging in the house they built. But as much as people have high hope of seeing changes after the civilian-led governments took over, the word change itself does not guarantee what changes would be carried out and how they might affect the people. And instead of seeing improvement in their life, what awaits the residents is a fine letter from the government they support.

7.5 Conclusion

By the end of May- just days to go before I left Mandalay, I visited Daw Den and Daw Thida one last time to say goodbye. It was my third visit to Daw Den and my fourth to Daw Thida. Daw Den finally finished the construction but she was nowhere to be found. The window frames had been installed, the kitchen and bedroom walls were built, the dirt floor had been covered with a layer of concrete, and the house was painted green on the outside with a newly installed gate (Figure 28).

Figure 28 Daw Den's house after construction (photo by author).

How did Daw Den manage to pay the fine? Again I saw Ma Nwe who lived in a rented house opposite Daw Den's house, and she told me the whole story: Daw Den rented the whole house out for six months to a businessman as a warehouse, and she had used the rent received to pay off the fine and finish the construction. But where did Daw Den and Ko Wa live for these six months? Ma Nwe said that Daw Den and Ko Wa's family had to stay with Daw Den's elder son who lived in an area even more remote than Tagyi, until the end of the rental period. "Daw Den built a house she can't live in because of the fine," Ma Nwe said while we were sitting on the chairs outside of Daw Den's house, "and now her house is a warehouse no one lives. I haven't seen her or Ko Wa for a long time."

And for Daw Thida, she still had not paid the one million kyats (667 USD) fine at that time and continued to receive a reminder from the MCDC monthly. But the family planned to visit soon to negotiate for an instalment. The wide rooftop gap was still there, and to prepare for the rainy season, Daw Thida's nephew found an old plastic cover from his workplace for the family to use to cover the rooftop gap. It was unclear if that would work, but before the family had paid their fine, the plastic cover was their best shot to avoid getting wet in the house.

In this chapter, I examine the phenomenon of house building in Tagyi. I show that house construction is not only a means for residents to provide housing for themselves but also a way for them to materialise their aspirations and claim a sense of belonging in Mandalay. If we understand aspiration as "never simply individual (as then language of wants and choices inclines us to think). They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life" (Appadurai 2004, 67), then understanding Tagyi residents' motivations for house construction is central to understanding what collective desire they share in the course of autoconstruction. If previous chapters argue that having some sort of land ownership is a prerequisite of inclusion in Mandalay, then house construction is related to residents' sense of belonging in the city. Conversations with residents such as Daw Den and Daw Thida suggest that they consider house construction as both a familial desire and obligation. Building a house, especially a concrete one, symbolises a sense of upward mobility and a determination to stay in the city- a place where residents envision as more developed, with better opportunities, and can provide a brighter future to the next generations. A house is more than just a physical construction- it is a hub for the family to gather and provide mutual support to each other to live and work in the city (Huard 2020; Simone 2018). With house building being tied to providing for the family, it also becomes an obligation of family members to pool their resources together for the construction.

However, the process of building a house is never straightforward, especially when we consider how it is often intertwined with the broader issue of informality, claims-making, and encountering the state (Caldeira 2017). In her study on slum evictions in Luanda, the capital of Angola, Gastrow (2017) shows that slum dwellers there actively use the permanent material of their houses- cement, to claim urban belonging. Gastrow (2017) argues that, the slum dwellers' cement houses "could no longer simply be dismissed as "anarchic" but had to be taken seriously as objects of good urbanism, through which demands and rights could be articulated" (233). Builder-residents on the outskirts of Mandalay, however, could not claim their belonging the same way as those did with their concrete houses in Angola. Their struggle is not so much about what materials to use for their house construction, but rather how they can overcome the gap between the municipality's demand for order and obedience, and the residents' inability to access the very same regulations they were told to follow.

In the Myanmar context, residents' house building journeys and how they realize their aspiration and claim of belonging in the city is inevitably complicated by the fact that the country was undergoing a political transition- a period that emphasises democratisation,

changes, and hope (Girke and Beyer 2018). But while words like transition and changes are themselves neutral terms, they carry baggage from the past in the process of shaping the present and the future (Rhoads and Wittekind 2019). In the case of house building in Mandalay, the baggage that the new municipality under the NLD government had to carry was not so much about continuing the old directives and practices of the military government (cf Rhoads 2018; Sanchez 2019; 2020), but quite the opposite. The eagerness of the newly elected municipal government to bring positive changes to the table, distinguishes itself from the previous military government, and establish legitimacy and popularity among the urban dwellers, have all led to a series of new policies and reforms in the local context parallel to the national political changes happening at the same time. The result is, as this chapter shows, not merely a "temporal disruption" (Ramakrishnan 2014, 763) in the residents' house building journey, but leads to the ambivalence of understanding and experiencing political changes they long anticipated and imagined.

But here is the twist with the impacts of political changes. It is not evenly distributed in society, and the fine is an example of this uneven distribution. Same as the capacity to aspire, those who are richer and more powerful have a better chance to navigate the difficulty in realising their aspiration and be able to achieve their dreams. What does that mean in the context of Myanmar? It means that those who have more connections and financial resources can deal with the changes in the political transition just fine. As this chapter tells the stories of poorer residents- both in terms of finance and connection, like Daw Den and Daw Thida of how their house building process has been interrupted by the new building regulations and fine scale since 2017, their accounts do not only show us the unexpected damages to the people caused by a desire of enhancing local governance, but also lead to the broader question of what political changes look like on the ground, one that I cannot avoid asking when doing my fieldwork in the democratising Myanmar while looking into struggles and aspirations of residents' everyday lives on the outskirts- not merely physically, but also politically as sitting on the edge of the state interest.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis is an ethnography of residents' lived experiences on the outskirts of urban Myanmar. It examines how the outskirts were developed, how land was assigned and controlled, and how residents experienced and claimed urban citizenship, particularly during Myanmar's political transitional period. It explores the outskirts as a transient environment in which residents are forced to act on several forms of marginality - geographical, legal, social, and political. It deconstructs the relationship between land ownership and citizenship to demonstrate how decades of government policies, individual agency, and even relocation have resulted in the transformation of the outskirts into a residential neighbourhood. It investigates how the urban outskirts have become a space for governmental planning as well as a place modified by the citizens themselves.

This thesis has three objectives. First, it attempts to understand the transformation of Myanmar's urban outskirts and utilise this as a lens to comprehend the country's urban planning, a subject that is frequently cited in research but not thoroughly examined within Burma/Myanmar studies. Second, it aims to provide insights into Myanmar's urban question by providing empirical data on land and citizenship struggles in Burma/Myanmar studies. Third, it seeks to comprehend the experiences and perspectives of urban dwellers living in transitional Myanmar. It goes beyond the current national-level debate that many Burma/Myanmar studies scholars are engaged in by concentrating on transition narratives at the sub-national level.

With these considerations in mind, this thesis begins with a broad overview of urban citizenship and the narratives of transition in Chapter 1. It also examines current trends in urban studies in Myanmar, and seeks to contribute to the discussion by providing ethnographic data to explore the country's urban question, which I consider - at its core – to be a citizenship question as much as a land question (Roy 2016).

This is followed by Chapter 2 on research methodology, which explains how this research is designed, how data was collected and analysed, and how conclusions were drawn. It explores the realities of conducting research in Myanmar during the period of political reform, which affected my research trajectory and field site, and eventually led me to study urban planning, land and housing, and citizenship in Tagyi, a former resettlement ward on Mandalay's outskirts.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 both discuss urban planning in Mandalay but the former focuses on

urban planning from the government's perspective while the latter focuses on those of Tagyi residents. Chapter 3 demonstrates that successive governments constructed the outer areas of the city in response its urban problems, while also explaining their neglect of the outskirts. At the same time, it shows that even if the state does not take care of or care for the outskirts, it must nonetheless cater to the people who live there. Chapter 4 gives background information regarding the establishment of Tagyi through locals' own narratives. It follows the journey of many Tagyi residents from their migration to Mandalay, to living along the Irrawaddy riverbank, to being evicted and resettled in Tagyi. This chapter contends that residents have been actively engaged in place-making activities in their everyday lives, and that their daily practices have interfered with the state's urban planning. These dynamics between planning a marginal space and the fight over its shape has made the outskirts a dynamic, ever-changing space and place to observe urban and citizenship struggles in Myanmar.

Chapters 5 to 7 contain specific arguments about Tagyi residents' struggles for land and citizenship, which are different aspects of the politics of peripheral urbanisation on Mandalay's outskirts. Beginning with empirical chapters on legality and displacement, propertied citizenship, and urban belonging in the political transition, these chapters are about particular materiality: landslips, subdivision practices, and the violation fees.

In telling the story of the formation and transformation of Tagyi, and in detailing the ways Tagyi residents must grapple with the struggles of securing a place to stay in the city, this thesis argues that the issue of urban citizenship in Myanmar is indeed an urban land question—a question that tightly binds together matters of property and citizenship. And in a broader context, the issue of urban citizenship is closely related to residents' experiences and perceptions of transition. Their struggles for land and citizenship in the transitional era show how political changes failed to bring about anticipated positive changes at the ground level, leading to a reconsideration of what transition looks like in practice and its impacts on people's everyday lives.

This final chapter reflects on the major themes of this thesis, and the insights they provide into the politics of urban transformation in contemporary Myanmar. Sections 8.1 to 8.3 recap the three overall arguments made in this thesis: a) the outskirts are politically and socially constructed, b) urban citizenship is an urban land question, and c) urban transformations are compounded by Myanmar's political transition. Section 8.4 is a brief statement on the thesis' scholarly contribution. Section 8.5 discusses the work's limitations and recommends further study directions.

8.1 Myanmar's urban planning and the production of the outskirts

This thesis adds to Myanmar's current urban studies literature in three ways.

First, it examines the changes and continuity in post-colonial Myanmar's urban planning. It contributes to the issue of how successive governments in Myanmar – from the multi-partisan government in 1948-1962, to the military regimes of 1962-2011, to the political transition era of 2011-2021 – have consistently used eviction and resettlement to clear urban spaces (see Seekins 2011; Rhoads 2018). This thesis acknowledges the continuity of these successive governments using violence and involuntary means such as eviction and resettlement to clear urban space and confiscate land from urban dwellers, but it argues that within this continuity, successive governments in Myanmar have shifted their attitude towards and policies on the urban and urban planning.

In Chapter 3, following the trajectory of post-colonial Myanmar's planning, we witness a shift in planning direction in line with the history of Myanmar post-independence: the state goes from seeing urban planning as a path for growth and progress in 1948-1962, to using urban planning as a containment strategy and a political tool to consolidate the military's power in 1962-2011, to planning the urban for the sake of development in and of itself in the years since 2011. This unpacking of Myanmar's urban planning trajectory and examination of how ruling in post-colonial Myanmar have conceptualised the urban and its planning reveals more than simply how cities have been subject to and a product of state power (Roberts 2017). Rather, it reveals what these successive governments want to obtain through ruling specific parts of urban space: they want the outskirts to serve as a space for relocating populations from central areas— in other words, they view these expanded urban areas as solutions to urban problems.

Second, the existing literature on relocation policies has established extensively how resettlement has been used as a governmental tool for political, economic, and social control (see Bennett and McDowell 2012; Rogers and Wilmsen 2019). In this thesis, I have also highlighted how urban planning has inflicted lasting damage and deprivation on those who are forced to resettle in a new and remote place. However, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 3, even if the state created marginal spaces which it intended to neglect, it cannot completely ignore the municipal responsibilities of these outlying districts, nor can it allow uncontrolled development on the outskirts. Thus, this thesis argues that, as much as the state seeks to use urban planning as a governance tool (García 2016; Njoh 2006; Yiftachel 1998), such planning

is inevitably an incomplete form of control.

Third and finally, existing Myanmar literature has frequently documented how ordinary citizens have attempted to escape the state at all costs by engaging in different informal activities or even giving up their legal rights (Harrisson 2020; Rhoads 2020a; Thawnghmung 2019). In this context, evasion is sometimes seen as a way to resist the state. However, despite people's best efforts to avoid the state, this evasion is always imperfect due to the presence of the state in everyday life. Chapter 4 of this thesis agrees with the above assertion, but at the same time seeks to avoid framing ordinary people's actions within a binary of either evading or resisting the state; instead it argues that they must engage in a variety of tactics (de Certeau 1984) – sometimes working with the state, and sometimes separate from it – to obtain assistance in order to develop their neighbourhood. State-people interactions, thus, are always a process of negotiation (Anjaria 2011) and navigation (Vigh 2009).

Through these three types of scholarly contribution, this thesis provides a lens through which we might more fully view urban planning as a site of state-people interaction, and shows that the transformation of the outskirts is a product of both the state and the people. In doing so, it goes beyond simply labelling urban planning as a weapon of control to reveal disparities in successive national governments' conceptualisation of urbanity and urban planning. Furthermore, those who live in marginalised locations such as Tagyi also interfere in urban planning in the course of their everyday lives despite lacking any official power and engage in peripheral urbanisation (Caldeira 2017). These everyday actions, however, should not be viewed as insurgent or "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985), but rather as tactics employed by people to force the municipality to connect with them and provide additional services and assistance. Thinking of urban planning more widely, this thesis advocates for building up broader knowledge of the state's planning processes and residents' everyday responses to those processes, and argues that the outskirts are politically and socially constructed.

8.2 Urban land and citizenship

As Matelski and Sabrié (2019) argue, ongoing urbanisation has intensified competition for urban land among different groups of residents in Myanmar. With the increase of privatised urban development, we see the emergence of more gated communities, shopping malls, and satellite towns, all of which are planned and developed through collaboration between the state and real estate developers to attract middle-class residents. However, this growth of middle-

class housing space has been enabled by the exclusion of the urban poor and their space in the city, as demonstrated when urban land in Mandalay occupied by the working class is cleared by the municipal government for development purposes.

While Myanmar's urban housing development has been exclusionary for the poor, we equally see a parallel trend of residents seeking inclusion in the city through homeownership. Non-government initiatives, such as UN-Habitat and international donors providing free housing for ex-slum dwellers with occupancy certificates, have helped some impoverished Yangon residents to remain in that city with tenure security (UN Habitat 2020). In Mandalay, the municipal government provided similar social housing to ex-slum dwellers (Kyaw Ko Ko 2016; Zarni Mann 2016). However, the provision of social housing to the poor more generally remains limited. Without sufficient affordable social housing, many of Myanmar's working poor have continued struggling to secure a place to stay in its increasingly expensive cities. As a result, peripheral areas have become a popular option for urban dwellers looking for cheaper land, who then contribute to the building of the city outskirts in their own right. Subdivision of land, as practiced informally between buyers and sellers, is common not just in Tagyi but in all of Myanmar's urban peripheries. While the means used to obtain homeownership varies, the underlying message is the same: homeownership and citizenship are closely related in urban Myanmar. In this context, this thesis argues that the issue of urban citizenship in Myanmar is indeed an urban land question. Before getting into the issue of urban citizenship, however, I would first like to outline four points about Myanmar's urban land issue.

First, as Chapter 5 makes clear, I dispute the official narrative that locals traded land without a title for no reason other than tax evasion. I argue that residents, such as the seller and buyer mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, did so because they saw no significant difference in terms of ownership security between purchasing a land title and preserving their informal occupation of the land using landslip documentation. This lack of concern for formal land titles is a product of the history of resettlement and the attendant land allocation policies, as reflected by the ambivalence towards land tenure security frequently expressed by residents of the ward during interviews.

Second, I explore how the grey market for land sales works in Tagyi to demonstrate that legal ambiguity does not prevent residents from exchanging land or turning untitled land into capital. Informal landholding is often associated with precarity and insecurity (de Soto 2000), but this perspective overlooks how informality can be an effective means of holding and trading land. Instead of viewing informality as inferior and problematic, this thesis examines how, despite

only possessing ambiguous ownership documentation, residents have established a systematic way to exchange land—i.e. an "understanding" (Roberts and Rhoads 2021). The situation in Tagyi shows that residents may prefer the ambiguity of informal land dealings over obtaining a formal legal title, and that land ownership is a matter of practical control rather than a matter of legal formality.

Third, residents in Tagyi are not purchasing legal tenure or legally sanctioned land claims per se when they buy land in the ward. Instead, they are buying the access to urban services and benefits (Ribot and Peluso 2003) afforded by the land's location, with an understanding that the legal status of their purchased plot is ambiguous. Landownership on the outskirts of Mandalay is a matter of whether one has practical control over the land and its derived benefits, a matter which does not necessarily align with the legal status of the land.

Fourth, I examine how local actors such as individual land brokers, residents, and even the administrator in Tagyi engage in practices of land speculation and displacement, as detailed in Chapter 5. I follow the recent strand of literature on land speculation which focuses on the roles of residents and land brokers in small-scale land speculation and land grabs (D. Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011; Kan and Chen 2021; Leitner, Nowak, and Sheppard 2022; Woods 2020). This work broadens the existing discussion on global land speculation and land grabbing by analysing how local actors participate in the localised processes of land financialisaton and land grabbing for their own sake, rather than as local fixers for the state or outside businesses (Sud 2014). By entering into this discussion on land grabs from the ground level, I seek to connect it to the literature on resettlement and argue that resettlement is not the end of displacement, but is instead only the beginning of a market-induced displacement (Leitner, Nowak, and Sheppard 2022), as resettlement turns land that was not previously tradable into a new commodity over which people can compete. In doing so, I argue that we witness accumulation by displacement (Zhang 2010) occurring on Mandalay's outskirts as wealthier residents buy more and more land while poorer residents come under financial pressure to sell, with the latter encountering symbolic violence in the land market—that is to say, it becomes normal for the wealthy to easily accumulate ever-more land without having to pay careful attention to how the market actually works because they have access to capital. While Levien (2011) claims it can only truly be considered "a grab" when land is taken away from people involuntarily, the case of Tagyi illustrates how land can be "grabbed" in a meaningful sense even when locals ostensibly sell their land voluntarily, without physical duress from any third party.

Existing literature on land speculation often focuses on areas that are subject to development projects (Deasi and Loftus 2013; Harms 2016; Kan and Chen 2021; Levien 2012; Zhang 2010) or on changes in land use that occur in peri-urban areas where, for example, agricultural land is changed into urban land (Goldman 2011). However, land speculation is by no means limited to such areas. Tagyi lies outside of any government development area or real estate project, yet speculation there has pushed up land prices and displaced the poorer residents. In focusing on Tagyi, this thesis answers Desai and Loftus' (2013, 790) call for a research agenda with a "nuanced, multi-scalar approach that might enable understandings of how geographically specific practices and land ownership patterns *articulate* with speculation on global land markets" (emphasis in original). While this thesis does not directly involve international investment or the global land market, the case of Tagyi resembles the patterns of land speculation and investment which have been widely documented in many other cities around the world (Ghertner and Lake 2021).

What are the consequences of our knowledge of land ownership and displacement in urban Myanmar? Land titles have frequently been considered as either a feasible solution for land tenure security or a tool utilised by the government for dispossession or relocation. This discussion largely focuses on rural and ethnic communities (Kramer 2015; Scurrah, Hirsch and Woods 2015; Suhardiman, Kenney-Lazar, and Meinzen-Dick 2019). Yet Tagyi, an urban neighbourhood, demonstrates another possibility: residents are unconcerned with formal titles, and the municipality has not used land titling as grounds for justifying the eviction of those who have opted to simply hold onto their landslips for years or even decades. In Myanmar, it is common for people to use documents other than legal land titles but which are issued by the government as proof of land ownership, resulting in "dual authority" (Suhardiman, Bright, and Palmano 2021) on land governance split between ethnic groups and the national government. Tagyi is not located in an ethnic area but we can see a form of "dual authority" at play there between the old junta and the civilian-led government that had supplanted it. The landslips in question were granted by the military administration and the subsequent NLD government was obliged to recognise them despite its ambivalence regarding their legality. Although it refused to recognise landslips as legal ownership documents, it also refused to suggest that holders of those landslips were illegal occupants. This drives home how the political transition does not provide "a blank slate" (Rhoads and Wittekind 2019) for Myanmar as the legacy of policies enacted by the military government persists into the post-2011 era. This suggests that state control is perpetually incomplete and constantly contested, with ordinary people left to try and

secure their landholding by whatever means they have at hand in the face of inconsistent legal requirements laid down by successive governments (Mark 2016).

As has been shown, the urban land question in Myanmar is often a matter of personal struggle and legal ambiguity. The questions of who owns what, in what terms and under what conditions (to rephrase Roy's (2016) land questions) often do not have straightforward answers. Yet they present a multitude of stories, negotiations, and enactments involving the intersection of multiple actors, as is seen in Tagyi. Individual actors, such as the land brokers and the wealthier land buyers discussed in Chapter 5, do not always fit into our existing framework of globalised land grabs, but are nonetheless important forces that drive land speculation in the local context. Thus, this thesis contributes to the literature by illuminating how land speculation and displacement create a complex reality for residents living on Mandalay's outskirts.

In terms of scholarly discussion of citizenship in Myanmar, much of the focus has been at the national level (Cheesman 2017; Ho and Chua 2016; Thawnhmung and U Yadana 2018; Walton 2018). In this thesis, I contribute to this discussion by focusing on the local level and arguing that urban citizenship in Myanmar is more a question of whether one can secure a place to stay in the city. To this end, I seek to examine the relationship between land and citizenship by applying the concept of propertied citizenship (Blomley 2004; Hammar 2017; Heer 2018; Roy 2003b; Wu 2010;) on the outskirts of Mandalay and argue that we should understand urban citizenship in Myanmar through the lens of land.

In Myanmar, urban dwellers often take it upon themselves to secure housing, as they lack affordable options from the state. This self-reliance is a common survival strategy (Thawnghmung 2019), and results in land owners being seen as more capable citizens than those who struggle to secure even a small plot. The issue of urban citizenship, in this context, becomes a fundamental question of obtaining urban residency, rather than a matter of participation or empowerment, as is often the focus in the debate of urban citizenship in the Global North.

It is in this context that I argue urban citizenship is differentiated by personal wealth. In general, land speculation and accumulation are class-based phenomena, as the more privileged classes can take advantage of the less powerful (Levien 2018). In this sense, there is a need to differentiate sub-groups within communities to break down their components, as each community includes a variety of people (D. Hall 2013). As Prasse-Freeman and Phyo Win Latt (2017) argue, class consciousness has entered a state of arrested development in Myanmar:

"When class is explicitly used, it is not only (or very often) applied in the context of classes opposed to each other because of clear delineations between them (as in Marxist conceptualisations), but rather it is used as a mode of general social differentiation" (408). In Mandalay, people living in resettlement wards on the outskirts tend to be seen as one class: the lower-income, less-educated working poor. However, this papers over the very real differences between the residents in Tagyi. This thesis shows that the ward is not solely a home for the working poor—a case that has been made explicit in Chapter 5, which recounts how wealthier residents speculate and acquire land from their poorer neighbours; in Chapter 6, which details the phenomenon of differentiation via land subdivision; and even in Chapter 7, which notes how tall concrete dwellings have sprung up alongside old bamboo houses in the ward. All of this serves to illustrate how the richer residents of Myanmar's cities are acquiring more and better land while the poor are forced to live on subdivided plots or to even sell their land and move out of the outskirts. Thus, the issue of urban citizenship, as I argue through the case of Tagyi, is an urban land question. Urban citizenship is fundamentally a propertied matter in Myanmar.

8.3 Urban transformation in Myanmar's political transition

This research was conducted during the era of political transition and touches on the issue of citizenship within the context of political reform through the case of house construction in Tagyi. House building is an aspiration for resident-builders and their progeny, as it represents a way to claim rights and their belonging in the city (Gastrow 2017). In the case of Tagyi, the struggle of house building is not just a reflection of the ideal and the impossibility of its realisation, but rather is a complex intersection of property, belonging, and political transformation. The introduction of tighter regulations and increased fines for violations by the MCDC has caused serious issues for those who are unable to comply, including those without legal documentation. The disconnect between the MCDC's reform ambitions and residents' housing needs has made forging a sense of urban belonging a complicated matter, one that is related to residents' ability to envision a future in the city amidst a changing political setting.

The NLD's landslide victory in 2015 demonstrates Myanmar voters' unwavering support for the party, especially among ethnic Bamars (Thawnghmung 2015). Yet while I did witness first-hand both the popularity of the NLD and widespread anti-military sentiment in the daily conversations I had with Tagyi's residents, the reality is more complicated. I demonstrate in

Chapter 7 that residents of Tagyi were ambivalent about the policy actions which followed the political changes they had long anticipated. My thesis adds depth and nuance to the relationship between Bamar civilians and the NLD government, and provides a more in-depth analysis of how political changes have brought about both a sense of belonging and an inability to belong, illustrating how these two contradictory feelings often co-exist simultaneously in political transition. In doing so, this thesis uses the word 'transition' with caution and does not assume it inevitably leads to linear change, preferring to remain cognizant that every period of substantial change always carries with it the baggage of previous regimes (Chambers et al. 2018; Lall 2016; Rhoads and Wittekind 2019).

According to Holston (2008), in his study of urban citizenship in a working-class neighbourhood in the periphery of São Paulo that Brazil's political transition from a military dictatorship to a democratic administration produced a sense of insurgency among the working poor. Likewise, Myanmar underwent political change during the period from 2011 to 2021. However, based on my research in Tagyi, I contend that the political change which occurred in Myanmar did not result in the same type of insurgent citizenship that Holston observed in São Paulo. Instead, individuals in Tagyi were divided over the outcomes of political change, and the concepts of rights and entitlement remained hazy among those I interviewed.

My fieldwork in Mandalay in 2018-19 took place during a period in which the political transition and economic reforms had broadly influenced urban Myanmar. The country's political transition entailed a regime shift, with a new government replacing the old. Thus, legitimacy became a critical issue for the newly elected municipal government, which was keen to distance itself from the previous military authority. In its desire for legitimacy and popularity, the civilian-led MCDC was eager to implement a slew of new policies to develop the city—to "make Mandalay clean, beautiful, and make the urban people proud," as its motto suggested. However, these policies did not address the needs of the city's underprivileged population (Sanchez 2019). The same may be said for the political transition's impact on Tagyi. When the civilian-led administration imposed new regulations without acknowledging older ones established by the military government, citizens were locked into an impossible predicament and left largely unable to obtain a legal permit for house construction. As a result, many residents were either living in half-finished houses or facing a hefty fine for violating strict new rules imposed by the civilian government (see Chapter 7).

Yet while the political reforms were not exactly what most urban dwellers had hoped for, many people continued to support the civilian-led government and the NLD, on the grounds that

having a non-military government was a real benefit to the country and the people. Thus, Tagyi residents' mixed views about the shift in governance should not be seen as simply as unalloyed resentment of the political changes outlined above, but as a representation of what transition looks like on the ground—a bittersweet and visceral lived experience.

8.4 Implications for urban studies, citizenship, and Myanmar

As AbdouMaliq Simone (2010) suggests, it is necessary to pay more attention to "the continued small and medium-level developments of residential and commercial districts that have occupied specific territories within cities for a long time" (48) if we wish to avoid rendering working class or working poor neighbourhoods invisible in urban studies. Simone's view is further elaborated by Perera Nihal (2016), who asserts that there is a knowledge gap concerning how ordinary people create their spaces, or "the production of lived spaces by those who do not have the power to produce abstract spaces and erase other spaces" (3). As Schindler (2017) argues, cities in the Global South continue to be analysed in terms of their disadvantaged position within the context of globalisation, which omits other forces that are at play in shaping them and their residents' lived experiences. This thesis is an attempt to understand Myanmar's working-class neighbourhoods, where residents' lives are neither particularly precarious nor entirely risk-free,[109] and where ordinary people must work to secure their own land and housing to be recognised as urban citizens.

If the outskirts is a subaltern space that is politically and socially produced, then Roy (2011) argues that subaltern should not be defined as subordinate or inferior, but rather should be repositioned and understood as a category that "marks the limits of archival and ethnographic recognition" (231). By calling for such a repositioning, Roy is pushing to expand subaltern urbanism beyond territorial study and create a mode of knowledge production that is primarily about recognition: how we can recognise the invisible, and how we can make the invisible visible. Roy's argument on subaltern urbanism collaborates with other studies which aim to push the boundaries of how we understand cities in the Global South, which are fundamentally different from those the Global North. The former requires special attention to their unique history of development. They should not be seen as simply following the path of cities in the Global North but studied individually, based on their context (Robinson 2002). Cities in the

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[109] This statement held true during my fieldwork, but under the current political situation in which the military dictatorship has returned, the general public lives under the constant threat of violence.

Global South should not be viewed as "pathological and in need of development interventions" (Schindler 2017, 47) but rather as spaces where new knowledge can be forged.

In relation to studies on citizenship, this thesis challenges the assertion that insurgency and resistance are people's primary means of response when they are suppressed or inadequately supported by the state. By focusing on residents' journeys and their struggles to procure and secure their land, this research contributes to existing scholarship by highlighting other possibilities for people engaging in non-resistant tactics as they seek to claim their urban citizenship.

The intellectual debate over the basis of urban citizenship has been contentious. Some, including Purcell (2002; 2013), argue that the right to the city is based on one's presence in the city rather than property ownership, but as Roy (2003b) points out, urban citizenship is based on property ownership, and those who lack it, such as the homeless, are considered improper citizens in many societies. In this thesis, I hope to contribute to the continuing debate about propertied citizenship (Roy 2003b; Hammar 2019) by suggesting that residents who are subject to the paradigm of propertied citizenship are both expanding and reinforcing it.

In Myanmar studies, the discussion of urban development in the post-colonial period has primarily centred on two themes: large-scale development projects and informal settlements. Areas like Tagyi – which are both planned and marginal, informal yet not illegal, and neither quiet nor contested – remain understudied. These areas on the outskirts differ substantially from mega-projects and the like in terms of scale and who is involved, but the core conflict remains: people competing for space within the city even as their interests often align under the banner of urbanisation. By examining at residents' land related struggles through the lens of local practices in land sales, land subdivision, and house construction, this thesis examines the urban land question, namely "What is the making of the urban in Myanmar?" (Roberts 2017, 64), interrogates the narratives of transition, and puts them into the context of urban citizenship.

This thesis also adds to our understanding of the relationship between Myanmar's urban transformation and the country's political transition. It demonstrates how the transition is increasing existing inequalities and creating new ones by adopting difficult-to-navigate policies, regulations, and laws in urban settings. The findings also show that this shift has had an impact on housing development, with many residents having trouble acquiring the requisite permissions and being heavily penalised as a result. Despite these obstacles and inconsistencies,

the research also shows that many urban residents remain in some ways hopeful, viewing the civilian-led government as the preferrable and only alternative to military rule. As a result, this research contributes to a better understanding of the complex dynamics at work in, and the influence of transition on, Myanmar's urban change.

8.5 Limitations and future research

This research has three notable limitations, which I outline below.

First, this research is solely focused on Mandalay, which is Bamar-dominated and the second-largest city in Myanmar. I emphasise that it is Bamar-dominated because different cities in Myanmar have been governed in markedly different ways throughout the country's history. It is important to note that cities in ethnic minority areas, such as in the Kayin State capital of Hpa-An, local actors play a more significant role in policymaking relative to the central government (Lamb 2020). And even Bamar-majority cities are not governed identically. Recent studies on Yangon, for instance, have demonstrated how its civil administration is struggling to keep up with the growth of the burgeoning megacity (Boutry 2018; Kyed 2019; Matelski and Sabrié 2019; Morley 2013; Simone 2018; Than Pale 2018). The governance of smaller towns in Bamar majority areas, such as Bago (Reeder 2019), appears to remain substantially under the military's influence. In Mandalay, although the government is engaging in a growing number of urban improvement and development projects, these projects are rather techno-centric. The municipality also appears to favour launching these projects in parts of the city that are already more developed and prosperous, in order to ensure they will generate success stories (Sanchez 2019; 2020). Thus, my choice to focus on a single city – Mandalay – poses both advantages and a limitation for this thesis.

Second, this thesis is limited by my positionality. Because my Burmese language proficiency at the time of my fieldwork did not enable me to conduct many of the interviews on my own, I was often accompanied by research assistants. And although I consider all of my research assistants and translators reliable, my limited Burmese meant that I often had to rely on third parties to understand many of my informants and other Burmese-language sources. However, even my basic language skills served to opened up opportunities for me during my fieldwork. I was often invited to residents' houses, such as Daw Aye's, to practice Burmese with locals, who always welcomed me with open arms. My position as a foreign researcher also proved to be a barrier to accessing information, rather than an asset (see Chapter 2 for details). I was

never seen as a local but rather a *nain ngan kyar thar* (foreigner, in Burmese), and I likely missed out on certain forms of insider knowledge during my research. That being said, I grew up in a working-class family in Hong Kong, and thus shared certain experiential similarities with many residents of Tagyi: I watched for years as my parents struggled to purchase an apartment; lived in an environment with limited benefits or welfare; and my family was forced to live off loans while my father had difficulty finding better-paid work to provide for us. While I have no intention of suggesting that working class life in Hong Kong is equivalent to that in in Mandalay, I do want to stress that many general experiences are comparable and that my background has made me more sensitive to certain challenges faced by the residents of Tagyi and helped me to better understand how land and housing struggles work—not so much in legal, economic or policy terms, but through appreciating, at a personal level, how and why families always strive to provide for the next generation, regardless of where they may be.

Third, this research's contribution skews somewhat towards the empirical. It aims primarily to understand the urban land question in Myanmar and uses land as an analytical lens to better understand urban citizenship. This research has applied various concepts such as accumulation by displacement and propertied citizenship, as well as belonging and urban aspirations to analyse how urban dwellers living on the outskirts on Mandalay claim citizenship. While building upon these existing concepts, this research says relatively little on urban dwellers' struggles that is not related to land or housing.

Further research might well be conducted on urban planning in Myanmar to better capture the lives of what I refer to as the city's non-squatting working class. We should pay more attention to spaces where conflicts or even violence are difficult to detect, and which are not the site of government projects or megacity developments. This echoes Simone's (2010) advocacy for more research on working-class neighbourhoods which are overlooked in urban studies but represent an important part of the urban landscape that is home to a sizable portion of many cities' populations.

At the same time, future research on urban Myanmar should continue to explore how land and property are central to the country's urban citizenship, and to enrich our understanding of the country's urban politics. This research eschews a state-centric approach to exploring property and citizenship in Myanmar in favour of providing an account of how urban dwellers engage in planning and claiming of citizenship, and I believe that further research should continue in this direction to explore citizenship at the subnational level—an endeavour which I believe will reveal additional dynamics and complexities concerning how urban space is produced and how

citizenship is experienced from below. Such research should also emphasise pushing beyond the visible aspects of the development process and instead investigate the underlying political and economic dynamics behind capital investment, urban policy, and land grabs.

Epilogue: Coup d'état and Urban Myanmar

The fieldwork for this research was carried out in 2018-2019. Looking back, I realise this was a relatively peaceful period for conducting research in Myanmar. I happened to leave the country in June 2019, only a few months before the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.[110] Not only my fieldwork but also most of my research was conducted during a period that today can be said to constitute the final years of political transition in Myanmar. In the middle of my writing-up, the military once again reasserted its absolute control over the country's governance, launching a coup d'état in early 2021. In this epilogue, I would like to provide a brief overview of the coup and its impacts on my research.

Myanmar's military, led by Commander-in-Chief General Min Aung Hlaing, carried out a coup against the NLD-led government on February 1, 2021. More than a hundred politicians, MPs and activists were arrested in early morning raids, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and NLD Ministers and Regional Ministers. The coup occurred on the first day of the new session of Parliament after the NLD won a large majority of seats in the general election held on November 8, 2020. The coup triggered nationwide protests by activists, numerous professional organisations, and the general population under the banner of the "Civil Disobedience Movement" (CDM). Myanmar's military pre-emptively sought to justify the coup with claims of massive voter fraud, which the Union Election Commission denied on January 28, 2021. It also claimed that its power grab was constitutional, citing Articles 417 and 418 of the 2008 Constitution. The CDM, which believes the military takeover to be illegitimate, has strongly refuted these claims. Nonetheless, the military overruled the results of the November 2020 general election and announced a one-year state of emergency, which was subsequently extended and remains in force as of December 2022. It also established a State Administrative Council (SAC) to act as the country's executive governing body and announced a new general election would be held sometime in 2023.

The 2021 coup has changed life in Myanmar in virtually every way imaginable, including in its cities, as the military's presence has once again become inescapable; to give just one example, public concern has been stoked by the junta's construction of military bunkers near major urban intersections (Ko Cho 2022). While the junta has built bunkers in major cities such

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[110] While this research was conducted before the pandemic, I am aware of its devasting impacts on urban housing, which is the main focus of my research. See Rhoads et al. (2020) for how the pandemic impacts the urban poor's ability to afford housing.

as Mandalay, Yangon, and Naypyidaw to keep a closer eye on civilians, its coup has also fuelled the formation of urban guerrilla movements which have bombed various military-related facilities (including many of these recently constructed bunkers), killing military officers and spies (Ye Myo Hein 2022). While Myanmar had been engaged in civil wars to some degree for many years, primarily in areas controlled by certain ethnic communities, the coup in 2021 considerably expanded the scope of civil war to include major Bamar-dominated cities, such as Mandalay and Yangon.

Following the coup, the municipal government of Mandalay was also replaced. The military immediately arrested and jailed Dr Ye Lwin, the surgeon and mayor of Mandalay who was allied to the NLD. Members of the MCDC resigned, and the SAC nominated a new mayor to take over on February 7, 2021. Military personnel have also been stationed on the Mandalay University campus, and numerous teachers and students have been jailed for participating in the CDM. Many urban residents have been killed or arrested for supporting the CDM, while others have been evicted from their homes by the military. Mandalay, like so many other parts of the country, has been turned into a battlefield.

Both the pandemic and the coup have affected my research plans. I had originally intended on making a short follow-up visit to Mandalay in 2020-2021, as I realised there were gaps in my data collection. I would have liked to revisit Mandalay, especially Tagyi, to get more information and to catch up with the residents I interviewed in order to follow-up on the issues they had been grappling with during my fieldwork. This was, unfortunately, impossible.

Further complicating matters, I have lost contacts with most of the Tagyi residents I interviewed in the wake of the coup, as many have abandoned social media for fear of monitoring and reprisals from the military. I was also shocked to learn from a local news article that the Tagyi ward administration building – home to the offices of U Kyu and several local elders including U Aung, had been bombed multiple times. Some occupants of the office building were reportedly injured, but I still have no idea who they were or whether U Kyu or U Aung are safe. I have frequently thought about U Kyu in particular, since numerous attacks have been carried out at the ward level targeting local administrators, particularly those like U Kyu who have military backgrounds. During our conversations, he made it clear to me that he had joined the military because he couldn't find other work that would allow him to leave his hometown after he turned 18 in the late 1970s. But this was hardly common knowledge in the ward, and I can't help but worry about his safety.

How has the coup affected Tagyi's neighbourhood relations? And in a broader context, with numerous forced evictions taking place in Mandalay, how are residents coping with the relocation, and what does this mean for urban citizenship? These are some of the unanswered questions I've been pondering since the coup and which I hope to have a chance to explore in the future.

Outside of Tagyi, I got to know many university students and fresh graduates during my fieldwork in Mandalay, including those with whom I worked closely. All of them joined the CDM but were later forced to give up on more direct forms of resistance in the face of overwhelming military violence, becoming more subtle in how they choose to fight back. Through continued communication with my friends in Mandalay, I know that many now feel stuck in a sort of limbo thanks to the political situation in Myanmar. The CDM is very much about the future of the country's young people, but within that resistance movement many young people I have spoken to find themselves unable to chart a future.[111] A common concern is that the political reforms witnessed from 2011-2021 – a "whole decade of improvement and changes" as my former housemate in Yangon once put it – would be for nought.

Yet in contrast to what Skidmore termed the politics of fear in people's everyday lives during her research in Yangon in the 1990s, I would say that the dominant emotion in Myanmar today is not fear, but anger at the SAC for taking away the progress made over the last decade. My friends' anger with the military, sharing of post-coup struggles and their sense of "stuckness" have forced me to engage in conversations about how we should reflect on the transitional period, as some of them were not only upset with the military but also with NLD for not being strong enough to protect the people.

One thing, however, is certain: Myanmar will never be the same, and the idea of getting "back to normal" or returning to "before the 2021 coup" amounts to wishful thinking at best. We must be careful not to dismiss the suffering Myanmar's people have gone through since February 1, 2021, but I am still hopeful about the country's future. I believe that the resistance movement will succeed for the following two reasons.

First, as with many autocratic regimes throughout history, the SAC and the military in Myanmar constantly overestimate their popularity among the broader populace. They did not foresee that resistance would be so strong for so long, and over time more people have taken

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[111] Through my interviews with university students in Mandalay, I have explored how young people have responded to these new political realities, and argue that the coup has both united and divided the country's youth (Chiu 2022).

up arms against the military's caretaker government. And despite limited opportunities to openly resist through protests and other public action, many in Myanmar continue to engage in various forms of everyday resistance to ensure the junta knows how deeply unpopular they really are.

Second, this coup and the resulting resistance movement have revealed deep and pressing problems in Myanmar that have long gone unaddressed—in particular, the NLD's problematic history of being primarily Bamar-oriented, its lack of a strong vision and its failure to make meaningful commitments to ethnic politics. These issues cannot be resolved overnight, but there are early signs of improvement on these and other fronts by the opposition government, the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar, which has begun trying to tackle some of these fundamental, systemic issues alongside its resistance efforts. If these issues can be resolved, it will pave the way for a stronger and more unified resistance force in Myanmar – one that could later serve as a concrete foundation for democracy in the form of a federal government which can truly recognise ethnic equality and dignity.

Finally, here at the very end of this thesis, I would like to express my heartfelt condolences to those who have died in the resistance movement, those who have been injured, detained, or imprisoned, and to the families of victims who have been affected by the coup. It is my fervent hope that these losses will not have been in vain.

Appendix: Household Survey

Opening speech

My name is (assistant's name) and this is Francesca, who is a student from an England University (UEA). I'm helping her to translate today. She's interested in knowing about the urban working class's housing and their life stories. She's particularly interested in why and how people are living in Tagyi ward.

We would like to sit down and ask you some questions for around 30 mins to an hour, depending on your time. We will not tell anyone what we chat about, we will not tell anyone of your name, so you can talk freely.

The Mandalay government or local administration is not involved in this survey. The survey is only for research purposes. We are students with no ties to any development programmes or projects.

And if you have any questions about me and my research, please ask.

So, are you available? (When the respondent says yes, then we can start the survey; if the respondent says no, please ask if we can come back for another time and date for the survey).

And we would like to record the survey, is it ok?

1. Background information

1a. Interviewer's Name _____

1b. Resident's Name _____   Phone number (optional)_____

1c. Date_____ (DD/MM/YY)   Time _____

1d. Ward (subward and land slot number) _____

1e. Age _____

1f. Sex _____

1g. How long has respondent lived in this house? _____

1h. Is the respondent the head of household (**please circle the appropriate answer**)?

    Yes   No

If no: Name of head of household _____
             Sex of head of household? _____
             Age of head of household? _____

1l. How many people live in this household?

Adult men (18 and over) _____   Adult women (18 and over) _____

Boys (17 and under) _____   Girls (17 and under) _____

Total members of household _____

1m. Among these [____] household members, how many are currently working? _____

2. Demographics of the household head

2a. What is the literacy status of the **household head (please circle the correct answer)**?

- Neither able to read nor write   - Able to read only   - Able to write only   - Able to read and write

2b. How much formal schooling has the **household head** had **(please circle the correct answer)**?

- None   - Primary   - Lower Secondary   - Higher Secondary   - University/college or more

2c. Is the household head… **(please circle the correct answer)**?

- Single/Never married   - Married   - Widowed   - Divorced/Separated

2d. What is the religion of the **household head** (**please circle the appropriate answer**)?

- Buddhism   - Christian   - Muslim   - None   - Other [Please specify: _____]

2e. Does the **household head** attend a pagoda or a church (**please circle the appropriate answer**)?

- Yes   - No

If yes, how often in a month? _____ [times a month]

2f. What is the (main) job of the **household head**?

Housewife/Homemaker _____

Business owner (**what business?**) _____

Unemployed _____

Student or Apprentice (**where / in what field?**) _____

Retired _____

Employee (**what industry/ company?**) _____

Day Labourer (**what industry/ company?**) _____

Government staff (**which department?**) _____

Other [please specify_____]

2g. How does the **household head** go to work?

_____

2h. Where does the **household head** work?

_____

2i. And how long (time) does it take to go to work?

_____

2j. What is the **total household income** (per month)?

_____

2k. Which ethnic group(s) does the **household head** belong to?

_____

2l. What language(s) does the **household head** speak?

_____

2m. Is the **household head** born in Mandalay?

- Yes   - No

If **no**, where was he/she born? _____

Why did he/she move to Mandalay? _____

When did he/she move to Mandalay? _____

Did anyone move to Mandalay with him/her? _____

3. Demographics of the respondent (if he/she IS NOT the household head)

3a. What is the literacy status of **the respondent (please circle the correct answer)**?

- Neither able to read nor write   - Able to read only   - Able to write only   - Able to read and write

3b. How much formal schooling has **the respondent** had **(please circle the correct answer)**?

- None   - Primary   - Lower Secondary   - Higher Secondary   - University/college or more

3c. Is the **respondent** currently married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never been married **(please circle the correct answer)**?

- Single/Never married   - Married   - Widowed   - Divorced/Separated

3d. What is the religion of **the respondent** (**please circle the appropriate answer**)?

- Buddhism   - Christian   - Muslim   - None   - Other [Please specify: _____]

3e. Do you attend a pagoda or a church **(please circle the appropriate answer)**?

- Yes   - No

If yes, how often in a month? _____ [times a month]

3f. What is the (main) job of **the respondent**?

Housewife/Homemaker _____

Business owner (**what business?**) _____

Unemployed _____

Student or Apprentice (**where / in what field?**) _____

Retired _____

Employee (**what industry/ company?**) _____

Day Labourer (**what industry/ company?**) _____

Government staff (**which department?**) _____

Other [please specify_____]

3g. How does **the respondent** go to work?

_____

3h. Where does **the respondent** work?

_____

3i. And how long (time) does it take to go to work?

_____

3j. Which ethnic group(s) does **the respondent** belong to?

_____

3k. What language(s) does **the respondent** speak?

_____

3l. What is the **total household income** (per month)?

_____

3m. Is **the respondent** born in Mandalay?

- Yes   - No

If **no**, where was he/she born? _____

Why did he/she move to Mandalay? _____

When did he/she move to Mandalay? _____

Did anyone move to Mandalay with him/her? _____

4. Social relations and welfare

4a. Is there any social welfare organisation in this area? (**Please circle**)

- Yes (name of the organisation? _____)   - No

4b. Are you a member of this welfare organisation?

- Yes (for how long? _____)   - No

4c. Do you need to contribute to this welfare group? If yes, in what ways?

_____

4d. And how often do you join the activities organised by this welfare group?

_____

4e. Has **your household received** contributions/**loans of money** from outside the household?

- Yes   - No

If yes, who is the person or what is the institution, and what, if any is their relationship **to the household head**, how much money are they contributing, and what was the money for?

The person/institution is _____

They are related to the household head as her/his _____

They/The institution leant _____ kyats

The money was for what purpose _____

5. Land and housing

5a. Do you **own** the house you live in (**please circle the correct answer**)?

- Yes   - No

If yes, what is the proof of owning this house **(can select <u>more than one</u> option)**?

Documents (please list) _____

Housing tax receipts

No written proof (eg building the own his/her own)

If no,

i. who is that owner? _____

ii. how much is the rent? _____

iii. is there a signed contract with the owner? - Yes   - No

iv. when was the last contract signed? _____

v. how long is the least for (eg 6 months, 12 months)? _____

vi. has the rent been increase? - Yes (how much? _____)   - No

vii. are you worried that the owner would increase the rent? - Yes   - No

viii. (if the above answer is yes), what make you think that the owner will increase the rent (eg building of new road, reconstruction of the house, increasing land price)?

_____

5b. Please indicate **how many** of the following your house has?

Living room _____

Sleeping room _____

Pit toilet _____

Kitchen _____

5c. What is your main source of water (**circle the answer**)?

Own wells (How much do you have to pay for it? _____)

Public wells (How much do you have to pay for it? _____)

Buying from merchants (How much do you have to pay for it? _____)

Tape water provided by the government (How much do you have to pay for it? _____)

5d. What is your source of electricity (**circle the answer**)?

Government electricity (How much do you have to pay for electricity? _____)

Nearby houses (Where is the house? _____ How much do you have to pay for electricity? _____)

5e. Please indicate what materials your house is made of? Please list all (**this can be done by the person writing down the answers without asking the respondent, unless necessary**).

Roof (circle which apply)

        Bamboo   Thatch / Reed roof

        Tin / Iron roof   Other [Specify: _____]

Walls (circle which apply)

        Wood   Bricks

        Bamboo   Cement

        Other [Specify: _____]

Floor (circle which apply)

        Barren

        Cement   Other [Specify: _____]

5f. Do you own any other **houses** other than the one you are living in now (**circle correct answer**)?

- Yes   - No

(**If yes**, how many and where? _____)

5g. Do you own the piece of land where your house is located?

- Yes   - No

If yes,

what is the proof of owning this piece of land (**can select <u>more than one</u> option**)?

Land slip from the MCDC (which indicate that a person is being relocated to one land to this current piece of land)

Please also ask:

a.   Is it an original slip or a copy? - Original   - Copy

b.   if the respondent got it from the seller? - Yes   - No

c.   whose name is written on the land slip?

        _____

Land Grant Certificate

Please ask the following question if this option is not selected.

if the respondent has heard of this certificate? - Yes   - No

Sales contract signed with the seller

Please also ask:

Did the seller also give the respondent any proof of land ownership when selling the land? - Yes   - No

If yes, what is the proof? _____

Land tax receipts

Other documents (please list) _____

5h. How much does the household have to pay for buying this land?

    _____

5i. Does the household have to pay for land tax?

    Yes (how much? _____)

    No (why not? _____)

    Used to pay (how much? And when did you stop paying? _____)

If no (<u>don't own this land</u>):

Are you paying rent for this land? - Yes   - No

(If so, please ask the following questions)

i. who is that owner? _____

ii. how much is the rent? _____

iii. is there a signed contract with the owner? - Yes   - No

iv. when was the last contract signed? _____

v. how long is the least for (eg 6 months, 12 months)? ....

vi. has the rent been increase? Yes (how much?...........................)   No

vii. are you worried that the owner would increase the rent? Yes   No

viii. (if the above answer is yes), what make you think that the owner will increase the rent (eg building of new road, reconstruction of the house, increasing land price)?

_____

No (why do you not have to pay rent?) _____

5j. What is the size of your land?

_____

5k. Did you live in somewhere else before moving to this land? **If yes**, where (can be more than one location)?

_____

5l. Did you legally own your **last house**?

- Yes   - No

If yes, what is the proof of owning this house **(can select more than one option)**?

Documents (please list) _____

Housing tax receipts

No written proof (eg building the own his/her own) _____

5m. Did you legally own the land where your house was built on?

- Yes   - No

If yes,

what is the proof of owning this piece of land **(can select more than one option)**?

Land slip from the MCDC (which indicate that a person is being relocated to one land to this current piece of land)

Please also ask:

a.   Is it an original slip or a copy? - Original   - Copy

b.   if the respondent got it from the seller? - Yes   - No

c.   whose name is written on the land slip?

        _____

Land Grant Certificate

Please ask the following question if this option is not selected.

if the respondent has heard of this certificate? - Yes   - No

Sales contract signed with the seller

Please also ask:

Did the seller also give the respondent any proof of land ownership when selling the land? - Yes   - No

If yes, what is the proof? _____

Land tax receipts

Other documents (please list) _____

5n. Why did you leave your **last house**?

   Being relocated by the municipal government

      Please ask

      a.   How long did you live in there before the relocation? _____

      b.   When were you relocated? _____

      c.   Why were you relocated? _____

      d.   How did you get the allocated land? Eg lucky draw or being notified by the government? _____

      e.   What is the size of the relocated land? _____

f. Did your family have to sign a statement to indicate that you were relocated voluntarily? Yes (proof?)   No

g. How were you relocated (truck provided or on your own or both)? _____

Being relocated by the business

Please ask

a. How long did you live in there before the relocation? _____

b. When were you relocated? _____

c. Why were you relocated? _____

d. How did you get the allocated land? _____

e. What is the size of the relocated land? _____

f. Did your family have to sign a statement to indicate that you were relocated voluntarily? Yes (proof?)   No

g. How were you relocated (truck provided or on your own or both)? _____

Being evicted by the lawful landowner

(Can you describe what happened? _____)

You found a better place

(Why better, and how did you find this new place? _____)

5o. Have you visited the area where you **last house** was after moving to here?

(**If yes**, why do you visit that area after moving out? ....)
(**If no**, why don't you visit that area after moving out? ....)

5p. Have you heard of the following documents, do you know how to get them and their usages?

Land slip _____

Land grant certificate _____

Form 105 _____

5q. (if the respondent has sold or bought land), did you notify the local administrator or the MCDC of the sale? Did anyone sign on the contract as a witness? Did you need to pay for a service fee?

_____

*5r. If the respondent **lived along the riverbank (or other informal settlement area) before**, please ask the following,

When you lived in there, were there crimes or robberies? - Yes   - No

Did you feel safe living in there? - Yes   - No

Was that area a "black area" declared by the government at that time? - Yes   - No

Have you ever tried to move back to that area after being relocated? - Yes   - No

If yes, why? ....

*5s. If the respondent has lived in more than one location in Mandalay, were you relocated by the MCDC even though you had proof of land ownership?

If yes,

what is the proof of owning this piece of land **(can select more than one option)**?

Land slip from the MCDC (which indicate that a person is being relocated to one land to this current piece of land)

Please also ask:

a.   Is it an original slip or a copy? - Original   - Copy

b.   if the respondent got it from the seller? - Yes   - No

c.   whose name is written on the land slip?

   _____

Land Grant Certificate

Please ask the following question if this option is not selected.

if the respondent has heard of this certificate? - Yes   - No

Sales contract signed with the seller

Please also ask:

Did the seller also give the respondent any proof of land ownership when selling the land? - Yes   - No

If yes, what is the proof? _____

Land tax receipts

Other documents (please list) _____

6. Assets

6a. Now we are going to ask some questions about what your household owns. Does your household own any of the following items?

A bicycle _____

A motorbike _____

A television _____

A mobile phone _____

An AC _____

A sewing machine _____

A fridge _____

A washing machine _____

A power generator _____

7. The neighbourhood

7a. Where do you get food (where is the market?)

_____

7b. Where is the closest

hospital/ clinic? _____

elementary school/ high school? _____

7c. Have you been robbed in this neighbourhood? - Yes   - No

(If yes, can you describe what happened? _____)

7d. Has your house been broken into? - Yes   - No

(If yes, can you describe what happened? _____)

7e. Do you feel safe living here?

_____

7f. What is the name of the ward administrator?

_____

7g. Do you have relatives/ friends living in this area? – Yes   - No

(If yes, how where are they and how often do you see them?)

_____

(If no, where do they live, how often can you see them?)

_____

7h. (if the respondent was relocated to here), were there other family members living in here?

_____

7i. (if the respondent was relocated to here), have you heard of this ward before the relocation?

_____

7j. What facilitates do you want to have in this neighbourhood?

_____

7k. Is the land price increasing in this neighbourhood?

    Yes (how do you know? _____)

    No

    Don't know

7l. How often do you go to the city? What is the furthest place you have visited in Mandalay?

_____

7m. Do you know if there is any government planning in this ward?

_____

7n. Do you know there are more people moving in this ward? If yes, do you know why?

_____

7o. Have you heard that a land slip can only allow the family to live on the land for 30 years?

_____

Conclusion

This is the end of our survey. Do you have any questions for us?

_____

Thank you for your time.

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THE END

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