Durham University

Durham E-Theses

Complexity and Resistance in South-eastern, Myanmar 2012-2018

ALEXANDER JAMES MOODIE

How to cite:

MOODIE, ALEXANDER JAMES (2024) Complexity and Resistance in South-eastern, Myanmar 2012-2018. Doctoral thesis, Durham University.

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a https://etheses.durham.ac.uk/id/eprint/15312/ is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the full Durham E-Theses policy for further details.

Academic Support Office, The Palatine Centre, Durham University, Stockton Road, Durham, DH1 3LE
e-mail: e-theses.admin@durham.ac.uk Tel: +44 0191 334 6107
https://etheses.durham.ac.uk

Complexity and Resistance in South-eastern Myanmar, 2012-2018

Alexander James Moodie

Abstract

This thesis seeks to explain how the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved amid new forms of structural violence. This was a period of political and economic change for this part of Myanmar, catalysed by the 2012 ceasefire between the main armed group of the region – the Karen National Union – and the Myanmar government, combined with a partial political and economic liberalisation. However, this 'ceasefire capitalism' period, while resulting in less direct violence for villagers, also catalysed more threats, including land confiscation, destruction of environments, loss of livelihoods and negative cultural impacts. Using the theoretical lens of complexity theory, this thesis narrates how self-organised acts by villagers emerged as patterns of dispersed resistance, spreading throughout the region and adapting to this new political and economic context. The four main categories of resistance it maps are Engagement, Mobilisation, Leveraging Existing Leaders and Organisations, and Confrontation. It uses already-existing documentation from a local human rights organisation – the Karen Human Rights Group – in the form of interviews, situation updates, photographs and land confiscation forms. I apply a thematic analysis through coding to a) identify patterns of resistance and b) apply complexity concepts of emergence, adaption and self-organisation to narrate a complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance. Using this theoretical lens, the thesis finds that a) the new political context provided opportunities for new modes and dynamic forms of resistance; b) this includes the ability for more connections and interactions between people therefore more forms of dispersed resistance emerged; and c) the role of civil society and community-based organisations in facilitating these connections was vital. The thesis contributes towards a more critical strand of complexity, one which takes into account power, inequality, conflict, and resistance.

Complexity and Resistance in South-eastern, Myanmar 2012-2018

Alexander James Moodie

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University
2023

Contents

List of Maps, Figures, and Photographs 7
Acronyms 8
Statement of Copyright 10
Declaration 10
Acknowledgements 11
Introduction 12
Key Concepts 15
Resistance 15
Complexity 15
Method 17
Contribution 18
Thesis Outline 19
A Note on Terminology and Geographical Boundaries 21
Chapter One: Context: The Karen and a History of Conflict 23
1.1 Who are the Karen? 24
1.2 Colonial Legacy 26
1.2.1 Making the Karen Legible 27
1.2.2 Division and Distrust 29
1.3 'The World's Longest Running Civil War' 31
Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism 37
2.1 A New Era in Myanmar 38
2.1.1 A Democratic Transition? 38
2.1.2 The 2012 KNU-Myanmar Government Ceasefire 39
2.1.3 Who Governs the Southeast? 43
2.1.4 A Return to Armed Conflict 48
2.2 Myanmar's Political Economy 50
2.2.1 Pre-2011 National Political Economy 50
2.2.2 Pre-2011 Ceasefire Economies 52
2.2.3 Post-2011 National Political Economy 56
2.3 Ceasefire Capitalism for the 2010s in South-eastern Myanmar 61
2.3.1 Exploiting the Southeast 61
2.3.2 KNU Involvement 62
2.3.3 New Patterns of Structural Violence 64
2.4 Conclusion 66
Chapter Three: Resistance 68
3.1 Four Criteria for Identifying Resistance 68

3.1.1 From Revolution to the Everyday 69
3.1.2 The Role of the State 72
3.1.3 Actions Over Intent 74
3.1.4 A Direct and Recognisable Challenge from a Position of Subordination 79
3.2 Defining Resistance 83
3.3 Conceptualising Resistance 87
3.4 Conclusion 91
Chapter Four: A Complexity Framework for Dispersed Resistance 94
4.1 Introducing a Complexity Lens 95
4.1.1 Complexity 95
4.1.2 Relationality 96
4.1.3 Complexity and Resistance 99
4.2 Three Key Complexity Concepts 101
4.2.1 Emergence 101
4.2.2 Self-Organisation 105
4.2.3 Adaption 108
4.3 Narrating Resistance through a Complexity Framework 111
4.4 Conclusion 118
Chapter Five: Methodology 119
5.1 Overview 119
5.1.1. Methodological Approach 119
5.1.2 The Data Corpus 121
5.2 Operationalising the Framework 125
5.2.1 A Two Step Process 125
5.2.2 Drawing Boundaries Around the System 126
5.3 Methods 128
5.3.1 Thematic Analysis 128
5.3.2 Concept-book 129
5.3.3 Coding 136
5.3.3 Triangulation 140
5.4 Discussion and Reflections 141
5.4.1 Advantages and Disadvantages 141
5.4.2 Interpretation 143
5.4.3 Positionality 143
5.4.4 My Role as an Academic 146
5.4.5 Agency 147
5.5 Conclusion 149

Chapter Six: Engagement 150
6.1 Testing the 'Rule of Law' 152
6.1.1 Trialling a 'Reformed Judiciary' 154
6.1.2 Preparatory Registering of Land 157
6.2 Reporting to State Authorities 162
6.2.1 Reporting to Local Government 163
6.2.2 Appealing to New Democratic Entities 166
6.3 Negotiating with Armed Actors 169
6.4 Negotiating with Companies 170
6.5 Submitting Complaint Letters 176
6.6 Conclusion 182
Chapter Seven: Mobilisation 184
7.1 Forming Committees 185
7.2 Building Networks 191
7.3 Taking Collective Action 199
7.4 Conclusion 202
Chapter Eight: Leveraging Local Leaders and Organisations 204
8.1 Appealing to the Karen National Union 207
8.2 Utilising Village Heads and Village Tract Leaders 216
8.3 Catalysing Role of Civil Society and Community-based Organisations 219
8.4 Conclusion 228
Chapter Nine: Confrontation 230
9.1 Verbally Confronting 232
9.2 Physically Confronting 236
9.3 Refusing to Comply 239
9.4 Directly Protesting 242
9.5 Fencing 249
9.6 Conclusion 251
Chapter Ten: Conclusion 253
10.1 Three Key Takeaways 253
10.1.1 Resistance is Dynamic 253
10.1.2 Resistance Relies on Connections 255
10.1.3 Resistance is Facilitated by Community-based and Civil Society Organisations 256
10.1.4 A Complex Adaptive System of Dispersed Resistance 259
10.2 Limitations 259
10.3 Conceptual Implications 260
10.3.1 What can Complexity tell us about Resistance? 260

10.3.2 What can Resistance tell us about Complexity? 262
10.4 Future Applications? 264
Appendix A: Types of Documentation 267
Appendix B: Codes and Categories of Dispersed Resistance 268
Reference List 269

List of Maps, Figures, and Photographs

Map 1: Demographic map of Myanmar 25
Map 2: Map of major ethnic armed organisations in Myanmar 35
Map 3: Map of south-eastern Myanmar 44

Figure 1: Karen armed groups 33
Figure 2: A complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance 115
Figure 3: Codes into categories 138
Figure 4: Network Building in Mergui-Tavoy District 198

Photograph 1: Construction of the Toh Boh Dam 172
Photograph 2: Villagers meet to discuss the cement factory. 187
Photograph 3: Villagers carrying stone to the top of the mountain to build a stupa. 188
Photograph 4: Villagers holding 'No Dam' signs at GMS consultation meeting 234
Photograph 5: Environmental event in April 2017, attended by 200 people from 10 different villages in Mergui-Tavoy District. 244
Photograph 6: Community members holding a ceremony in March 2018 for International Day of Rivers. 244
Photograph 7: Villagers from five villages protest against the Kyauk N'Ga Dam on the Shwegyin River 246
Photograph 8: : First protest regarding the KMAC plantation project, 5th December, 2015. 246
Photograph 9: Second protest regarding the KMAC plantation project, 12th January, 2016. 247
Photograph 10: The red flag in this photo is a sign of retaking and asserting their land claims as part of a fencing protest 251

Acronyms

BGF – Border Guard Force

BIA – Burma Independence Army

BSPP – Burma Socialist Programme Party

CAT - Conservation Alliance Tanawthari

CBO – Community Based Organisation

CSLD - Community Sustainable Livelihood Development

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

DKBA-Benevolent – Democratic Karen Benevolent Army

DKBA-Buddhist – Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

EAO – Ethnic Armed Organisation

FAB – Farmland Administration Body

GAD – General Administration Department

ICG – International Crisis Group

ICJ – International Commission of Jurists

IDP – Internally Displaced Person

ITD – Ital-Thai Development

JMC – Joint Monitoring Committee

KESAN – Karen Environmental Social Action Network

KHRG – Karen Human Rights Group

KIA – Kachin Independence Army

KIO – Kachin Independence Organisation

KMAC - Kaung Myanmar Aung Company

KNDO – Karen National Defence Organisation

KNLA – Karen National Liberation Army

KNU – Karen National Union

KNU/KNLA-PC – Karen National Union/ Karen National Liberation Army – Peace Council

KWO – Karen Women's Organisation

LUC – Land Use Certificate

MEC – Myanmar Economic Corporation

MEHL – Myanma Economic Holdings Limited

MSPP - Myanmar Stark Prestige Plantation

NCA – Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NLD – National League for Democracy

RKIPN - Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature

SEZ – Special Economic Zone

SLORC – State Law and Order Restoration Council

SPDC – State Peace and Development Council

TRIP-NET - Tenasserim River and Indigenous People's Network

UN – United Nations

USDP – Union Solidarity and Development Party

VFV - Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Lands Management Law

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Declaration

The material contained in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. This thesis is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of others which is used in the thesis is credited to the author in question in the text.

Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council and the Northern Ireland and North East Doctoral Training Programme for the funding and support that made this PhD possible. My supervisors, Stefanie Kappler, Roger Mac Ginty, and Tom Widger offered valuable guidance, advice, encouragement and care throughout what became a pandemic PhD. The difference that good supervisors can make whilst going through the process of completing a PhD is, I have learnt, substantial. In addition, my peers and other staff at Durham University, while not meeting face-to-face as much as I originally envisioned, nevertheless provided a supportive, collegial, and very welcoming environment.

Away from the university my family and friends have been unerring in their support. Thank you to my parents for letting me move back in at 35 years of age for a period whilst the pandemic was raging around the world. An honourable mention must also go to my mother-in-law, who also opened her house up for me for periods. My Durham family, Phil and Anne Towns, provided me with the most generous and flexible living arrangement in all of County Durham, but more importantly, a sense of community and a home when I needed one. And of course my wife, Rin Fujimatsu, whom when I started this PhD was still my fiancée. She challenged me, provided me with intellectual stimulation, and never stopped finding ways to make sure I got over the line.

Lastly, I would not have been able to even conceive this PhD without the incredible amount I learnt from people of Myanmar, particularly the border areas. Spending over a decade of my life working alongside the most courageous, innovative, and capable people who have experienced the worse of humanity is, while cliché, an inspiration. It made any struggles I had with this PhD pale into comparison. Of course, the Karen Human Rights Group, whose valuable data provided me with the basis of my data corpus are one of these, as are my colleagues at Progressive Voice. The political situation in Myanmar descended into widespread and horrific violence at the hands of a brutal military junta part way through this PhD. It has been deeply sad to observe hopes dashed and communities uprooted and I sincerely hope that Myanmar's Spring Revolution will succeed in finally uprooting the Myanmar military and establishing a federal democracy.

Introduction

In 2011, Myanmar embarked on a series of political and economic changes, bringing hope that a democratic transition was underway. Blighted by decades of violent and repressive military regimes, as well as an even longer civil war in ethnic minority border areas, the Myanmar military initiated a stage-managed transition from the military regime of the State Peace and Development Council to the "flourishing of a genuine, disciplined multi-party democratic system" (Myanmar Constitution 2008, Article 6(d)). After the release of hundreds of political prisoners, the holding of a quasi-democratic election, the passing of laws allowing freedom of assembly, including the right to strike, and ceasefire agreements with several armed groups, many both inside and outside the country started to buy into the discourse of 'democratic transition' (Ra et al 2022). This only accelerated when Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize winner and icon of Myanmar's struggle for democracy, participated in the 2012 by-elections with her party, the National League for Democracy,

While many in the central cities and plains of Myanmar were caught up in this transition, for ethnic minorities in the border areas the most significant developments were the round of ceasefire agreements made in late 2011 and 2012. Ethnic armed organisations have been fighting for self-determination almost since the very beginning of Myanmar's independence in 1948, and many international actors as well as ethnic minority leaders within Myanmar saw this as a fresh start for the road to peace. The civil wars had left Myanmar's ethnic areas impoverished, militarised, and with a legacy of serious human rights violations, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. The longest running armed conflict was in the southeast of the country with the Karen National Union (KNU), ongoing for over 60 years by the time of their 2012 ceasefire with the Myanmar Government.

However, while ceasefire and political changes brought about positive changes and a narrative of democratic change, the ceasefire also brought new threats. Certainly villagers had greater freedom of movement, and less fear of extortion, forced labour, arbitrary imprisonment for association with a 'rebel' group or extrajudicial killings at the hands of the Myanmar military. Yet the ceasefire brought about new threats of violence, less direct than the decades of armed conflict, but serious all the same. This includes the influx of investment and development projects, hungry for the natural resources such as timber and gold, industrial

agribusiness seeking to establish huge monocrop plantations of palm oil or rubber, and infrastructure projects such as the Asia Highway road, or hydropower dams to serve the energy needs of Myanmar's neighbours. All of this was facilitated by an economic environment conducive to transnational involvement and a national policy and legal framework that sought to individualise land title and encourage large-scale investment. In the region of south-eastern Myanmar, which had seen some of the worst fighting between the KNU and the Myanmar military, and where villagers had been living in a state of fear of what violence the Myanmar military would do to them, these changes were particularly profound. While communities experienced a ceasefire for the first time in generations, they now faced land confiscations, loss of livelihoods, reduced access to customary land, and the polluting of rivers and forests.

Villagers in south-eastern Myanmar have always employed strategies of mitigation against oppression during the darkest days of armed conflict between the KNU and the Myanmar military (Malseed, 2009). Now, however they faced new challenges catalysed by the political and economic changes in Myanmar that began in 2011. This thesis then, seeks to answer the question:

How did the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endure, adapt, and evolve amid new forms of structural violence[1] and what explains this dynamic?

In order to answer this question, and to capture the dynamism of this time period, I will be applying the lens of complexity theory and its associated concepts to the literature on resistance. This is because the characteristics of the resistance studied in this thesis, that of being small-scale, decentralised throughout the region and emerging from interaction and relation, are encapsulated by the concepts within a complexity approach. Complexity provides the means to capture the *dynamism* of resistance that linear cause and effect approaches do not. It is a lens that allows an engagement with complex social and political

[1] I am referring to Galtung's (1969) conceptualisation which defines structural violence, or indirect violence, as political, social, economic, or legal structures that deprive people of their ability to meet their basic needs. Rather than personal violence, which has an object-action-subject formation, structural violence is manifest in broader inequalities experienced by a group. This detrimental lack of access and opportunity, for example in health, livelihood opportunities, education, or material enjoyment, compared to what is possible, is thus a type of structural violence. In this type of violence, the cause of these inequalities are the structures of power distribution.

phenomena and therefore enables me to narrate how villagers resisted the new threats that the political and economic changes brought about, and how these evolved over time.

In terms of temporal and spatial limits, this thesis is limited to south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018. This area has experienced the longest-running armed conflict in the country and the 2012 ceasefire is a starting point for profound political change. Furthermore, methodologically, the opportunities and limitations of collecting data means that this area – south-eastern Myanmar - has rich information available from this particular time period (more on this later). The time period under investigation ends in 2018 because this is when the ceasefire began to break down. While tensions throughout this period ensured the ceasefire was always fragile, 2018 marks the beginning of the end of ceasefire and prospects for peace. At the time of writing, in late 2022/early 2023, the country had erupted into a national uprising as Myanmar people of all ethnicities revolted against the attempted Myanmar military takeover. The ceasefire with the KNU completely broke down, and intense armed conflict, including the use of heavy artillery and airstrikes by the Myanmar military, has obliterated any hopes for peace in the near future short of a successful revolution.

It is worth noting in this introduction the impact that both the COVID-19 pandemic and the coup attempt[2] of February 1st 2021 and subsequent violence committed by the Myanmar military had on this PhD. Originally, this thesis was going to examine how an indigenous peace park – the Salween Peace Park - located in northern Karen State in KNU territory, was challenging peacebuilding and statebuilding orthodoxy. This original PhD research proposal was heavily reliant on fieldwork, the implementation of which became uncertain due to the unpredictability of the COVID-19 situation. This was compounded by an unstable and increasingly violent political situation in Myanmar. After several months of trying to find alternative methodologies to garner data from the Salween Peace Park that could be done remotely, I realised that this original research project was simply not possible. Therefore this PhD was almost completely redesigned, with a different research question, theoretical base, and methodology. It became a PhD designed on the assumption that it would have to be fully completed online, from the UK, and with data that already existed. I contextualise this so as

[2] I use coup 'attempt' here to draw attention to the lack of success the military had in consolidating power after its putsch. At the time of writing, the various resistance forces, including groups such as the KNU, have successfully prevented the junta from enjoying 'effective control' over the country. For more, see this report by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/2022/09/statement-briefing-effective-control-myanmar/

to familiarise the reader of the prevailing environment that informed the approach and methodological choices presented in the thesis.

Key Concepts

Resistance

Going back to the initial question it is important to present what it is I mean by resistance. I answer this after a literature review of resistance studies, using James C. Scott's 'everyday resistance' as a departure point. The definition of resistance that will be used in this thesis is thus:

> Patterns of localised, small scale, self-organised actions, shaped by state domination, that challenge, confront, and/or negotiate power relations from a subordinated position.

This describes the modes of resistance actions that villagers engaged in during this period. I have also identified a concept of resistance with which to describe what I am investigating – Lilja and Vinthagen's, (2018) 'dispersed resistance.' Dispersed resistance describes small-scale oppositional acts that are not necessarily hidden, can be individual or part of loose networks, and can inspire other similar acts to form a pattern (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018). The utility of dispersed resistance is that it lies between the mass organised resistance seen in social movements, revolutions, armed rebellions and the like, yet is more public and recognised than hidden, or disguised, everyday acts of resistance expanded on by Scott.

Complexity

Resistance, or dispersed resistance, is thus the phenomenon under investigation. However, the theoretical lens which frames this research on resistance is complexity. Rather than being a single, coherent theory, complexity is a "toolkit" of complementary concepts within an overarching theoretical lens (Bousquet & Curtis, 2011, p.45). It is a "loose network of interconnected and interdependent ideas" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.59) that "can be used in a highly flexible manner…as a framework in their own right" (Ramalingham &

Jones, 2008, p.63). A complexity view of the world sees systems of interconnecting, interacting components that produce non-linear effects. A complex system is open, nested within other systems, and is more than the sum of its individual components. It is a self-organising system that adapts to and co-evolves with its environment, and has emergent properties (Cilliers, 2000). There are three key complexity concepts that will frame this resistance – emergence, adaption, and self-organisation. Emergence refers to the outcomes created by interaction between components of a complex system. In this thesis, the components are the villagers of south-eastern Myanmar. These outcomes are social phenomena and can include markets, social networks, conflict, peacebuilding, or, in the case of this thesis, dispersed resistance. The second aspect of complexity theory that this framework utilises is self-organisation. Complex systems do not rely on a central, organising agent or body, nor external coordination. Rather, they are decentralised and organised at the micro-level i.e. the individual or very localised level. Lastly, adaption refers to the capacity of components of the complex system – villagers – to act and react to the surrounding environment, using information available to make decisions best suited for them. A complex system is thus one in which actors self-organise, adapting to the surrounding environment, and their interactions produce emergent effects. This thesis will thus make three propositions related to these three core complexity concepts. These are:

P1. Emergence – *Patterns of resistance emerge that confront, challenge and negotiate state power from a position of subordination.*

P2. Adaption – *These resistance patterns adapt and are in response to changing political, economic and conflict dynamics.*

P3. Self-organisation - *The patterns of resistance acts have no central organisation or coordination mechanism, are spread throughout the area, and begin at the village level.*

The framework, which uses these complexity concepts will also include three mechanisms, or motors, which complexify and the system i.e. how do these three concepts develop? These three mechanisms are feedback loops, facilitation and thickening relations. Feedback loops refer to the reaction to resistance actions, and these serve to either increase momentum - a positive feedback loop – for further resistance actions, or stymie further action – a negative feedback loop. The second mechanism is facilitation, and this refers to how certain actors

within the system serve to catalyse the interactions and therefore resistance actions of villagers. This role is played by "strong agents" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.45) which will be unpacked in Chapter Four: Complexity. The third mechanism is thickening relations, and this refers to how a system becomes denser when there are more connections and interactions. The more people are able to connect, the thicker the relations and therefore the more complex the system. These three mechanisms, I will argue, are the motors from which the complexity concepts of emergence, adaption and self-organisation materialise and hence confirm the three propositions.

Method

I will validate the above propositions related to the key complexity concepts of emergence, adaption and self-organisation by implementing two rounds of thematic analysis. The first round will use coding to identify the patterns of resistance, which in complexity terms are the emergent outcomes. The second round will use the same coding process to identify the complexity concepts of 'adaption' and 'self-organisation.' This a deductive approach, as the concepts and their associated propositions are already established. The concepts of 'emergence,' 'self-organisation,' and 'adaption,' and the accompanying propositions are supplemented with a set of guidelines which are used to identify these concepts. This is called a 'Concept-Book' and is presented in Chapter Five: Methodology.

The thematic analysis involved uses the software programme, NVivo and the main data source is documentation produced by a local, ethnic Karen human rights organisation – the Karen Human Rights Group. This data corpus includes interviews, situation updates, photographs and other pieces of data. This data is triangulated through reports from other civil society organisations, think tanks, NGOs and research organisations, as well as reference to similar forms of resistance in comparative examples in the region and globally. Lastly, an interview with KHRG themselves offers a critical contextualisation of how and why this data was produced.

In short, I will narrate the evolution and adaption of villagers' resistance by applying the theoretical lens of complexity to the concept of dispersed resistance. The main research method I am employing is a thematic analysis of already existing documentation produced

and published by KHRG. After mapping out patterns of resistance from this data, I will then apply the complexity concepts of emergence, adaption and self-organisation to narrate a complex system of dispersed resistance. This will allow me to present how villagers' non-armed resistance adapted, evolved, and endured when faced with new threats of structural violence. I will conclude by summarising these findings, before outlining any potential conceptual implications beyond the empirics presented at the core of this thesis.

Contribution

Little has been written that applies a complexity lens to studies on resistance and, given the paucity of scholarship in resistance with complexity, this is a novel theoretical approach to researching resistance, making not just an empirical contribution, but a conceptual one too. Empirically, I will demonstrate the dynamic change of resistance patterns in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018, using the complexity approach to narrate a) what the patterns of dispersed resistance are, and b) how they evolved.

Three main conclusions will be drawn. These are:

A) That the new political and economic context, while catalysing threats to villagers, also offered opportunities for new modes and dynamic forms of resistance, such as protest, forming networks and committees, and sending complaint letters.
B) Resistance increased when people were able to connect and interact with each other. The ceasefire afforded greater freedom of movement and association, and this meant that connections between people were more possible and therefore more forms of dispersed resistance emerged.
C) The role of civil society and community-based organisations in facilitating these connections was vital. This was an adaption to the new political and economic context in which there was greater civic space.

Conceptually, I will discuss what a complexity approach brings to resistance studies, and how its emphasis on interaction gives an analytical focus with which to map patterns of resistance. It will also argue that a complexity lens allows us to understand resistance as a dynamic phenomenon that is able to evolve amid changing political and economic circumstances. I

will also discuss what resistance can bring to complexity. Complexity approaches in the social sciences often omit power relations and politics, and in practical terms, have been instrumentalised, not to address power, inequality and structures of violence, but as technical solutions at a micro-level to adapt better to, for example, a peacebuilding programme. However, this thesis will hopefully be a step in a direction of a 'critical complexity' - one in which complexity can address those issues around power, inequality and structures of violence. The complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance discussed in this thesis is a reaction to state power, but this state power is connected to wider, global systems and this can also be an avenue for future applications.

Thesis Outline

The thesis outline is as follows. Chapter One will contextualise the conflict in south-eastern Myanmar by outlining a brief history of the region. This includes who the Karen are and the legacies of colonialism. This is important because such colonial legacies have impacted the long trajectory of conflict, the political economy of south-eastern Myanmar, as well as the political economy of Myanmar nationally, which in turn impact the modes of resistance possible.

Chapter Two will contextualise the post-ceasefire situation of structural violence. This chapter is in essence an explanation of *what* is being resisted. It does this by tracing conflict and political economy dynamics, both nationally and locally. The national and local political economies can be viewed as two different sets of dynamics but they feed into and co-constitute each other. They are also closely related to armed conflict in the area, and how they interact has profoundly shaped the lives of villagers. This chapter will present the concept of 'ceasefire capitalism' (Woods, 2011) which was first applied in a different part of Myanmar – Kachin State in northern Myanmar – to describe the state-led territorialisation of previously inaccessible land through commercial, natural resource extraction projects. This is important because it lays the foundations of the dynamics seen in the post-2012 ceasefire period in south-eastern Myanmar. These dynamics are then described, and how the combination of ceasefire and economic liberalisation came together in a new assemblage of ceasefire capitalism, and the impact this has had on villagers.

While Chapters One and Two on the history and context lay the foundation of what is being resisted, Chapter Three will outline what I mean by resistance. It will include a literature review of resistance scholarship, and, based on this, lay out four criteria for what I mean by resistance. Using this criteria, I will outline a definition of resistance. This is operationalised and referred to throughout the thesis. Lastly, based on the definition and the criteria, I will discuss a contemporary concept – dispersed resistance – that captures the social phenomenon under investigation.

Chapter Four will then introduce a complexity lens as the theoretical approach to researching dispersed resistance of villagers reacting to the violence of ceasefire capitalism. I will discuss the uses of complexity in related fields, although there has not been an explicit application to non-violent resistance. Explaining the three main concepts – emergence, self-organisation, and adaption - this chapter will then introduce a framework which will be used to narrate a complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance.

Chapter Five will be on the methodology. I will explain the interpretive approach, the methods used, and how to operationalise the framework set out in the Chapter Four. This includes a step-by-step presentation of conducting the two rounds of thematic analysis, and the 'concept-book' that is used to identify the complexity concepts of emergence, self-organisation and adaption. I also will discuss my own positionality, as well as a critical discussion of the documentation that is being used. This is based on an interview with KHRG - the organisation that produced the main data corpus utilised in this thesis.

Chapters Six to Nine consist of the four empirical chapters that a) outline the emergent patterns of resistance (this corresponds to the first round of thematic analysis), and b) narrate these patterns through the complexity concepts of adaption and self-organisation (this corresponds to the second round of the thematic analysis). The three mechanisms, or motors, that complexify the system – feedback loops, facilitation, and thickening relations - will also be applied to each of these categories. The four chapters correspond to four categories of modes of resistance – Engagement, Mobilisation, Engaging Local Leaders and Organisations, and Confrontation. Examples will be included of instances of these modes of resistance which will be contextualised, and then framed through a complexity lens.

Lastly, I will conclude with a summary of how the data has answered the research question of this thesis, the conceptual implications of applying complexity to resistance, gaps in this research project, and possible future applications.

A Note on Terminology and Geographical Boundaries

The first issue to resolve as regards terminology is whether to use Burma or Myanmar. This is not as simple as the colonial name vs the postcolonial name, although that is one factor. In 1989 the military regime changed the name from Burma to Myanmar, ostensibly to be a break away from colonial terms and to be inclusive of all ethnic groups, not just the dominant ethnic group - the Burman/Bama. Other name changes included the then-capital from Rangoon to Yangon, and the city of Moulmein to Mawlamyine. However, the words Bama and Myanma mean the same thing in the language itself. Bama is simply more of a colloquial, spoken term while Myanma is a more literary, formal term (Lintner, 2012). Thus, many older people within the country have rejected the word Myanmar as they view it as part of the military's propaganda efforts to present itself the protector of the nation that is keeping the country together, inclusive of all the 'national races.' Consequently, some ethnic leaders, civil society and media organisations, including some of those referenced in this thesis, use 'Burma' and even have 'Burma' in their name. However, over thirty years since the name-change, Myanmar is the dominant term used by most people throughout the country, and is officially the name, despite some countries such as the UK and the US still using the term 'Burma.' While acknowledging the political contestation of this term then, this thesis uses Myanmar going forward, because in its current usage it is widely accepted, not just by the military, but by many people of the country themselves. There is one caveat. When referring to the history of Myanmar, and before the name change, such as colonial era or immediate post-independence era, Burma and Burmese will be used, as this was the name of the country at the time. For example, in the next chapter, I refer to the King of Burma, not the King of Myanmar.

Second, when referring to areas in south-eastern Myanmar, there is a decision to be made on referring to either Myanmar government-designated districts or KNU-designated districts. While the boundaries are similar, there are some differences. The data corpus produced by KHRG uses the following seven: Thaton, Taungoo, Nyaunglebin, Mergui-Tavoy, Hpapun,

Dooplaya, and Hpa-an. These correspond to KNU-delineated boundaries and terminology rather than the government's. According to KHRG, their "use of the district designations to reference our research areas represents no political affiliation; rather, it is rooted in KHRG's historical practice, due to the fact that villagers interviewed by KHRG, as well as local organisations with whom KHRG seeks to cooperate, commonly use these designations" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015a, p.15). Given that the data is already referring to KNU districts, it would be a fruitless exercise to extrapolate each and every piece of documentation to ascertain which government district the data refers to, especially as there is considerable overlap between the districts. There would not be any substantive benefit of doing so. Therefore, just as KHRG do, this thesis uses the KNU-delineated districts, not as a political statement, but because this is how they are referred to in the original data.

Chapter One: Context: The Karen and a History of Conflict

Myanmar has never been at peace since its independence and establishment as a nation-state in 1948. A history of conflict goes back many centuries and is intertwined with the mandala kingdoms of South East Asia, British and (briefly) Japanese colonialism, and a violent statebuilding project led by the majority Burman ethnic group (Charney, 2009). This thesis focuses on a particular geographical area which is populated mostly by the ethnic Karen, a minority people within the state of Myanmar who have been in armed conflict with the Myanmar state since independence. The main conflict actor, apart from the Myanmar military, is the ethnic armed organisation (EAO), the Karen National Union (KNU), which has long purported to represent the Karen in their ongoing fight for self-determination vis-à-vis the Myanmar State. This chapter is a brief overview of armed conflict within Karen areas in the southeast of the country intertwined with Myanmar's national history. It contextualises the period under study (2012-2018) by tracing contemporary dynamics of ceasefire and political economy to legacies of colonialism and the postcolonial coercive statebuilding project of the Myanmar military.

First, I will outline who the Karen are and how they have become to be defined vis-à-vis the majority Burman of Myanmar. Second, the legacies of British colonialism specific to the Karen will be explained. Third, I will summarise the various conflict dynamics of the war between the KNU and the Myanmar military in a post-independence Myanmar leading up to the beginning of political reforms in 2011/2012.

These dynamics are important to understand because of the role they play in shaping both violence and resistance in south-eastern Myanmar. The history of colonialism has contributed to a deepening sense of a 'Karen' identity, as well as exacerbated existing tensions between the Karens and the Burmans. This in turn has shaped the trajectory of violence, armed conflict, and repression against villagers in Karen-populated south-eastern Myanmar, and the subsequent resistance that these Karen villagers employ. Second, an extractive political economy and marketisation of land tenure, which the British laid the foundations for, mark the beginning of a consistent trajectory of dispossession and erosion of customary land rights. This is manifest in the threats to villagers' land and livelihoods today - the resistance to which is analysed in this thesis. Furthermore, the nexus of political economy and armed

conflict dynamics, which shape the threats to villagers during the period under investigation (2012-2018), are intertwined, and to understand these threats, it is important to situate them in longer-term trends.

1.1 Who are the Karen?

The Karen are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Myanmar. Their exact number is contested but estimates are of between three and seven million people (Thawnghmung, 2008, p.3) of a total estimated national population of 51.5 million people (Department of Population, 2014). The Karen live in the Irrawaddy Delta region, in Yangon - the main commercial city and former capital of Myanmar, in the eastern and south-eastern borderlands where they are the majority population, and the northeast of the central plains. There is a government-delineated Karen State, in which 1.5 million people, mostly Karen live. There are also pockets of Karen and mixed Thai-Karen communities in western Thailand, as well as nearly 100,000 Karen refugees living in refugee camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Myanmar border, displaced due to armed conflict. Lastly there are diaspora communities in Western Europe, Australia, and North America.

Map 1: Demographic map of Myanmar

('More Process Than Peace,' 2015).[3]

There is sizeable diversity within the Karen and there are many subgroups within the broader Karen frame, with the two most common being S'gaw Karen and P'wo Karen. This diversity is manifest in the many different Karen languages that different ethnic Karen subgroups speak, and the existence of at least two alphabets, one S'gaw Karen and one P'wo Karen (Thawnghmung, 2008, p.3). Religiously they are a diverse people, with Christianity, Animism and Buddhism practiced, as well as some forms of amalgamation of these belief

[3] Map taken from *The Economist* which itself is based on Smith (1991). A note on this map: It does not include the Rohingya as a major ethnic group (they live in northern Rakhine State in the west of Myanmar) which, while unrelated to this thesis, is a glaring omission. A lack of a clear alternative that is inclusive of the Rohingya while also showing where the ethnic Karen live is the reason this map is used.

systems, for example Christian communities sometimes still make offerings to the spirits, or *nats.* The identity of the Karen is often defined as a people who have been persecuted for many years by the mostly ethnic-Burman military. Successive ruling military juntas have launched campaigns of violence against ethnic minorities throughout Myanmar such as the Shan, Kachin, Mon, Rakhine, Rohingya, and indeed, the Karen. In fact, the construction of a 'Karen' identity is often traced through a dialectical relationship with the ethnic Burman – the majority ethnic group in Myanmar (Cheeseman, 2002). This difficult history has shaped dynamics of armed conflict, political economy and territorialisation for decades. Civil war broke out in 1949 between the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) and the Burmese government and has been ongoing ever since, ebbing and flowing without any meaningful ceasefire until 2012. Yet, these dynamics of war already had a foundation in Myanmar's colonial history.

1.2 Colonial Legacy

The brief overview of colonial history is important because its legacies can be felt in both the history and contemporary dynamics of armed conflict and the political economy of south-eastern Myanmar. Colonial policies laid the foundations for the subsequent civil war and brutal repression of Karen people by the Burman-dominated state as well as the exploitation of land and natural resources in border areas. This in turn shaped the forms of resistance, both armed and non-armed, that villagers in the southeast have employed over many decades and still do today.

Little written documentation exists regarding the Karen and their land before the colonial period, although unlike other ethnic peoples in Myanmar, such as the Burman, the Rakhine and the Mon, there were no Karen kingdoms to speak of (Fink, p.x, 2001, in Po, 1928). Yet British colonialism brought about permanent changes to the social and political organisation of all peoples of Myanmar, including their relationship to the power bases at the centre, and to the land. Three Anglo-Burmese wars in the 19th century ended when the British took control of the whole country in 1885, banishing the last King of Burma to exile in India. These wars also resulted in control of the areas where the Karen lived in the delta and the eastern hill tracts. The British had a dual system of governance in Burma. 'Lower,' or

'Ministerial Burma' was under more direct rule while the 'Frontier', or 'Scheduled Areas,' were more loosely ruled, with hereditary chiefs maintaining their power locally while acknowledging the supremacy of British rule (Smith, 1999, pp.42-43). The Karen were scattered with the lowland, delta and plains Karen living in Ministerial Burma and some living in the hill tracts of the Frontier Areas.

1.2.1 Making the Karen Legible

For the Karen in the east, the British had their eyes on the valuable teak in the forested hills. As with other colonial contexts, the British enacted a strict classification scheme with regard to ethnicity, race and the ordering of peoples through the taking of censuses (Charney, 2009). The objectification of colonised peoples was based on "an understanding developed in the West that national, racial, and other identifications had to be essentialized so that they could be incorporated into classificatory schemes for people, following the same approach adopted for the classification of animals and plants" (Charney, 2009, p.8). This had long term effects, as "the ethnic categories introduced by the British have become a political fact and a social reality" (Oh, 2013, p.5). Thus, this essentialising approach to people has a legacy to today's conflict in Myanmar, often framed as it is around ethnicity and the ethno-nationalist character of the KNU, the main armed actor in the geographical area under investigation – south-eastern Myanmar.

Just as the Burman kingdoms attempted to tax and conscript the Karen in their early state-making days, the British brought in advanced methods and resources to tax and make legible the populations they had colonised (Ikeda, 2012). This meant statistics, counting, records, and the organisation of peoples so as to monitor, tax, and secure land and its inhabitants. This includes the introduction of individual property rights and subsequent records of who owns what and where. As Scott explains, "the very concept of the modern state is inconceivable without a vastly simplified and uniform property regime that is legible, and hence manipulable from the centre" (Scott, 1995, p.49). For the Karen in the hills, this had never existed before. Their customary land use consisted of "subsistence, swidden agriculture, which has rotational periods of seven years or more" (Talbott et al, 2016, p.41). The most important effects of the introduction of this type of land tenure by the British were "to map a terrain of taxable real property that was perfectly legible to any clerk or trained state official.

At the same time, it radically devalued local knowledge and autonomy" (Scott, 1995, p.46). Thus, many lowland Karen areas became systemically mapped.

Ferguson (2014) has traced the use of the specific laws that were used to map, tax, and exploit land that the British considered 'wasteland.' Most Karen areas fell into the lowland 'Ministerial Burma' and were mapped out using the Village Act. This legislation produced a "territorial grid system" (Ferguson, 2014, p.298) based on mapped out wards with definite boundaries and created records for taxation purposes (Callahan, 2005). The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 allowed any land deemed to be vacant or wasteland, and could be of public or commercial use, to be taken over by the authorities (Ferguson, 2014). "This process made use of the concept of Waste Lands as an economic classification, with the ultimate goal to bring more of the country's natural resources and agricultural products into the fold of global capitalism, and therefore be controlled and taxed by the British colonial apparatus" (Ferguson, 2014, p.296).

This type of land and property regime, facilitated by the laws outlined above, in which taxable, demarcated private property is prioritised over collective or communal land use, while to a limited extent was in place during the pre-colonial, Burmese Kingdom days, was greatly accelerated during the period of colonialism. Despite British efforts, however, local practices still continued, especially in higher, difficult to access terrain, such as the Karen hills, and the British could interfere little. "The result has been the survival of strongly independent, or what nationalist leaders describe, as anti-central and anti-feudal, traditions amongst many of the hill peoples" (Smith, 1999, p.33). However, while this independent tradition managed to resist direct colonial rule or that of the postcolonial state in certain pockets of the country, the colonial policy of individual, recorded land use shaped national land tenure practices and shifted power relations permanently (Scott, 1995, p.47) in much of the rest of Myanmar. This is evident today, as certain colonial era laws that facilitate the confiscation and commodification of land are still in effect. Postcolonial legislation, such as the 1953 Land Nationalisation Act, and the contemporary legal regime, such as the Farmland Law and the Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Land Management Laws of 2012, rather than being a break from colonial practice, are a continuation, as the Myanmar state weaponises land legislation in the service of statebuilding and territorialisation. This will be explored in the later section on the political economy of land in conflict-affected areas such as those where the Karen live. The point is that while just one of several factors that inform the

contemporary land regime of the Myanmar government and military, the legacies of colonial land use policy are felt today in Karen-populated south-eastern Myanmar. In turn, this results in greater threats to land and livelihood of villagers in the period under study, and it is the reaction and resistance to these threats that this thesis analyses.

1.2.2 Division and Distrust

In a classic divide and rule policy of the British, the Karens, especially the S'gaw, Christian Karen, were favoured in terms of positions in the colonial administration, the police and the armed forces. Thus, when World War II broke out, and with the Japanese Imperial Army taking British colonial possessions throughout Asia, the allied forces contained a disproportionate number of ethnic Karen officers and soldiers compared to ethnic Burmans (Callahan, 2005). The war, however, had a profound impact on the fate of the Karen and their place in Myanmar today. The Japanese Imperial Army incubated and trained the nascent Burmese Independence Army (BIA) led by General Aung San, the father of one-time *de facto* leader and former human rights icon, Aung San Suu Kyi. After entering Burma through Thailand at the very beginning of 1942, the predominantly Burman, BIA and the Japanese Imperial Army swept through Karen areas towards central Burma, committing horrific acts of cruelty on Karen villagers along the way including massacres, sexual violence and extrajudicial killings (Gravers, 2007, p.243). With the Karen historically preferred by the British in terms of positions in the colonial administration, the military and the police, the Burmans enacted revenge on ethnic Karen with their powerful Japanese ally. This only deepened the mistrust, grievances and tension between the Karen and Burmans. After a brief period of Japanese occupation, General Aung San switched sides, and allied with the British, until the Japanese were eventually defeated (Charney, 2009). Throughout this period, the Karen, as well as other ethnic minority soldiers, had remained loyal to the British and the experience of fighting on both sides, and atrocities committed by the BIA, were instrumental in hardening their position regarding a post-independence autonomy from the Burmans.

In the immediate post-WWII period, when Burman leaders were negotiating independence with Attlee's British government, Karen leaders felt confident that loyalty to the British during WWII fighting against the Japanese would result in the Karen being looked upon favourably when negotiating some form of self-determination or independence for the Karen

(MacLean, 2022, p.62). Additionally they had sided with the British to put down Burman rebellions, such as the S'gaw Karen policemen who helped put down the infamous Sayasan rebellion in the central Burman plains in 1930-1931. Self-determination, however, was not to be. Reluctance from the British, as well as mixed messages and notions of what a potentially independent Karen nation would entail, and which geographic parts of what is now Myanmar would be included, resulted in confusion on the British side. Would a Karen nation include the Irrawaddy Delta or the eastern hills only? Would it include a part of what is now Tanintharyi Region and therefore access to the sea? One proposal included parts of what was then called Siam, now Thailand (Gravers, 2007).

Ultimately the British and General Aung San negotiated an independence agreement with Burman leaders in 1947, but General Aung San was assassinated before independence was officially declared on 4th of January, 1948 (Charney, 2009, p.71). This was not before he had made overtures to ethnic minorities regarding autonomy and independence during the 1947 Panglong Conference. The Panglong Agreement was signed by leaders from the 'Frontier Areas,' - the Chin, Shan and Kachin - and General Aung San, and agreed upon a relatively high level of autonomy for these ethnic groups, with the Shan given the right to secession after ten years. However, as much of the area that the Karen lived in was part of 'Ministerial Burma,' Karen leaders were not consulted. Four Karen representatives arrived late to the Panglong Conference but decided not to participate in discussions and were only observers (Garbagni & Walton, 2020). The resulting Panglong Agreement thus had no provision for Karen autonomy or a Karen State. Despite this, the 1947 Constitution mandated for a subregional Karen State based on the demarcations written by a commission, but no provision for the possibility of secession like the Shan. The main Karen political organisation at the time, the Karen National Union, rejected this state of affairs. Burma's independence was declared in 1948 but the dynamics of WWII and the different sides that Karen and Burman leaders and soldiers took during the early years were never resolved. Tensions increased throughout 1948 and a massacre on Christmas Eve in 1948 in a Karen church in Tenasserim Division (now called Tanintharyi Region) in the south, after a grenade attack during a service killed 80 people was the final straw (Callahan, 2005, p. 132-133). War broke out in January 1949 between the Karen, consisting of Karen battalions that defected from the Burmese armed forces and the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) - then the armed wing of the KNU - and the Burmans. There has not been a period of sustained peace since.

1.3 'The World's Longest Running Civil War'

When civil war broke out in January 1949, the KNU controlled several important towns and cities even in central Burma. In fact, by February 1949, they controlled territory just four miles away from the centre of power in what was then still called Rangoon (now Yangon) (Callahan, 2005, p.133). A negotiated break in fighting allowed the Burmese army to regroup and slowly push the KNU back. This pattern has largely repeated itself throughout the history of the civil war with the Karen. From controlling large swathes of eastern Burma in the late 1940s, including the Irrawaddy Delta, outer Rangoon (Yangon), the eastern plains and the areas close to the border with Thailand, in 2022, the KNU controls just pockets on the Thai border and in the Karen hills. Various mutinies, battlefield defeats, power struggles and shifting support from external actors are just a few elements of the history of Karen armed rebellion (Jolliffe, 2016). The KNDO still exists, but has been largely supplanted by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) as the main the armed wing of the KNU.

One of the key dynamics of this armed conflict is the 'four cuts' policy of the Burmese or Myanmar armed forces. This is a policy introduced by the Myanmar military in the 1960s that aimed to cut four essential links between the ethnic armed organisations and local populations – food, money, intelligence, and recruits (Smith, 1999, p.259). One aspect of the implementation of the four cuts policy was the designation of 'black,' 'brown' and 'white' areas. Black areas were fully under control of the rebels, in this case the KNU, brown areas were contested, and white areas were fully under government or military control (Smith, 1999, p.261). The goal was to turn black areas brown before turning the whole map white by cutting off rebel forces from local populations and moving people from forested areas to strategic hamlets located in deforested areas near roads, in which populations could be controlled (Woods & Naimark, 2020). The Burmese army would concentrate its operations in black areas, giving warning to villagers to move into the strategic hamlets, before operating a 'shoot-on-site' policy. This was a typical counterinsurgency tactic in South East Asia at the time, developed by the British in response to the communist insurgency in Malaysia and also used by the US in Vietnam (Smith, 1999). As per the Burmese proverb, the Four Cuts policy set out *"to drain the sea, in order to kill the fish"* (The Border Consortium, 2002).

The strategic hamlets were not a strategy to convert and maintain ideological support for military operations against rebels by providing economic support and protection, as was the ostensible intention of the US programme in Vietnam. Rather, as well as cutting off essential links between armed groups and local populations, they were also part of a 'land reclamation' strategy in which land that was deemed derelict or unproductive, especially due to war, could be confiscated by the Myanmar state. For Ferguson, she sees "a compelling continuity between the Four Cuts strategy and former land reclamation acts" (Ferguson, 2014, p.304). Thus, the "problem, from the state's point of view, is not just that it is not in control of these areas, but also that the areas are not generating revenue for the state" (Ferguson, 2014, p.304). The Myanmar military's counterinsurgency tactics went hand-in-hand with the taking of communal or collective land used by non-taxed, non-recorded rural Karen villagers, for the purposes of propping up the Myanmar military. Villagers that had been forcibly displaced were press-ganged into working the land, feeding the military in these strategic hamlets or relocation sites, building infrastructure such as roads, and portering for the army (The Border Consortium, 2002). This intensified in the early 1990s, in which all units were supposed to be "economically self-sufficient" (MacLean, 2008, p.3) and after a 1997 order which meant that each battalion had to sustain its own food supplies (Campbell, 2012). A series of military installations were established throughout Karen State, "consolidating control over large areas of land and natural resources" (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018a, p.17).

The devastation and human suffering of this violence was immense, and to this day there remains many tens of thousands of displaced Karen people who fled either to Thailand or to internally displaced persons sites deep into KNU territory (The Border Consortium, 2018). As the 1990s drew to a close the Four Cuts policy was phased out (MacLean, 2008) yet ultimately, the Myanmar military was able to slowly take more and more territory. Geopolitical changes such as Myanmar's closer relationship with Thailand resulted in less tacit support that Myanmar's neighbour had previously given the KNU, which had hitherto seen it as a useful buffer against the Burmese Communist Party north of KNU territory. The Thai authorities in the 1990s also became keen to cooperate with the Myanmar military junta to exploit natural resources such as hydropower and offshore gas (Burma Environmental Working Group, 2017, Jones, 2014b). This resulted in joint economic ventures such as hydropower dams planned along the Salween River, (Middleton et al, 2019), the Yadana Gas Pipeline that pipes natural gas from an offshore gas field through KNU territory to Thailand,

and the development of the huge, partially-built Special Economic Zone in Dawei, in Tanintharyi Region in the south which encompasses some KNU territory. A logging ban in Thailand meant that timber concessions were granted to Thai companies in Karen State, while new mining operations became operational in the 1990s (Brenner, 2019). This weakened the KNU's economic base (Jones, 2014b). Added to this was a slew of splinter groups breaking away from the KNU/KNLA, as detailed in Figure 1 below.

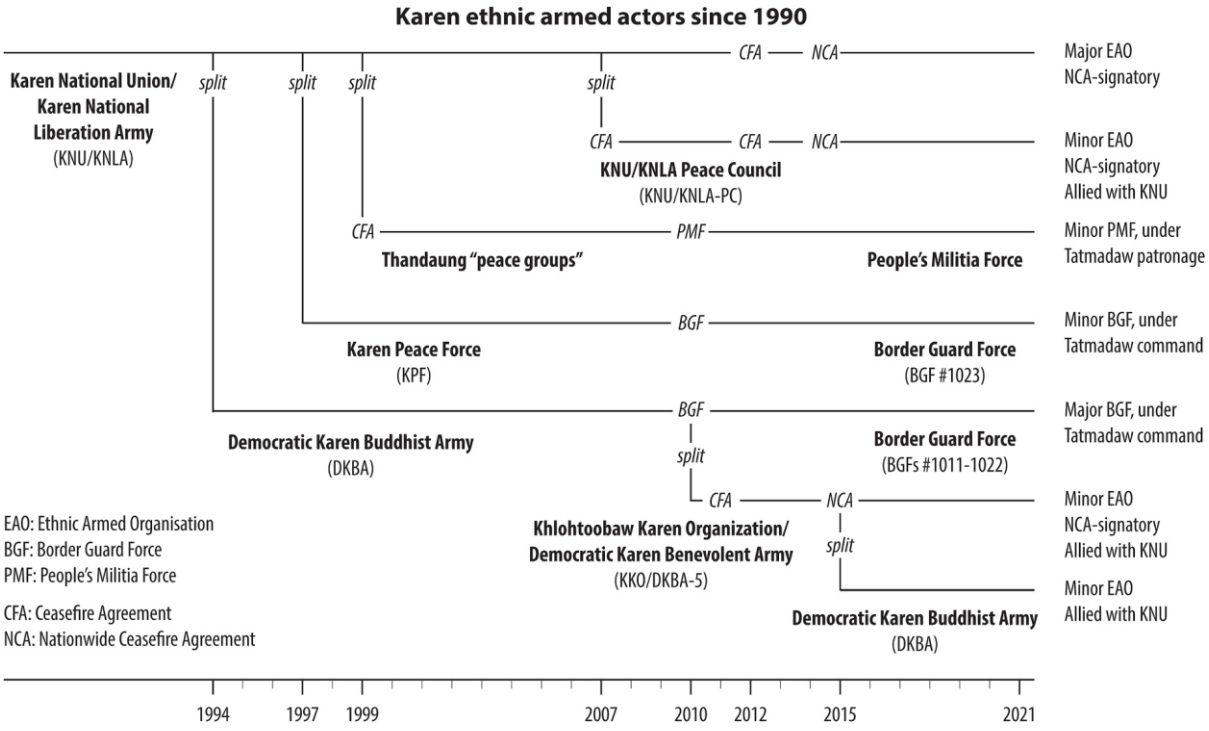


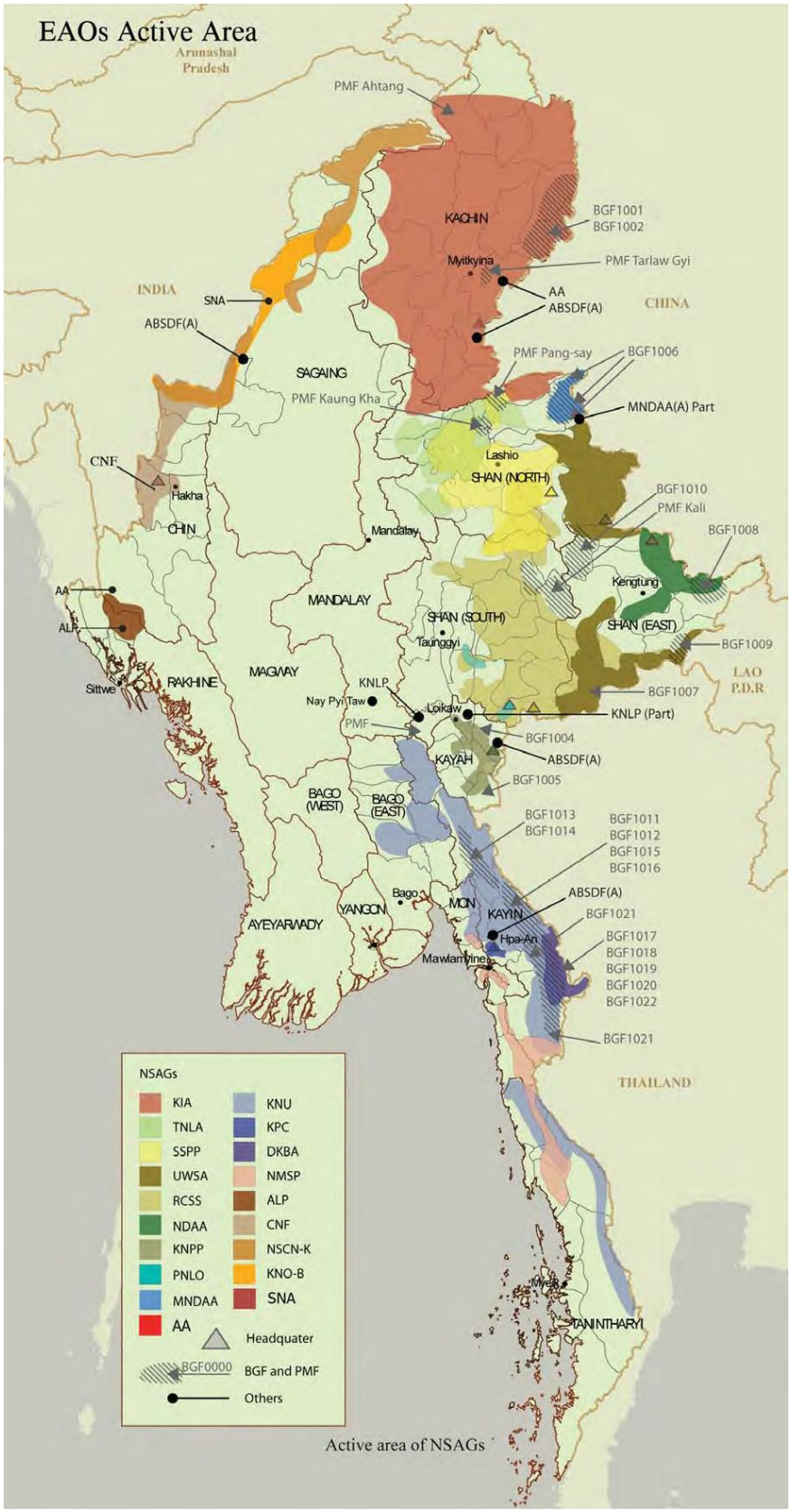
Figure 1: Karen armed groups

(Stokke et al 2022, p.4)

As the graphic above indicates, there were several incidences of splintering of Karen armed groups with various outcomes, including ceasefires with the Myanmar military and incorporation as Border Guard Forces (BGFs). BGFs are "battalion sized militias created by the *Tatmadaw* in 2009 and 2010"…the formation of which…"involved the integration of soldiers from the *Tatmadaw*[4] with units that originally were either ethnic armed organizations or militia groups" (Buchanan, 2016, p.iii). The most important in terms of the dynamics of armed conflict was the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), a Buddhist splinter group from the KNLA, comprised of Buddhist soldiers disillusioned with the S'Gaw Christian leadership of the KNU. They immediately signed a ceasefire with the military, and, in a joint operation with the Myanmar military, took the KNU's headquarters, Manerplaw in 1995. The

[4] Tatmadaw means the Burmese Military – or more literally, the Royal Burmese Army

loss of this key strategic position, as well as several battalions and territory to the DKBA, severely weakened the KNU. The DKBA ultimately transformed into a BGF in 2010, and enjoyed economic privileges while under the command of the Myanmar military (Jolliffe, 2016, p.32).



Map 2: Map of major ethnic armed organisations in Myanmar

(Burma News International, 2019. p.167).

The above map shows the plethora of EAOs present in Myanmar as of 2018. In the southeast, the KNU – the Karen National Union – represents the largest Karen armed group, although as the map shows, several other armed actors are present in the southeast of Myanmar, including Myanmar military proxy-BGFs.

The above chapter has outlined the legacies of colonialism and summarised the key trajectories of armed conflict between the ethnic Karen and the Myanmar military. The impact of British colonialism is still felt today in the making of a legible land and taxable regime and the fetishisation of ethnic and racial identity, which set the foundations for the decades long inter-ethnic conflict in Myanmar. Meanwhile, the postcolonial state of Myanmar has seen the Myanmar military attempt to build a unitary state underpinned by a dominant Buman-nationalist agenda (Kramer, 2021, p.479), while ethnic groups such as the Karen have largely fought for greater autonomy and self-determination. This has been described as 'the world's longest running civil war' (Rieffel, 2019). By 2012, the KNU still controlled pockets of territory and governed populations of Karen communities, but had been significantly weakened compared to its previous position of strength.

Thus, the way that the postcolonial Myanmar state has been experienced by villagers in many parts of the southeast has been that of violence, armed conflict, exploitation of natural resources, and dispossession. These armed conflict and political economy dynamics in turn have shaped the kind of resistance that villagers have employed and this has been mostly in the form of armed resistance, through the armed group, the KNU. Beginning in 2012, a new phase of relations with the central state of Myanmar began, and this brought new threats to the land and livelihoods Karen of the southeast. Yet, new forms of resistance became possible, and these were less institutionalised, more decentralised, and less formally organised. They were, indeed, more complex. It is this new era of threat and resistance that the next chapter will outline and contextualise.

Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism

This section will contextualise the resistance that is the focus of this thesis which takes place between 2012 and 2018 in south-eastern Myanmar. It will outline *what* is being resisted. It does so by outlining the political reforms that led to the 2012 bilateral ceasefire between the Karen National Union (KNU), the Myanmar government, and the Myanmar military, and the subsequent peace process. It also explores the political economy of this time, with a particular focus on land. I argue that economic liberalisation, together with the ceasefire, created a complex assemblage of forces that posed new threats and opportunities villagers in south-eastern Myanmar. This kind of assemblage has been described as 'ceasefire capitalism' (Woods, 2011), 'war by other means' (Stokke et al, 2022) or 'neither war nor peace' (Kramer, 2021). The section will thus look at national political economy dynamics, as well as armed conflict-related political economy dynamics in the border, ethnic minority areas of Myanmar, including the southeast, as they are co-constitutive of each other. Without sufficient attention to the conflict and ceasefire economies, it would be impossible to understand the national political economy, and vice-versa. This in turn allows us to locate the threats of violence, land confiscation, destructive extractive industries, and livelihood impacts that this new era of ceasefire and economic liberalisation had on villagers in the southeast. How villagers responded and resisted these threats is then unpacked in later empirical chapters.

The chapter will proceed as follows. First, there is a brief overview of the political reforms that began in 2011 and the impact this had in terms of a bilateral ceasefire agreement that was reached in 2012 with the KNU and the Myanmar government. The impact of this tenuous ceasefire included a reduction in armed conflict and greater freedom of movement and political participation for civilians. However, it also brought about cooperation and conflict around governance and authority in areas of mixed administration. I will also briefly discuss the breakdown of this ceasefire. Second, I will summarise the political economy developments leading up to 2011, by a) looking at national dynamics and b) introducing the concept of 'ceasefire capitalism' that occurred in Kachin State from 1994-2011 – a preview of what happened in Karen State in the post-2011 era. I will end this second section by introducing the national political economy of the post-2011 reform period. This sets the stage for the final section of this chapter, and how the significant components of the concept

of 'ceasefire capitalism' – ceasefire, land confiscation, new capital flows, natural resource extraction from outside the area, and state expansion – are applicable to 2012-2018 in south-eastern Myanmar. The impact of these dynamics, and how they translate into threats and structural violence for people on the ground, are *what is being resisted and by whom.*

2.1 A New Era in Myanmar

2.1.1 A Democratic Transition?

In 2012, after over 60 years of armed conflict, a new political climate of reform in Myanmar paved the way for a ceasefire between the KNU and the Myanmar military, as well as the quasi-civilian government led by former General and then-President, Thein Sein. This corresponded with a slew of other political and economic changes that were occurring nationally.

In 2010, while seen as largely flawed, an election to the newly formed Parliament began a period of power-sharing between the military and a civilian government. The political party that won the 2010 election was the military-established and military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) led by former General, Thein Sein. The main opposition party – the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Nobel Peace Prize winner and Myanmar's democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi, boycotted the 2010 election, although she was released from house arrest shortly after. Despite well-founded scepticism, the first few years of Myanmar's 'transition' yielded hope. Several hundred political prisoners were released, a huge, Chinese-backed dam on one of the most important rivers in the country was suspended after public backlash, trade unions became, on paper, legalised, newspaper censorship ended, and media freedom expanded. In 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD participated in by-elections, winning 43 out of 44 seats, thus allowing her to take a seat in the new Parliament (Jones, 2014a, p.781). Importantly for south-eastern Myanmar, a new round of ceasefire talks began in 2011, and between September 2011 and August 2012, 13 ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) entered into bilateral ceasefire agreements with the quasi-civilian government (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018a, p.6). Myanmar also began to integrate into the international community as western sanctions were lifted, international

financial institutions reengaged (Talbott et al, 2016, p.350) and high profile visits by western leaders complemented the general optimism around a 'democratic transition.' Media reports and statements by international politicians and institutions placed hope in the transition. For example, upon visiting Myanmar in 2014, then-US President Obama stated that "I am optimistic about the possibilities of Myanmar," (President Obama 'Optimistic', 2014) and the "democratisation process in Myanmar is real" (Hodal, 2014). In 2013, the International Crisis Group (ICG) honoured President Thein Sein at its "In Pursuit of Peace Prize Dinner", with ICG President stating, "Myanmar has initiated a remarkable and unprecedented set of reforms since President Thein Sein's government took over in March 2011" (International Crisis Group, 2013).

It must be noted, however, that many civil society actors warned of the limited nature of this transition, of the ongoing military offensives, for example in Kachin State, and the residual power of the military enshrined in the 2008 Constitution (Ra et al, 2021). This constitution meant that the military was guaranteed 25% of seats in Parliament, that three key ministries – Border Affairs, Home Affairs, and Defence – remained in military hands, while the body in charge of day-to-day administration of the country - the General Administration Department, remained under the purview of the military-run Ministry of Home Affairs. Power was also centralised, with very few powers allocated to the newly established region and state parliaments. Finally, any changes to the 2008 Constitution needed a 75% vote in Parliament, yet with 25% allocation in Parliament to military personnel, this served as an effective veto for the military. Thus, while certain reforms did occur, and certainly in central cities such as Yangon and Mandalay these new freedoms were enjoyed by the Myanmar people, the limitations of this transition, structured by residual military power, were often overlooked by Western observers at the time (Ra et al, 2021, pp.466-467). Furthermore, the benefits of these reforms were distributed unequally, and ethnic minorities in the border areas, for example south-eastern Myanmar, continued to face direct and indirect violence at the hands of the Myanmar military.

2.1.2 The 2012 KNU-Myanmar Government Ceasefire

One of the most celebrated components of this package of political changes was the 2012 ceasefire with the KNU. This was important as the KNU, the first ethnic group to rebel against the Rangoon (Yangon) government of immediate post-independence, has been one of

the staunchest and strongest armed groups resisting the Myanmar state. The prospect of peace for Karen communities that had suffered decades of violence, displacement, and conflict-induced poverty was possible ("Burma Government Signs Ceasefire," 2012). Furthermore, this ceasefire catalysed change for communities in the southeast, both positive and negative. Expanded civic space allowed people greater freedoms of association and assembly, while at the same time, less armed conflict resulted in the increasing presence of private sector actors looking to capitalise on the southeast's land and natural resources.

Following the January 2012 bilateral ceasefire, talks continued with the Thein Sein government, and these were centred around signing a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA). This was meant to be a grand occasion, in which all major armed groups would sign with international observers present. After extensive negotiations, drafts, and deliberations a text was agreed upon in early 2015 (Kramer, 2021, p.487). However, there were disagreements regarding which armed groups would actually be allowed to sign. The government refused to recognise or accept the Arakan Army, the ethnic Kokang, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army as signatories. In response, several other EAOs refused to sign, resulting in only eight groups signing in October 2015, producing a partial NCA. The KNU was one of the two signatories with major military power, while the smaller, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) - an offshoot of the Karen Border Guard Force which itself was once called the DKBA - and another small Karen splinter group, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council also became signatories (Nationwide Ceasefire Organization – Signatory, Ethnic Armed Organizations, n.d.).

This was one of the last acts of Thein Sein's government before national elections in November 2015. These elections, this time contested by the NLD, resulted in a comprehensive victory for Aung San Suu Kyi's party. While a constitutional clause barred her from becoming President, her government created a new position – State Counsellor – through which she became de facto civilian leader of the country, albeit with the structural entrenchment of military power still a stumbling block to further reform.

Aung San Suu Kyi and her party continued down the NCA path which essentially became a two-track process, with the government negotiating on one hand with the bloc of NCA signatories, including the KNU, whilst simultaneously trying to persuade other EAOs to sign the NCA (Stokke et al, 2022, p.12). Peace talks became stuck, despite the NLD drafting "a

framework for political dialog" (Stokke et al, 2022, p.12), and convening a series of Union Peace Conferences between 2016 and 2020, ostensibly to work towards a comprehensive peace accord. Yet at such conferences, the military would block any proposals from ethnic representatives that were seen to be not in accordance with the 2008 Constitution (Kramer, 2021, p.488). Furthermore, the NLD, like the military, remained stuck on the NCA which did not have credibility or legitimacy in the eyes of many EAOs. Thus, EAOs feared "ending up with a Union Peace Accord that provides them with no essential new provisions that go beyond the 2008 constitution and existing laws" (Kramer, 2021, p.487). This was problematic as the 2008 Constitution entrenches the military in politics and centralises power, key grievances for ethnic groups. Ultimately "the NLD-government failed to achieve national reconciliation with the military while the limitations of the peace process eroded the fragile trust that had existed between the NLD-government and EAOs" (Stokke et al, 2022, p.12). Furthermore, according to the Karen Peace Support Network, a network of Karen civil society organisations, "the NLD-led government has failed to speak out against or condemn the Burma Army for its ongoing offensives against both ceasefire and non-ceasefire EAOs and its widespread and systematic violation of the human rights of civilians in ethnic areas" (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018a, p.9).

Despite the stuck nature of the peace process, some positive changes did occur for people on the ground in south-eastern Myanmar. Less armed conflict and a reduction of the most violent forms of human rights violations by military forces eased security concerns for civilians. In turn this allowed greater freedom of movement with which to pursue livelihood and social activities (Mark, 2022, p.7, Jolliffe, 2016, p.48). The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) published a report that in 2014 that documented the changes in the human rights situation on the ground, both positive and negative. Added to the greater freedom of movement and reduction in human rights violations, they also reported that armed actors were laying less new anti-personnel mines, there had not been any large-scale military operations, and there was a decrease in demands for forced labour (Karen Human Rights Group, 2014d, pp.6-7).

As well as the freedom of movement to travel and work, described by KHRG researchers and the villagers they interviewed as "the single most positive trend resulting from the ceasefire" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2014d, p.4), this freedom also extended to political and civil society activities. As Kenney-Lazar and Mark (2020) put it, "Myanmar citizens, peasants, and

ethnic groups have a greater political voice than ever before, able to form political parties, participate in civil society organizations, protest and demonstrate, and file lawsuits, among other avenues of expression" (Kenney-Lazar & Mark, 2020, p.14). For example, Karen community-based organisations (CBOs) were able to operate with less security concerns in conflict-affected areas, including providing support to internally displaced persons. They were able to open new offices in towns and access more streams of international donor funding. Organisations that had previously only been able to operate in KNU stronghold areas or the refugee camps on the Thai side of the border were able to connect and work openly with organisations that previously were only able to work in government-controlled areas (Jolliffe, 2016, p.51). Part of the reason that this was made possible is because being associated with the KNU was no longer deemed to be a terrorist activity. This stems from Section 17(1) of the colonial-era Unlawful Associations Act which stipulates that membership or association with an unlawful group is punishable with a prison sentence, and this law was often used against people in ethnic minority areas (Kramer, 2021, p.482). The 2015 NCA, however, contains a provision that signatories are no longer on the unlawful associations list and as such the KNU were removed (Kyed & Harrisson, 2019, p.299). This greater civic space had implications for the capacity and opportunity to resist, as civil society organisations (CSOs) could operate more openly and facilitate connections between villagers who were experiencing new forms of violence and mobilise resistance. This will be demonstrated in more detail in later, empirical chapters.

Yet there were also other negative dynamics that civilians also had to face. In particular, the ceasefire afforded the Myanmar military time and space to strengthen its positions in areas that were previously inaccessible, especially in south-eastern Myanmar (Karen Human Rights Group, 2014d, p. 6). Bases that were previously made from bamboo now became fortified with concrete, while the military was able to "resupply and rotate its troops far more regularly, and to begin reconnaissance operations in areas it has never accessed before" (Jolliffe, 2016, p.49). New facilities were established, particularly in Hpapun District - one of the KNU strongholds - and the military also increased its airborne capacities (Jolliffe, 2016, p.49). According to a report by the Border Consortium, a consortium of international NGOs involved with humanitarian assistance for those displaced in the southeast of Myanmar, militarisation by *all* actors increased after the ceasefire, particularly in relation to development projects (more on this later) (The Border Consortium, 2014, pp.13-14). Thus while the ceasefire reduced direct violence, it also had the effect of "transforming the

presence of soldiers in everyday village affairs from sporadic and limited to permanent and wide-spread" (MacLean, 2022, p.66).

2.1.3 Who Governs the Southeast?

The ceasefire brought about new dynamics of competition and cooperation between the two main political authorities in the southeast of Myanmar – the Myanmar government and the KNU. This in turn led to new opportunities and openings for engagement for villagers who wanted to respond or resist the direct and indirect forms of violence that they experienced.

The history of armed conflict in Karen areas involves the slow, inexorable loss of territory that informed the image of a Karen nation, or *Kawthoolei.*[5] Yet from 2012 to 2018, there remained pockets held and administered by the KNU, the most powerful Karen ethnonationalist armed group. This is not to say that the KNU represent *all* Karen people, representation of the Karen is indeed contested, negotiated, and extremely complex (Thawnghmung, 2008). They have, however, undeniably been the most powerful organisation that claims to represent, but also to govern, certain Karen populations, despite the decreasing territory and number of people living in KNU-administered areas. The KNU itself is also riven by factionalism, internal power struggles and different levels of strength and legitimacy between its seven brigades, each of which administers and is responsible for territory demarcated along locally-defined lines.

The KNU has operated as a state within a state, and has its own health, taxation, education and judicial structures with civilian-led governmental departments, including forestry, agriculture, foreign affairs and others separate from the armed wing – the KNLA (Jolliffe, 2014, Saferworld & Karen Peace Support Network, 2018). Some areas are fully under control of the KNU (black areas), some areas experience a type of mixed sovereignty (brown areas) where Myanmar government actors and institutions are present alongside the KNU, while some areas of the southeast are fully under government control (white areas). The governance structures of the KNU are embedded in Karen society and rely on participation and deep roots in the community (McCarthy & Farrelly, 2020). While there are central governance and

[5] *Kawthoolei* is a Karen word for a Karen homeland. It is a "symbolic space" (Gravers, 2007, p.245) rather than an exact geographical area. It translates as 'flowering country.' (See Gravers, 2007)

administrative organs of government, the KNU is relatively decentralised along seven territorial districts and each district has significant autonomy in terms of revenue raising and governance (Jolliffe, 2016, p.14).

Map 3: Map of south-eastern Myanmar

(Jolliffe in Asia Foundation, 2016, p.iii).

Research by the Asia Foundation conducted in 2016 found that approximately 800,000 people lived under some form of influence of the KNU. Of this, 250,000-350,000 were "primarily under the authority of the KNU but are also in contact with the government or other authorities" and 100,000 were living firmly under KNU authority (Jolliffe, 2016, p.5). These are concentrated in the northern KNU Districts – Hpapun and Taungoo (MacLean, 2022, p.66), shown in the above map. Other indicators of KNU administration as per the Asia Foundation's 2016 research include the 167,574 students attending over 1,500 community schools supported by the KNU Department of Education and Culture or its affiliates, 61 KNU Department of Health and Welfare clinics employing 700 health workers targeting 190,000 people, and the 600 police officers of the Karen National Police Force (Jolliffe, 2016, p.5). The KNU has also historically implemented land tenure policies. In 1974, its first land use policy was enacted, with the principle that "land must be in our hand" (KNU Land Policy, 2015), partially a response to the land confiscation of the Myanmar military's 'Four Cuts' policy. It has since enacted another land use policy in 2015, the KNU Land Policy, that includes provisions on both the customary *kaw,* or *ku* system of land use that indigenous rural Karen communities use, as well as provisions on individual land title (Hong, 2017). The KNU's revenue comes from taxation on local people, traders and companies, with taxation on mining industries – gold, tin and antimony – its largest source. It also receives contributions from the Karen diaspora (Jolliffe, 2016, p.27).

The 2012 ceasefire led to, among other dynamics, a period of both cooperation and competition over governance between the Myanmar government and the KNU administration (Harrisson & Kyed, 2019). Despite territorial losses of the 1990s, the KNU was still the main political authority in mountainous areas near the Thailand border, as well as small pockets in Bago and Tanintharyi Regions and Mon State (Harrisson & Kyed, 2019, pp.298-299). However, since the ceasefire the Myanmar government attempted to expand its administration into previously KNU dominated territory (Mark, 2022). Particularly through education, a sensitive sector due to its centrality to Karen culture, language, and identity, the Myanmar government-built schools, employed teachers, and transformed Karen Education and Culture Department schools into partial or full government schools. They were able to compete by offering larger salaries to teachers and/or enticing students away from an under-funded Karen education system (Ko Kwe Moo Kha, 2021, p.73). Other sectors in which the Myanmar government expanded its administration includes land registration, local development activities, and forestry (Jolliffe, 2016, p.45).

One new dynamic that impacted Myanmar state expansion was aid, development, and peacebuilding projects from international donors. When the country began its partial political and economic liberalisation in 2011, the nature of aid and humanitarian assistance delivery changed, as did traditional donor countries' diplomatic and trade relationships with the Myanmar government (Carr, 2018). Donor countries and agencies' geopolitical considerations, changing perceptions of the Myanmar government, self-interest, faith in the peace process and transition to democracy, and opportunities to work and expand aid coverage inside the country through the Myanmar government resulted in reduced support for cross-border humanitarian assistance (Décobert, 2020). Many new development funding streams became available, in addition to humanitarian aid (Carr, 2018). Thus "international actors, both Western and Asian, engaged pragmatically as funders of peacebuilding projects, investors in resource exploitation in ceasefire areas, and as sponsors of state capacity building at the national scale" (Stokke et al, 2022 p.12).

For the local service providers in Karen State, changes meant that for some funding streams, rather than apply for funding from donors through their Thai or regional base, they had to register with the central government and apply through state channels. This was a major problem for them as they were still not legal, let alone registered. However, "registration in turn comes with the associated obligation to report programs, budgets, and activities to the state" (Décobert, 2020, p.8). These practicalities served to reify the presence of institutions and actors of the Myanmar state in ethnic minority areas which had previously been contested. Furthermore, the normalisation of aid and development relations meant that there was a plethora of international actors engaged in development projects, implemented in coordination with central Myanmar authorities in conflict-affected areas. For example, since 2012, there was a significant increase in the construction of schools and clinics across Karen State as outlined above. This was made possible by increasing amounts of aid and development money. Yet as Décobert's (2020) research has shown, "ethnic minority service providers commonly perceive the increase in government schools and clinics in their areas as an attempt to undermine their local health and education systems and to increase control over their communities, land, and resources" (Décobert, 2020, p.9). Another example is the World Bank-backed 'Peaceful and Prosperous Communities Project' that aimed to "to address the significant and historical underinvestment in public infrastructure, services, and support for market-oriented activities in areas of Myanmar that have suffered from long-running

conflicts" (World Bank, 2019). However, as the Karen Peace Support Network pointed out at the time, this project served to undermine local service provision and governance structures, offering support for the central government's state expansion. "This World Bank project is designed and controlled by only one party to the conflict – Naypyidaw[6] – in order to expand its unitary structures into ethnic-governed areas" (Karen Peace Support Network, 2019).

Yet it was not just the Myanmar government that was expanding its administration. Additionally, the KNU engaged in "ceasefire state-making," i.e. targeting civilian areas to expand their spheres of governance, resulting in a form of what Kyed calls "frontier border governance" (Kyed, 2021, p.1). As she describes:

> the civilian departments of the KNU are expanding into the lowlands—literally 'coming down from the hills'—while the Myanmar state is making more non-militarized efforts, like the provision of education and elections, to establish a presence in the area (Kyed, 2021, p.11).

Kyed demonstrated this through ethnographic research in Karen villages that were subject to competing political authorities – the Myanmar state and the KNU - during the ceasefire period. She notes how the KNU became more assertive and through the tools of justice provision and policing, seeking to "nurture popular legitimacy, granting them the kind of credibility that is necessary for the provision of other collective goods, taxation, and resource control" (Kyed, 2021, p.3). This was implemented through mobile courts, expanding the jurisdiction of the Karen National Police Force, increasing jail cells and dissemination of KNU laws and rules for behaviour to villages under mixed authority (Kyed & Harrisson, 2019, p.304, Kyed, 2021, p.17). Other social goods formed part of the KNU's 'ceasefire state-making' including land registration, education and health.

Since the 2012 ceasefire competition over the issuance of land titles also increased (Mark, 2022). While the 2012 bilateral ceasefire and the 2015 NCA contained some clauses around which actor has the right to govern land, tensions remained in areas of mixed authority. Furthermore, important differences between the KNU Land Policy of 2015 and the Myanmar

[6] The capital of Myanmar, a new city which was constructed in the early 2000s.

government's land laws remained. Specifically this involved the right to ownership under KNU law vis-à-vis land use under Myanmar government law, and the better protection of customary land use under the KNU (Mark, 2022). Between 2012 and 2016 the KNU had "registered 61,765 plots covering just under 354,512 acres (1,435 sq. km)" (Jolliffe, 2016, p.55). In areas of mixed authority, villagers took to registering their plots with both administrations where possible as an insurance policy against the greater threats of land confiscation that the ceasefire period brought (Kyed, 2021).

This led to problems and differing levels of cooperation and competition between the two authorities, depending on their particular context and history. Mark (2022) outlines some of the key dynamics in these areas of mixed authority: some villages had an appointed head for each authority while others had one head for both; the territorial demarcations of the KNU and the government of village boundaries may have been different; some villages had a presence or influence of other armed groups such as the BGF or KNU splinter groups; some villages had historically been under KNU administration and due to battlefield defeats were now under Myanmar government control, and the long history of conflict and abuse, especially at the hands of Myanmar military soldiers meant that political legitimacy in villages throughout the southeast of Myanmar was contested, varied, and context-dependent (Mark, 2022, p.8). However, research has shown that villagers tended to prefer the administration of KNU authorities, although this is not uniform (Harrisson & Kyed, 2019, and Mark, 2022).

The changing dynamics of political authority in areas of mixed administration outlined in this section is relevant in that competition and contestation around governance in hitherto war-torn areas meant that civilians had greater opportunity to engage with different authorities. This is coupled with other freedoms that the ceasefire facilitated in terms of more freedom of movement and political association. Therefore, more than before the 2012 ceasefire and partial political liberalisation, villagers had the ability and relative freedom to leverage their agency in areas of competing authorities where each side claims legitimacy. There was thus greater potential to oppose or resist certain development projects and local-level decisions that were detrimental to their communities.

2.1.4 A Return to Armed Conflict

Ultimately, the lack of progress in the peace process in addressing grievances of the Karen, and the increasing militarisation by the Myanmar military, resulted in a breakdown of the ceasefire. The stuck nature of the national peace process also coincided with increasing encroachments and violations of the NCA by the Myanmar military, particularly in Hpa-an and Hpapun Districts (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018b, p.9). In 2018 Myanmar military troops began moving hundreds of troops into KNU territory in Hpapun District to rebuild roads connecting military bases. This was in violation of the terms of the NCA, Section 8(b) of which stipulates that "movement of armed troops in the areas controlled by the other is allowed only after obtaining prior agreement" (Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, 2015). According to Karen CSOs, this was "the largest and most coordinated deployment of troops into Karen State's Mutraw (Hpapun) district since 2008" (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018b, p.3). Over 2,500 people were displaced as clashes erupted between the KNLA and the Myanmar military in early 2018. Local CSOs, as well as the KNU itself, decried the operations, viewing it as a strategy to allow year-round reinforcements and increase military control in an area that had been out of reach for the Myanmar state (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018b). Due to the impasse in the peace process and the increasing tensions in Hpapun District described above, the KNU stated that it would suspend official participation in peace talks, officially notifying State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi by letter in October 2018 (Karen National Union Headquarters, 2018). As of November 2018, the KNU had only participated in informal peace talks with the Myanmar government (Kyaw Kha, 2019).

The post-2018 period saw informal talks and a back and forth without real progress in the peace process while military tensions on the ground increased. The 2021 coup attempt by the Myanmar military junta[7] undid all notion of ceasefire or peace process, and Karen areas have suffered immense conflict, including airstrikes and the use of heavy artillery as major offensives have been launched by the military junta since. The increasing tension, the breakdown of the peace talks, and the eruption of armed conflict in 2018, however, was the beginning of a return to armed conflict, reminiscent of pre-2012, and therefore marks a definitive point at which this thesis' timeframe is bookmarked by.

[7] I use coup 'attempt' here to draw attention to the lack of success the military had in consolidating power after its putsch. At the time of writing, the various resistance forces, including groups such as the KNU, have successfully prevented the junta from enjoying 'effective control' over the country. For more, see this report by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar: https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/2022/09/statement-briefing-effective-control-myanmar/

2.2 Myanmar's Political Economy

The previous section outlined the political trajectory, both nationally and locally, which resulted in a period of ceasefire with the KNU in the southeast after 2012. It also outlined some of the impacts this had on the ground for villagers, including competing political authorities, militarisation, reduction in direct violence and related human rights violations, and expanded political and civic space. Yet these dynamics are part of a double-edged sword, and a changing political economy, facilitated by these changing politics, had significant negative impacts for people in terms of new threats of land confiscation, environmental destruction, and natural resource extraction. The following section will give an overview of the national political economy and how this fed into the conflict-affected border areas. It will outline a comparative example of ceasefire – Kachin State between 1994 and 2011 – academic analysis of which produced the concept 'ceasefire capitalism' (Woods, 2011). This is presented because for many scholars and civil society activists, the ceasefire capitalism period in Kachin is a forerunner for the political economy of Karen State between 2012 and 2018. I will, however, also outline how in Karen State, national political economy trends resulted in some key differences, mainly related to legislation. I will finish by presenting how these changing political economy dynamics translated into new threats and forms of structural violence for villagers on the ground. This chapter thus lays the ground to understand *what* it is that is being resisted.

2.2.1 Pre-2011 National Political Economy

In 1962, General Ne Win launched a coup d'état, ostensibly to keep the country together that was falling apart due to various ethnonationalist and communist insurgencies, and the presence of Chinese nationalist Kuomintang troops in northern Myanmar. The new ruling military regime introduced an economic programme of state-led autarky implemented through the vehicle of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). By 1987, however, combined with disastrous economic interventions and corruption the economy was failing, and Myanmar was listed as one of the UN's least-developed nations (Talbott et al, 2016, p.334). In 1988, partly due to economic collapse, a nationwide uprising ended the rule of the BSPP yet the military still retained power. It staged another coup to 'restore order' and from

1988 was ruled by the State Law and Order Council (SLORC), changing its name in 1997 to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

The SLORC initiated Myanmar's first steps towards marketisation, moving away from the socialist-esque era of the BSPP. According to Talbott et al (2016), SLORC consolidated its power by opening up to foreign investment to exploit natural resources, especially offshore gas, massively increasing military spending, and launching large-scale military offensives against EAOs, particular in areas where natural resources were located such as Shan and Karen States (Talbott et al, 2016, p.335). It also liberalised the economy in agriculture, timber and fisheries sectors, while encouraging privatisation (Jones 2014b, p.148).

This shift was characterised by Jones (2014b) as a "constrained transition from state socialism to state-mediated capitalism" (Jones, 2014b, p.148). Part of this transition was the cultivation of a class of 'crony capitalists,' i.e. "large-scale "national entrepreneurs" capable of taking on major industries" (Jones, 2014b, p.148). An entrepreneurial class of businesspeople had not been allowed to exist during the autarkic BSPP period (Jones, 2014b) and thus needed to be created by SLORC. This new class of businessmen (and they were all men), however, could only prosper and gain licenses, contracts, and tenders etc. by having close relations with top generals and the military as an institution. They were the people with the capacity to develop certain industries in which they and the military benefitted such as arms dealing. Furthermore, the military established two huge conglomerates in the 1990s – the Myanma Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) in 1990 and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) in 1997 - which were run by the military and partnered with international and domestic investors in heavy industries, commodities, tourism, banking, trade and precious stones such as rubies and jade (Jones 2014b, p.149, Talbott et al 2016, p.347). This "state-mediated capitalism" served to entrench military control in the economy, to direct funds from investment into both the private hands of the generals and to fund the expansion of the military as an institution. Thus, SLORC "saw economic reform primarily as a means to strengthen its political control" (Brown, 2013, p.178). This is important as it lay the foundations for the longer term strategy of the military to subdue EAOs, and is evident in the ceasefire period of 2012-2018, where it continued to use economic power to consolidate political power.

The 1990s and 2000s also coincided with a series of western sanctions on trade, investment and overseas development assistance (Talbott et al, 2016, p.350). In turn, Myanmar's first steps towards economic liberalisation instead relied on capital from China, Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea, particularly in natural resource extraction and the garment sector (Brown, 2013, pp.195-196).

2.2.2 Pre-2011 Ceasefire Economies

These national shifts, from "state-mediated socialism" to "state-mediated capitalism," after 1988, however, only tell part of the story. The political economy of the border areas, where armed conflict was rife and a plethora of armed actors sought to finance themselves and their insurgencies, is the other side of the coin. The majority of Myanmar's natural resources, including jade and rubies, tin, gold, timber, and potential energy sources such as hydropower, were and still are located in ethnic minority areas on the borders. Furthermore, the production of opium in Shan and Kachin States, as well as synthetic narcotics, particularly meth amphetamine since the 1990s, were a major driver of power struggles in northern Myanmar. The Myanmar military sought to control these resources, contain ethnic minority armed insurgencies, and enrich the military as an institution as well as top officials and commanders personally. This section will thus give an overview of 'ceasefire capitalism' in Kachin State and the impact this had for civilians on the ground. It will inform how the ceasefire and liberalisation came together in a complex assemblage of factors that created the structural violence faced by people on the ground in Kachin. The reason that this section is outlining this political-economic strategy is that it was a forerunner for ceasefire dynamics in Karen State just a few years later.

Ceasefire capitalism describes the new patterns of "military–state centralization, land control and securitization, and primitive accumulation" that Woods (2011, p.751) outlined when analysing the 17-year ceasefire period between the Myanmar military and the EAO, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in the northern, Myanmar-China border areas between 1994 and 2011. It is "an intricate interplay between military force, resource-rich peasant land, and (trans-) national finance capital" (Woods, 2011, p.751) that co-opted certain political and business elites in Kachin State in order to centralise "politico-economic power" (Jones, 2014a, p.792) in the hands of the Myanmar military. During this period of ceasefire, Myanmar military commanders entered into joint ventures with local elites to exploit natural

resources in timber and mining sectors as well as monocrop agriculture. This was aided by transnational capital flows, especially from China which was undergoing unprecedented economic growth during this period and was hungry for natural resources such as those located over the border in Kachin State. These transnational capital flows were brokered by local Kachin business elites (Jones, 2014a, p.793) and widespread land and natural resource concessions were allocated to businesses and companies by Myanmar state agencies, forming a network of patronage. For Woods, rather than threatening sovereignty, these concessions were actually a tool of "Burmese military–statebuilding in the ethnic frontier" (Woods, 2011, p.749) as land and resource concessions "transformed customary land claims into constituted national territory" (Woods, 2011, p.751). Thus, after redirecting capital flows into these confiscated and conceded lands, the military regime "appropriates (trans-) national capital networks to form military–private partnerships to solidify de jure sovereignty into de facto territorial control" (Woods, 2011, p.749). Such assemblages in Myanmar like that outlined above in Kachin State, have been described by Callahan (2007) – utilising Duffield's (2001) concept - as emerging political complexes. They are a "set of flexible and adaptive networks that link state and other political authorities to domestic and foreign business concerns (some legal, others illegal), traditional indigenous leaders, political party leaders, and NGOs" (Callahan, 2007, pp.3-4). Similarly, Bächtold et al (2020) have described this period of ceasefire capitalism as "complex networks of various actors asserting different forms of (competing, overlapping) government" (Bächtold et al, 2020, p.367).[8]

According to Jones (2014a), a second aspect of this economic strategy was to integrate these local elites into the national economy, for example by allowing smugglers and businessmen to launder their money in national banks or invest in legitimate national businesses.[9] This access was dependent on military patronage and tied these local elites to a central, national economy rather than allowing them to cultivate local power bases (Jones, 2014a, p.793). For example 10% of gemstones[10] mined by ceasefire groups were initially required to be sold at

[8] This assemblage in itself could be approached with a complexity lens, although this is not the focus of this thesis.

[9] It should be noted here that whether or not this was a purposeful, coherent and organised strategy of the Myanmar military is down to analysis and interpretation, as Woods and Jones, outlined above, have done. The opaque nature of the decision-making processes of the Myanmar military, in a country internationally isolated for several decades, means complete certainty regarding the intentions on what strategic choices are being made is not possible. Thus, this thesis relies on the analysis and interpretation of prominent scholars on the political economy of Myanmar, rather than, for example, policy documents or leaked meeting minutes from the Myanmar military itself which are simply not available.

[10] Mines in Kachin State are the biggest source of jade in the world.

the national gem emporium in Naypyidaw. However, by the mid-2000s, all gemstones had to be sold this way, thus redirected them from localised sales and smuggling routes into China to central gem emporiums. This meant that the Kachin Independence Organization's[11] (KIO) main source of revenue was effectively redirected to the Myanmar state (Jones, 2014a, p.794). Similar dynamics occurred with lucrative timber and agriculture sectors. Additionally, increased 'development spending' by the military, especially infrastructure such as roads (McCarthy & Farrelly, 2020), penetrated KIO territory, thus leaving them vulnerable to military attack if the ceasefire did break down.

For Woods, this interplay afforded state control over lands previously inaccessible due to ongoing armed conflict (Woods, 2011). By co-opting local businessmen as well as certain high-ranking officials of the KIO into processes of natural resource extraction, the military neutralised the will to fight of the KIO, and entrenched state power through patronage networks centred around capital accumulation. It was an assemblage of power catalysed by the 1994 ceasefire and benefited Myanmar military commanders, a local business elite, smaller breakaway ceasefire organisations and certain officials within the KIO. However, this assemblage did not benefit most people within Kachin State as "only a fraction of the immense wealth extracted during the 1990s and 2000s trickled down to local communities" (McCarthy & Farrelly, 2020, p.150).

Under this form of 'ceasefire capitalism,' rural, subaltern classes suffered structural violence. Land confiscations, destruction of cultural and environmental heritage, extraction of valuable natural resources, loss of communal land and militarisation (Kramer, 2021) were experienced by the many who did not enrich themselves from this economic boom. As the Karen Peace Support Network noted, when drawing similarities with the ceasefire situation in Karen State, "much of the exploitation of land and resources took place at the expense of local communities who were, in many cases, driven further into poverty" (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018a, p.9). A report by a local Kachin CSO, the Kachin Development Network Group, outlined some of the negative impacts that this had on the people of Kachin State including a massive increase in logging for teak that destroyed local environments as erosion caused flooding and landslides. Meanwhile, chemical runoffs from the huge increase in mining operations poisoned rivers, threatening the health of both people and wildlife.

[11] The political wing of the KIA.

The jade mining industry in particular was a loci of destruction and exploitation. Most of the world's highest quality jade is located around the Hpakant area of Kachin State (McCarthy & Farrelly, 2020, p.151) and the extraction of which plays a major part in Myanmar's often illicit economy today. A 2015 Global Witness investigation found the industry to be worth £31billion annually, half of the GDP of Myanmar as a whole and "is secretly controlled by networks of military elites, drug lords and crony companies" (Global Witness, 2015). After the 1994 ceasefire, jade mining activities "skyrocketed", with joint ventures involving the Myanmar military conglomerate – MEHL - massively increasing the amount of jade mined. Before the ceasefire, there were no large-scale operations, but after the ceasefire, smaller traders and business owners were excluded, and only those with connections to the military could benefit from this boom (Burma Environmental Working Group, 2017, p.66). This in turn led to social problems among the new, transient population of migrant workers such as intravenous drug use and the spread of HIV (Kachin Development Networking Group, 2012, p.7). For women in particular, the jade mining industry had harmful impacts, as the mining displaced them from traditional livelihoods in farming or forest gathering. With reduced livelihood opportunities and a burgeoning population of male migrant workers, many women "who needed to survive and provide for their families turn to a booming—and unregulated—sex industry in mine areas, exposing themselves to sexually transmitted diseases and violence" (Burma Environmental Working Group, 2017, p.67).

Other impacts of this 'ceasefire capitalism' period include unregulated hunting, leading to decimation of wildlife in customary forests (Burma Environmental Working Group, 2017, p.23). One of the crony businessmen – or national entrepreneurs explained in the previous section - Htay Myint and his company, Yuzana, "bulldozed people out of their homes and turned over 200,000 acres of land in the world's largest tiger reserve into a chemical-laden mono-crop plantation" (Kachin Development Networking Group, 2012, p.4).

Ultimately, these impacts for people on the ground strained relations with the KIO and was one of the reasons why the ceasefire broke down in 2011. According to McCarthy and Farrelly, "the illiberal approach of Myanmar's post-socialist junta to coercively and commercially penetrate ceasefire areas of Kachin State further fractured relations between the elites and grassroots of respective insurgent organisations, and ultimately led to a return to hostilities in 2011" (McCarthy & Farrelly, 2021, p.147). There was discontent and anger at

the KIO's leadership, and disillusionment with what 'peace' brought for Kachin communities. In the later 2010s, a younger cohort, more in touch with the grassroots, came to leadership positions within the KIO (Brenner, 2019) and, channelling community frustration, rejected the Myanmar government's demand in 2010 to become a Border Guard Force – a proxy force under the direct control of the Myanmar military (McCarthy & Farrelly, 2020, p.151). Tensions were also rising due to the £3.6billion planned Chinese-backed Myitsone Dam project on the confluence of two rivers that are the source of the Irrawaddy River, the most important river in Myanmar and a cultural centre for Kachin people (Fawthrop, 2019). Armed conflict reignited between the KIA and the Myanmar military in June 2011 and has been ongoing since, displacing hundreds of thousands ("Chronology of the Kachin Conflict," 2014). This also ended the period of ceasefire capitalism that had brought about the destruction of environment, livelihoods and many societal ties to the lives of Kachin people for 17 years.

What this section has shown is that the military's attempts to control previously inaccessible areas in Kachin State in the north of Myanmar through exploitation of natural resources, co-option of ethnic elites and integration of local businessmen, aided by transnational capital, - a complex assemblage of power labelled 'ceasefire capitalism' - nurtured new threats of structural violence. While the ceasefire may have stopped much of the direct armed conflict, many people in Kachin State faced threats of land confiscation, destruction and pollution of the natural environments, loss of natural resources, and damaging of their traditional ways of life. And while the KIO ultimately returned to armed conflict, their territorial and economic base had been severely weakened. The situation in Karen State and the broader south-eastern Myanmar region in the post-2012 ceasefire period is reminiscent of this 'war by other means' (Kramer, 2021) by the Myanmar military, albeit with notable differences. The next section will provide an overview of the political economy of the 'transition period' of Myanmar from 2011. These national level dynamics, I argue, are the foundation for land grabs, integration of local elites into a national political economy, and exploitation of natural resources that served to entrench Myanmar State's politico-economic power in Karen areas that were previously inaccessible due to armed conflict. This in turn brought new forms of structural violence to local people, the resistance to which will be analysed in the later empirical chapters.

2.2.3 Post-2011 National Political Economy

After Thein Sein came to power as President of Myanmar in 2011 following the 2010 election, Myanmar began to deepen neoliberal economic reforms (Mark, 2022). For both the Thein Sein and the post-2015 Aung San Suu Kyi Governments:

> A fairly clear set of major neoliberal oriented economic reforms have been initiated and steadily pushed since 2011 as part and parcel of a 'rule of law' reform agenda aimed at creating the 'positive enabling environment' for big Asian, US and EU-based business interests itching to enter or do more business in Myanmar (Ra et al, 2021, p.464).

One of the key components of this, and what differentiates this from the earlier, post-1988 partial liberalisation of the economy outlined above, was the passing of two land laws and two investment laws that aimed to "embrace a private property regime that aspires to be the jewel in the crown of the government's liberalizing agenda" (Hong, 2017, p.230). A narrative developed of Myanmar being "Asia's final resource frontier" (Buchanan et al 2013, p.11) and investors from Europe, North America and several East Asian countries keen to explore this untapped potential (Kent, 2012) entered the country. The slew of reforms were also enthusiastically embraced by Western countries and international financial institutions. Most sanctions were lifted, including from the EU and the US, the World Bank reengaged after outstanding arrears from previous loans were finally paid off, and the Asian Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund intensified their engagement (Talbott et al, pp.350-1).

Two land laws were key to this new political economy of Myanmar. The first was the 2012 Farmland Law. Under this law, farmers must apply for a Land Use Certificate (LUC), otherwise known as Form 7, from the local Farmland Administrative Body (FAB). The LUC gives the user the right to "cultivate on, mortgage, lease, sell, exchange and gift" (Burma Environmental Working Group, 2017, p.27) the land, as per the conditions agreed with the FAB. Penalties include the loss of that land if these conditions are not met such as cultivating a different crop or leaving part of the land fallow. Importantly, while LUCs give a degree of control over the land "they should not be understood as freehold titles, but rather as a limited-term lease subject to terms and conditions dictated by the Central Government" (Burma Environmental Working Group, 2017, p.27). They can also be revoked if the government

wishes to use the land for the purposes of national development (Burma Environmental Working Group, 2017, p.27).

The purpose of the 2012 Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Lands Management Law (VFV) is to identify what is deemed 'wasteland' for accumulation by the government. Any land that is not registered with the above Farmland Law can be deemed 'vacant.' Up to 50,000 acres for a 30 year lease period can be allocated for industrial-level agribusiness. Land which is communal land such as forests, lakes, ponds, as well as land that is left fallow for a period, as per traditional agricultural practice, can be deemed vacant and taken by the government to lease to domestic and foreign investors (Transnational Institute, 2013). Many smallholder farmers can thus be labelled as squatters. According to analysis co-written by an ethnic Karen land rights activist:

> Together with the 2012 Farmland Law, the 2012 VFV Law created further legal precedent for widespread land grabbing and the dispossession of farmers, especially smallholder-farmers in ethnic areas, of their right to farm and more broadly their right to maintain their land, livelihoods, and customary tenure systems (Htoo & Scott, 2019, p.39).

To make matters worse, in 2018 amendments to this law criminalised those farmers who had not registered their land and were still using land deemed by the government as vacant, fallow or virgin. They thus faced criminal penalties of up to two years in prison and/or a fine of 300,000 Myanmar Kyat ($500 at the time of the amendment) (Htoo & Scott, 2019).

These land laws were essentially part of a neoliberal package to move away from customary land tenure, small-holder farms, and subsistence farming to large-scale, industrial agribusiness that would benefit political and business elites. The new land legislation facilitated the loss of land tenure rights of millions around the country, and particularly in ethnic minority areas. It can be seen as a continuation of colonial-era and postcolonial land policies that attempted to convert perceived 'wasteland' into commercially profitable usage at the expense of local communities' traditions and relations with the land. One estimate put an increase in land confiscation nationally at 170% between 2010 and 2017 (Global Justice Center, 2017, p.9). Private investors, both domestic and overseas, military-connected

companies and conglomerates, and joint ventures between the private sector and military-connected actors were the main beneficiaries of these land grabs.

Other legislation includes the 2012 Foreign Investment Law and the 2013 Citizens Investment Law. The Foreign Investment Law continued with the Farmland and VFV Laws' emphasis on agribusiness, "'restricting' the agricultural sector to large-scale private investment" (Hong, 2017, p.230). Both of these laws were consolidated in the 2016 Myanmar Investment Law, again to further facilitate foreign investment, the writing of which was aided by technical assistance from staff of the International Finance Corporation, the private sector arm of the World Bank (Hong, 2017, p.230). The Myanmar Investment Law allows leases of up to 50 years for lands and buildings, with longer leases and tax breaks for investments in Myanmar's "least developed" and "remote" regions (Burma Environmental Working Group, 2017, p.30). Furthermore, "outsiders from central Myanmar and neighbouring countries have started to buy land and exploit natural resources without consultation and approval from local communities – and in connivance with the local authorities" (Kramer, 2021, p.491). Foreign direct investment went from $2.6 billion in 2013 to $4.3 billion in 2017 (MacLean, 2022, p.50). The National Land Use Policy, a policy document that was passed in January 2016 after two years of consultations with civil society was a step in the right direction in terms of content, containing provisions for the protection of customary land tenure regimes (Hong, 2017, p.230). However, it remained a "policy with no direct effect in law" and with little impact on the national land law making process or framework (Transnational Institute, 2019).

The NLD government largely continued this neoliberal approach to the economy upon their election win in 2015 and "failed to replace oppressive laws with legislations necessary to protect Burma's smallholder-farmers and customary land tenure systems" (Htoo & Scott, 2019, p.36). As well as the amendment to the VFV Law in 2018, outlined above, Ra et al (2021) point to the NLD's Agricultural Development Strategy, that sought to develop rural areas by "integrating "minority small-holders into global value chains" (Ra et al, 2021, p.468). The Agricultural Development Strategy references the 2016 Myanmar Investment Law and is part of the broader neoliberal package of reforms and "thus follows a neo-institutional economics approach in terms of how best to harness the development of capitalist relations of production in agriculture" (Ra et al, 2021, p.469).

Through these economic changes – of individualisation of land tenure, encouraging large-scale foreign investment with support from international financial institutions, identifying and confiscating 'wasteland,' and supporting the development of large-scale industrial agriculture - the Myanmar state has utilised markets to extend state control. The British were never able to fully consolidate centralised control over land and neither were successive postcolonial military regimes in Myanmar (Htoo & Scott, 2019). However, with the new economic environment and territorialisation, this 'war by other means' enabled state penetration into conflict-affected areas long held by ethnic organisations such as the KNU. These laws "further entrench centralised ownership, management, and control over land" (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018a, p.17). This was extremely important because land is one of the key drivers of ethnic minority's grievances who call for control of land to be decentralised in a federalised system of governance. A network of Myanmar grassroots land activists and organisations, Land in Our Hands, documented that nearly half of all land confiscations since 1990 were by the Myanmar military (Land in Our Hands, 2015). Thus, while land confiscation by the Myanmar military has been an ongoing trend since at least the early 1990s, what is new in this post 2012 period is a) the facilitation of this through a legislative package, b) the support from transnational investors and international financial institutions that view Myanmar as a 'frontier' for investment, and c) the support from Aung San Suu Kyi's political party, once the icon and perceived best-hope for human rights and democracy. It was a form of 'ceasefire capitalism' that was tested in Kachin State and amended in Karen State.

Not only did this neoliberal economic paradigm fuel political grievances and actively ignore the demands of ethnic minorities, but the impact it had on ethnic minority villagers is particularly significant. Estimates from 2016 government figures showed that around 31% of Myanmar's land was deemed to be 'vacant, fallow or virgin' while over 80% of this was in ethnic minority areas – the areas of the country that have experienced the most armed conflict (Ra & Ju, 2021, p.506). This chapter will now turn to the specific effects that this had for people on the ground in the ceasefire areas of south-eastern Myanmar, i.e. creating new forms of structural violence.

2.3 Ceasefire Capitalism for the 2010s in South-eastern Myanmar

Section 2.2.2 of this chapter outlined how 'ceasefire capitalism,' a complex assemblage of military, local elites, and transnational businesses, transformed Kachin State to one where damaging natural resource exploitation, particularly jade mines, agribusiness and logging brought significant negative impacts to local communities. This form of territorialisation through development may have furthered the statebuilding project of the Myanmar military while benefiting a few local elites, but it came at the expense of new forms of structural violence, ultimately leading to tension and contributing to the breakdown of the ceasefire. National political economy changes outlined above in Section 2.2.3 served to have a similar effect during the ceasefire period with the KNU between 2012 and 2018, albeit with differences in the use of national legislation and leveraging of a broader assemblage of international actors to exploit the 'frontier' of Myanmar's conflict-affected borderlands through rapacious development. The following sections will examine the effects and specific manifestation of 'ceasefire capitalism' in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018.

2.3.1 Exploiting the Southeast

From the period beginning 2011/2012, investment in the southeast of Myanmar hugely increased. The region is considered attractive because of its "abundant natural resources and strategic location on the Thai border" (Human Rights Watch, 2016, p.22). Hydropower, industrial estates, agribusiness, international road links, mining concerns, and tourism were touted as investment opportunities (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The Japanese International Cooperation Agency issued a blueprint for industrial development in the southeast in 2014, ostensibly with this development aimed at the return of internally displaced persons and refugees (Karen Peace Support Network, 2014). The blueprint consisted of four components; economic corridors; free trade zones and industrial estates; industrial clusters; and urban development (Karen Peace Support Network, 2014). Heavily criticised by local Karen community organisations for its focus on industrial development as a panacea for peace as opposed to addressing root causes of the armed conflict, much of the blueprint ultimately did not make significant headway. However, its goals and plans, which were developed in conjunction with local state authorities, reflect the priorities of the Myanmar government, and

certain aspects of the blueprint did get off the ground, such as upgrades and expansion of roads for the East-West Economic corridor.

A 2014 report by the Border Consortium[12] in conjunction with eleven local CSOs surveyed 222 out of 665 village tracts in south-eastern Myanmar, finding that in the previous three years:

> 155 new investments have been proposed in 55% of village tracts surveyed. Road construction projects are most prominent, but concessions for mining (10%), logging (9%), commercial agriculture (5%) and industrial estates (5%) have also been proposed or approved during this period (The Border Consortium, 2014, p.12).

The survey further reported that most investments projects were located near military bases, indicating a militarised form of development.

2.3.2 KNU Involvement

An illuminative aspect of the 2012 ceasefire agreement were the tensions within the KNU, and how these related to the experience of the 1994-2011 Kachin ceasefire outlined above. The KNU did not enter into a ceasefire agreement until 2012, but some of the smaller offshoot Karen armed groups, such as the DKBA did, "abandoning their political agendas" and arguing that the fight for autonomy was more detrimental to Karen communities (Jolliffe, 2016, p.33). The areas where these groups were dominant also experienced a form of 'ceasefire capitalism' before 2012 with the DKBA acting more of a 'warlord' with its primary interest being revenue collection as oppose to providing state-like services and governance (McCarthy & Farrelly, 2020). Leading up to the 2012 ceasefire, there were different factions within the KNU who clashed over the potential peace talks, citing the DKBA experience for Karen people, in which rapacious commercial development served a few leaders at the expense of local communities, as a precedent. In fact, "by 2011, many KNU leaders had come to view the term *ceasefire* as synonymous with *surrender*, and the

[12] A consortium of international NGOs working on displacement and humanitarian issues in south-eastern Myanmar.

term *development* as a code word for personal profit" (Jolliffe 2016, p.41). This is supported by the fact that the Dawei Princess Company acted as a mediator between the Myanmar government and the KNU, as well as an advisor to the government in the early days of the ceasefire talks. The Dawei Princess Company at the time was a subcontractor to the huge Dawei Special Economic Zone Project which is partly located in KNU territory and also won logging concessions in KNU territory ("KNU Questions Role", 2012). Another faction of KNU leadership, however, viewed development as inevitable, and that unless the KNU engaged with companies they would be left behind. It was this faction that won out. Subsequent to the January 2012 ceasefire, this pro-ceasefire/pro-development faction consolidated their positions in KNU leadership at the 2012 KNU Congress, and continued on a path of more engagement with economic development actors (Jolliffe, 2016).

Certainly after the ceasefire was signed, the KNU was not a passive player in the development activities in south-eastern Myanmar. The Myanmar government encouraged them to set up companies, and township and district level companies were established in Mergui-Tavoy, Dooplaya, Hpa-an and Thaton Districts, while the Thoolei company was set up by the KNU Executive Committee (Jolliffe, 2016). The Thoolei Company came under fire from Karen civil society in 2016 for signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Myanmar government for the construction of the hydropower project, the Baw Ka Hta Dam in Nyaunglebin District without proper environmental and social impact assessments, or adequate consultation with local communities (Yan Naing, 2016).

The differing histories of districts within KNU control and the different politics within these districts impacts how much of a player the KNU is in business activities and engagement with outside investors. Areas under mixed control are typically more integrated into Myanmar's economy and politics, and KNU leaders there have less leverage to refuse offers of development and investment. On the other hand, 'stronghold' areas in the north, particularly Hpapun and Taungoo Districts, are better placed to resist state encroachment through business and development programmes, as they are better protected militarily and also have closer ties to the Thai economy on its border (Jolliffe, 2016).

Thus, while the level of investment and integration into the Myanmar economy is mixed throughout the southeast, certain actors and leaders within the KNU have engaged with the Myanmar state in business activities. This was justified by various leaders as a necessary

respite from years of armed conflict and inevitable given the dynamics of a changing national political context. This has not gone without criticism from sections of Karen civil society and community organisations who perceive the leadership of 'selling out,' just as elements of the Kachin leadership were perceived to during that ceasefire period.

2.3.3 New Patterns of Structural Violence

While the specific criticisms of certain KNU leaders were heard throughout this period of ceasefire, the overall path of ceasefire through development was also not popular among many Karen civil society actors. As the Karen Peace Support Network stated, "since the 2012 ceasefire significant areas of Karen State have come under growing pressure from large-scale extractive industries, hydropower projects, agribusiness and infrastructure development projects" (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018a, p.7). The impact this has had has been felt in terms of land confiscations, military tension around infrastructure projects (such as the military road built by the Myanmar military, an incursion into KNU territory, in 2018), development-induced displacement (Karen Peace Support Network, 2018a), damaging of traditional ways of life and loss of access to natural resources (Kramer, 2021), loss of biodiversity and youth migration out of villages (Park, 2021).

One of the main drivers of new forms of violence that the people of south-eastern Myanmar faced is related to land confiscation, facilitated by the Farmland and VFV laws. These laws disproportionately affected ethnic minority communities, such as the Karen, due to their customary land tenure practices and lack of documentation on land ownership. These laws have facilitated huge land grabs by outside investors. The Karen Human Rights Group documented 126 reports of land confiscation between December 2012 and January 2015, related to three main areas. First, infrastructure projects, and in particular, road construction, the biggest of which is the Asia Highway that runs through Karen State. Large hydropower projects were also of concern. Such projects also led to sporadic armed conflict. For example, fighting broke out between a splinter group of the DKBA, itself a splinter group of the KNU, and the Myanmar military proxy force, the BGF, over the Hat Gyi Dam near Hpapun District. The Hat Gyi Dam, a joint venture between Thai, Chinese State Enterprise and Myanmar investors, is a 1,365 megawatt dam that will export 90% of its power to neighbouring Thailand (Middleton et al, 2019). After the Myanmar military coordinated operations in 2014 and 2016, several thousand people were displaced. According to a local environmental group,

the reason was to "take new territory and reinforce its forward positions in Karen State, in order to ensure that the Hatgyi Dam project can move ahead without opposition" (Karen Rivers Watch, 2016).

Second, land was confiscated for natural resource extraction, especially gold mining. KHRG found that gold mining, particularly around Hpapun District led to "extensive environmental damage" including "the release of chemicals into rivers, as well as soil erosion" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015a, p.4). Coal mining in the southern, Mergui-Tavoy District also created friction. One example is the Ban Chaung open pit coal mine operated by two Thai companies that had been contracted by a military-linked Myanmar company – Mayflower (Gleeson, 2015). The mine polluted local water sources, destroyed livelihoods as well as catalysing land confiscation. While villagers repeatedly complained to the KNU, as it is in KNU territory, the KNU has deferred them to the Myanmar government (Gleeson, 2015).

Third, industrial agriculture projects, primarily rubber, but also teak, palm oil, cardamom and betel nut led to land confiscations (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015). Research by Park (2021) in Tanintharyi in the southern part of south-eastern Myanmar (roughly corresponding to Mergui-Tavoy District), emphasises land confiscations related to oil palm plantations, such as the huge joint venture between Malaysian and Myanmar companies – the Myanmar Stark Prestige Plantation (MSPP) oil palm plantation. Park writes that, "a total of 1.8 million acres were allocated for oil palm production between 2011 and 2016, totalling about 35% of all agribusiness concession areas nationally" (Park, 2021, p.570).

Park has also shown how land conflict has created inter-communal tensions and conflict around land between villagers, forcing people to register with the government as people strive to register their land where possible, and this is in tension with customary land practice (Park, 2021). Thus, by "formalizing what once was customarily held land," this results in a "transition towards capitalist property rights within the span of one generation" (Park, 2021, p.575). Furthermore such land grabs like that of MSPP have resulted in a scarcity of land, and young people migrate out due to scarcity of land, thus emptying villages (Park, 2021).

The gendered impacts of this new assemblage have also been researched. In terms of land tenure rights, despite there being no discrimination in law in terms of who inherits and owns land, research conducted in Karen communities by international NGO, Saferworld, has

shown that "a lack of understanding of land laws (by both government land officials and communities), combined with societal norms, results in most land being registered in men's names only" (Pierce et al, 2018 p.ii). Furthermore, if land is confiscated, this impacts families' income and women often face increased workload as they attempt to supplement existing income through day-wage labour. Yet due to cultural gender norms, they are still expected to complete household labour. Moreover, the loss of access to forests means that the products that women typically forage such as firewood, herbs, and vegetables are harder to attain, resulting in them walking further and taking more time to gather such house essentials (Park, 2021).

Thus, the 2012-2018 ceasefire capitalism period in Karen State brought about changes in terms of investments and development projects. Yet as outlined above, this was not altogether positive, and the impacts this had on rural people, in terms of land grabs, environmental damage, loss of livelihoods, and the gendered impacts of such projects form the types of structural violence that villagers attempted to resist.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the trajectory of political economy and conflict dynamics that have led to this period of 'ceasefire capitalism' in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018. For decades, the Myanmar military has sought to control territory and resources of ethnic armed organisations such as the KNU. But, as it found with the ceasefire capitalism period in Kachin State in the North between 1994 and 2011, a complex assemblage of natural resource extraction, joint development projects and transnational investment has been far more profitable and effective at weakening insurgencies and extending state control. The political reforms that began in 2011 resulted in a quasi-civilian government that has enacted neoliberal land laws and policies that have facilitated this expansion of the Myanmar state into previously inaccessible Karen territory.

For civilians in Karen villages the ceasefire has brought less direct armed conflict, a reduction in the worst forms of violence and human rights violations that they lived with for many decades, and greater civic and political freedoms. However, the commercial expansion

has come at a cost, and land confiscations, environmental destruction, and loss of livelihoods means that they were facing new forms of structural violence. How these villagers responded and resisted these new threats is the focus of this thesis.

Chapter Three: Resistance

The previous chapter outlined *what and whom* the villagers of south-eastern Myanmar resisted during the period under investigation – 2012 to 2018. This complex assemblage was conceptualised as 'ceasefire capitalism.' This chapter will outline a definition and a concept with which to frame, not the threats or violence, but the resistance itself. Not only will it define and conceptualise resistance, it will outline four criteria with which to identify resistance.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold and will proceed as follows. First it will outline four key criteria, based on a review of the resistance literature, that will specify what resistance is and how it will be identified in the data. Second, based on these four criteria, it will provide a working definition of resistance that will be used throughout the rest of this thesis. Lastly, I will present a concept of resistance that supports and encompasses these criteria and definition.

3.1 Four Criteria for Identifying Resistance

There is no definitive understanding of resistance, but rather, there is a plurality of definitions. It is an "umbrella concept" that "encompasses multiple forms and a potential for creative development and adaptability in different contexts" (Baaz et al, 2016, p.148). It is the purpose of this section then, to outline some key properties from various definitions and conceptualisations of resistance and, with the empirical investigation in mind, to develop and present a definition that a) is based on the existing debates and understandings within resistance literature, and b) frames what it is that I am analysing in this particular research. As Baaz et al (2016) point out "definitions and analytical categories are analytical tools; and if we have functional tools, then an important precondition for creating something new is in place" (Baaz et al, 2016, p.138). That something new is the investigation of a specific form of resistance in a specific place – south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018. This is not an original contribution to the conceptual debates on what constitutes resistance. It is not to say that other definitions are not valid. Rather, it is to use a definition and criteria for what constitutes resistance that works for *this* research project.

The following four sections will be a discussion of four aspects of resistance based on academic literature. First, I will trace the evolution from revolutionary resistance to everyday resistance. Second, I will discuss the importance of the state in shaping the resistance acts. Third I will discuss acts and intentions before fourth, and finally, outlining how resistance confronts and challenges state power, not necessarily biopower or disciplinary power.

3.1.1 From Revolution to the Everyday

This section will briefly trace how understandings of resistance shifted from mass-organised, revolutionary movements to also include everyday, quotidian acts, the type of practices that this research is concerned with. The section will end on the first criterion with which to identify the resistance under investigation - that it is small-scale, localised, enacted by individuals or groups of individuals, and not centrally organised.

In order to reach this first criterion, I will outline a very brief overview of where the concept of 'resistance' originates in the academic literature. Chin and Mittelman trace the theoretical lineage of resistance to three main figures – Gramsci's "Resistance as Counter-Hegemony," Polanyi's "Resistance as Countermovement" and Scott's "Resistance as Counter-Politics" (Chin & Mittelman, 1997). For Gramsci, hegemonic power encompasses all levels of society, including churches, civil society institutions, schools, media, and the family. Thus, hegemony does not rely solely on the state, but an ideologically dominating social world which gives meaning and organisation to social relations, and thus acceptance, or consent, of hegemonic interests (Williams, 2020). Resistance to this he calls 'counter-hegemony,' which entails the development of a collective consciousness and a coming together to take control of the state through wars of position (non-violent actions such as boycotts) and wars of movement (public, sometimes violent, tactics such as strikes) (Chin & Mittelman, 1997).

Polanyi's (1957) concept of 'countermovements,' explicated in '*The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time,'* is contextualised in the form of a response to "state-supported implementation of the 'self-regulating' market system during the 18th and 19th centuries" (Chin & Mittelman, 1997, p.29) and the breakdown of this in the economic crises of the 1930s. Polanyi argues that market-led economies are not self-regulating and need states to support laissez-faire capitalist development (Goodwin, 2018).

Countermovements were a collective response that sought to control and limit the impact of market forces on society and provide protection through pressure on the state (Chin & Mittelman, 1997).

Both Polanyi and Gramsci deal with larger, society-wide, collective manifestations of resistance and it was these mass resistance movements that literature in the 1960s and 1970s, with the US war in Vietnam as a contextual backdrop, sought to explain. Examples include Wolf's (1969) *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century,* Migdal's (1974) *Peasants, Politics, and Revolutions: Pressures toward Political and Social Change in the Third World* and Paige's (1975) *Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World.* These works analysed the structural factors that drove the peasantry in Asia, Latin America and Africa to collectively mobilise, resist and participate in revolutions. These early studies of resistance led Ortner to describe how "Once upon a time, resistance was a relatively unambiguous category, half of the seemingly simple binary, domination versus resistance. Domination was a relatively fixed and institutionalized form of power; resistance was essentially organized opposition to power institutionalized" (Ortner, 1995, p.174).

However, contra to the study of collective political movements and revolutions described above, starting in the 1970s, James C. Scott pioneered the concept of 'everyday resistance,' or later, 'infrapolitics' (1990). In a body of work based on his fieldwork in South East Asia that includes *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976) *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), Scott highlights the everyday, quotidian acts of resistance by the peasantry that do not necessarily rely on large-scale collective organisation. For Scott, resistance is:

> any act(s) by members(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes (Scott, 1985, p.290).

Many actions are deliberately covert and concealed underneath feigned submission to elites and actors of domination, or as he terms them, "hidden transcripts" (Scott, 1990). These

hidden transcripts include not just speech acts but also "activities such as poaching, pilfering, clandestine tax evasion, and intentionally shabby work for landlords" (Scott, 1990, p.14). He critiques Gramsci's notion of hegemony (Scott, 1985) as an all-encompassing ideological and symbolic domination throughout society by drawing attention to the micro-practices that peasants enact to resist domination when public or mass-organised movements are too dangerous or not feasible. Resistance is thus based on an intention by subordinate classes to mitigate or deny material, status, or symbolic domination (Scott, 1989, p.55). Scott's work is vital in locating agency in the everyday life of subaltern classes and this everyday resistance can lay the foundations or groundwork for larger scale, collective class war, uprisings, or revolutions. Furthermore, long-term everyday resistance practices can be seen as more significant in affecting substantive reforms, political shifts, and reordering of social relations than more symbolic, overt manifestations of opposition (Scott, 1989).

Scott's work of course, is not without critique, including its focus on class resistance at the expense of other vectors of domination such as race or gender (Chin & Mittelman, 1997), its broad scope of what can be classed as resistance, making it is easy to see resistance in any act (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, de Heredia, 2017, Mac Ginty, 2012), presenting hidden, subaltern space as essentialised and uncontaminated by power (Mitchell, 1990, Theodossopoulos, 2014), and the difficulty in proving intent (de Heredia 2017). However, the influence of Scott in particular on everyday resistance shifted the focus from that of large-scale, organised, resistance seen in social movements, revolutions, and rebellions to smaller, less formally organised acts. As Abhu Lughod stated in 1990 on the move from large-scale, organised popular mobilisation to small-scale, everyday individual acts, "Scholars seem to be trying to rescue for the record and to restore to our respect such previously devalued or neglected forms of resistance" (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p.41). Scott's influence on revaluating what we mean by resistance has had a long and deep influence on the study of such and serves this thesis' notion of resistance. Resistance is thus not confined to the large-scale organised mass movements. It includes the individual, or small-scale practices enacted by villagers not necessarily connected to a larger movement, nor linked to a coordinating body or figure. It can be 'everyday' in nature, micropractices that might not necessarily attract significant attention, but nevertheless, target the powerful and attempt to resist domination. This is the first criterion of how I will define resistance and how I will identify it in the data: small-scale everyday practices enacted by an individual or a group of individuals that are not centrally organised.

3.1.2 The Role of the State

This section will outline the importance of the role of state power in shaping the constraints and opportunities for resistance. This is not to say that there is not resistance to other institutions, discourses, or organisations, but that for this thesis, the state is a significant factor determining both threat and possibilities of resistance. I will thus briefly discuss an influential and complementary strand of resistance literature to the 'everyday' that emerged from the Subaltern Studies Group. However, this strand of resistance studies, while relevant by bringing our attention to the agency of subordinated groups, underestimates the role of the state in the constitution of resistance. It ends with the second criterion for defining and identifying resistance in the data analysis specific to this thesis: that resistance is a response to state power.

At the time of Scott reorientating our notion of resistance in the 1970s-1980s to include everyday, covert, micropractices, the Subaltern Studies Group, led by Ranahit Guha, pursued related goals (Betik, 2020). This group sought to revisit and re-evaluate the historiography of South Asia, to bring to the fore subaltern histories, and recover the agency and subjecthood of the peasant or subaltern outside of dominant colonial power (Chandra, 2015). Both Scott and the Subaltern Studies group, as with Marxist historians E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm that preceded and influenced them, aimed to bring to life a 'history from below' (Betik, 2020) and presented a binary between a subaltern or peasant class and those in power who dominate. Like Scott, their work has value in how we look at resistance today because of its focus on the subaltern, i.e. those 'from below,' and how it ascribes agency to people. And the agency of those villagers is what is behind their individual acts of resistance that this thesis is investigating. Yet while important and very much of its time, the Subaltern Studies conception of resistance has moved on. This is because the Subaltern Studies approach views resistance as a phenomenon that is autonomous from the state and is driven by subaltern lifeworlds (Chandra, 2015, p.568). It assumes that the peasantry's resistance is formed independently of state power, relying solely on the "moral economy" of the peasant (Chandra, 2015). This is also an important critique of Scott's work i.e. that a binary between domination in a material, coercive sense and a non-contaminated rational, resistant subject that is impervious to ideological domination in a persuasive sense is a false dichotomy (Mitchell, 1990). More recent conceptualisations of resistance, however, emphasise how

resistance and power are co-constitutive, is shaped by the state, and is even entangled with the workings of state power (Bayat, 2000, Baaz et al, 2016).

Chandra (2015) has identified three conceptualisations of resistance that draw on and are influenced by Scott's work on the everyday and place the state as a significant actor that shapes the forms and opportunities for resistance rather than maintaining separation as per the Subaltern Studies Group. These conceptualisations are not necessarily predicated on revolution and overthrow of the state, but a negotiation of state power, manifest in laws and institutions, to mitigate domination. This corresponds to the notion that resistance does not work autonomously from power, but is shaped by the type of power and domination that is exercised over people. Tactics or strategies of resistance depend on what are possible, practical, and are thought through on a cost-benefit rationale. Placing the state at the heart of domination, the three main conceptualisations of resistance that Chandra draws on are, firstly O'Brien's (1996) "Rightful Resistance" in which people work within the confines of state power, do not challenge its hegemony, but utilise the rhetoric of the state to make claims, holding them accountable to their political commitments and rhetoric. O'Brien and Li (2006) demonstrate this through research among the actions of the peasantry in China vis-à-vis the Chinese Communist Party, and how they "appeal to the established norms and values of the vanguard elite to articulate their claims without challenging the legitimacy of the regime per se" (Chandra, 2015, p.566). The second concept of resistance to the state, "Lawfare," draws on analysis of how subordinate groups use legal means for political ends (Comaroff & Comaroff (2009) in Chandra, 2015). For example, the use of lawsuits by indigenous groups in North America to reclaim land, or compensation pursued by groups for environmental damage. The final concept that Chandra brings our attention to is Chatterjee's "political society" in which the subordinate classes of people can make political claims through state institutions and structures, for example through elections, demands for welfare, or collective rights (Chatterjee, 2004, 2011, in Chandra, 2015).

Why these three conceptualisations are important to this research are that they refer explicitly to the state as central to resistance strategies. In this regard it underscores an assumption made by Scott, who urges us not to overlook "the vital role of power relations in constraining forms of resistance open to subordinate groups" (Scott, 1989, p.51). Johansson and Vinthagen (2019) also contend that "resistance is conditioned by the structures or relations of power that determine how and what to resist" (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019, p.68). Similarly for

Chandra, "to redefine resistance as negotiation is to, above all, place the modern state at the heart of subaltern politics. Subaltern resistance is thus not extrinsic but intrinsic to everyday power relations within which the state is embedded as a multi-layered leviathan" (Chandra, 2015. P.568). State power, in its 'ceasefire capitalism' assemblage outlined in the previous chapter and the violence that is a consequence of this state power, conditions the type of resistance possible. Hence why Scott's foundational work on 'everyday resistance' and its subsequent pathways such as 'rightful resistance,' 'lawfare,' and 'political society,' provide frames with which to analyse resistance in which the state is a central actor. Resistance in this thesis is a form of adaption to state power and the form of state power and subsequent violence shapes the resistance acts. It is not an autonomous space where the subordinated practice resistance according to their own lifeworlds as per the Subaltern Studies Group strand of resistance theorising. I would also add that this adaption is part of the dynamism of resistance and the ability of actors to cope with changing circumstances, including threats and violence. This is especially so in the context of south-eastern Myanmar, where the state, as the "multi-layered leviathan" (Chandra 2015, p.528) catalyses or represses resistance of villagers, as will be seen in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

This section has briefly introduced the Subaltern Studies group as important in advancing our understanding of resistance by, like Scott, focussing on the agency of those in a subaltern position in society – 'a history from below'. Yet they do not adequately take into account the role of state power in constituting this resistance. This is the second criterion for my definition of resistance: that resistance is a response to state power.

3.1.3 Actions Over Intent

The third criterion discussed here clarifies that resistance must be an action. This section will discuss intention, understanding, and whether or not the action needs to be overtly political or counter hegemonic.

The stipulation that resistance must be an act follows Vinthagen and Johansson, two of the foremost contemporary scholars on resistance, for whom "the way of acting counts" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p.18). They in turn have drawn inspiration from de Certeau, whom many have identified as a major theoretician of everyday resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019, de Heredia, 2017). As with Scott, de Certeau argues that less visible,

everyday smaller scale actions by subalterns can be classed as resistance (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). One of the advantages of de Certeau's theory of everyday resistance is that the focus is not on the *intent* to mitigate, as per Scott, but on the act, or action itself as a tactic that subverts, in a creative way, the power or strategy of the dominating power (de Heredia, 2017). According to Johansson and Vinthagen "de Certeau focuses on specific and small mundane acts by ordinary people (i.e., everyday resistance), where they make creative use (tactics) of what is given and designed by hegemonic power (strategy)" (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019, p.40). Thus, I am looking specifically at action and not intent or effect. Action here means an assertive physical or verbal act that is done in relation to the target of resistance. It does not include the properties of an actor, such as identity or perceived identity. Nor does it include avoidance, escape, survival, or simply coping (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). This notion of acting assertively in relation to the target of resistance will be further unpacked in the next section which stipulates that in order for this action to be classed as resistance it must challenge, confront or negotiate with the state.

Part of the reason is that I am using 'action' is that it elides the tricky question of intent. This is one of the fundamental disagreements on what counts as resistance. In one of the most comprehensive reviews of the resistance literature to date, in 2004 Einwohner and Hollander conducted a wide-ranging study of abstracts from sociological literature since 1995 that contained resistance, as well as key, pre-1995 texts on the subject. They found a diverse range of definitions and conceptualisations of resistance but were able to bring together two core elements in which most definitions agreed upon – action and opposition. Thus, in their review "virtually all uses included a sense of *action*, broadly conceived…authors seem to agree that resistance is not a quality of an actor or a state of being, but involves some active behavior, whether verbal, cognitive, or physical" (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p.538). Later in this section I will specify that cognition is not included in my own definition but the behavioural aspect, whether verbal or physical, is important in identifying what constitutes action.

However, in Hollander and Einwohner's (2004) study, the two elements in which definitions and conceptualisations that are disagreed upon the most are intent and recognition. Thus, given that almost all accounts of resistance take a position on intent, so shall I (recognition will be addressed in section 3.1.4 of this chapter). Scott, for example, uses "intent to deny" in his definition of resistance. And while he does admit that intent may be difficult to prove, it is

possible "when it is a question of both a systematic, established pattern of resistance undergirded by a popular culture that encodes notions of justice and anger encouraging that resistance, *and* a relation of domination that seems to preclude most other strategies" (Scott, 1989, p.53). Ortner, however is a little more doubtful, and famously lamented that studies of resistance are "ethnographically thin…thin on the subjectivity-the intentions, desires, fears, projects-of actors engaged in these dramas" (Ortner, 1995, p.190). Yet how to ascertain this subjectivity, and by extension their intent, is an extremely difficult task. It involves locating an individual's thought processes, motivations, consciousness. Methodologically, that would require in-depth, ethnographic fieldwork to produce a thick description that the current COVID-19 situation rendered almost impossible for this thesis.

All actions have a degree of intent behind them of course, it is not to say that there is *no* intent (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). The resistance of a one-off, small-scale protest, of refusing to leave land that is being confiscated, of verbal negotiation with developers, public complaint letters, or forming small village-level action groups are visible and obviously denote intent. However, for the purposes of this research, intent is not a criterion for categorising the act as resistance. Rather, I am identifying the action itself, eliding the need to assess the state of mind of the individual who enacted the practice. As Courpasson and Vallas (2016) note in their discussion of the state of resistance studies in 2016, they have "adopted a wary view regarding the question of motive or intent, since in our view conscious awareness is often a fleeting and elusive feature of resisters' lives. At times the consciousness only emerges from and following the actions at hand" (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016, p.6). Thus, rather than including intent as a criterion and leaving the research being open to criticism for "ethnographically thin," (Ortner, 1995) I am reducing ambiguity by focussing on the action. Furthermore, as argued by Vinthagen and Johansson (2013), whose work consistently views the action itself as paramount, intention is not relevant for defining the type of action, but instead, intention is relevant for "*understanding* the ideas, strategic thinking, plans, psychology or cultural meaning that actors articulate when they resist" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p.21). These ideas, strategic thinking, plans etc. are not what I am trying to identify and analyse.

Another point about the act is that it is more than simply cognition. Bayat (2000) makes the point that an awareness of resistance is not the same as actual resistance. Talking about domination does not mean acting against it. This is a useful distinction for my understanding

of resistance. There must be an act involved. This relates to agency and again, subjectivity. I am not looking for instances of understanding domination. Methodologically, it is not possible to fully get to the bottom of villagers' subjectivities, their understanding of their situation, and how they perceive it. I am looking at their actions. What is it that they are doing to confront this domination and violence?

However, since Scott and de Certeau, there has been a catalogue of work that identifies resistance in all manner of actions. As Bayat points out, for Scott, "Class resistance includes *any* act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are *intended* either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes…" (Scott, in Bayat 2000, p.542). If this is the case, then there is little difference between an overt act of resistance such as public demonstration or a hidden one such as a joke told between workers about their boss. It leaves the definition open to equating all manner of actions as long as they are part of this class resistance. Similarly, a problem with de Certeau's work is that it is easy to see any action as resistance, even if it is just acting differently (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p.17). Some scholars overcome this by using gradients or typologies. De Heredia (2017), for example, distinguishes between acts which confront authorities, thus "advancing an agenda" or those which "deny claims" and have different "gradients of intensity, exposure, engagement against claims and intentionality" (de Heredia, 2017, pp.71-73). Einwohner and Hollander produced a typology to summarise the varying disagreements of what constitutes resistance based on intent and recognition as mentioned above. The types of resistance they present include overt, covert, unwitting, target-defined, externally-defined, missed, and attempted resistance depending on the intent and recognition of the action (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p.544).

The problem of differing gradients of resistance should be understood in the context of this research by looking at resistance as a continuum (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). On one side of the continuum, there are the hidden, subtle and barely recognisable resistance acts. These might be what Hollander and Einwohner class as unwitting resistance from their own typology (above). These are the acts that can be criticised as being given the label resistance when in reality they may just be getting by, coping, or surviving etc. On the other side there are the large-scale, organised revolutions, the type of resistance that early resistance theorists investigated such as peasant-led revolutions. The resistance that this thesis is researching lies in the middle. It is not large-scale or organised, such as a nationwide protest, an industry-

wide strike, or an armed uprising. Neither is it, for example, a joke told between female friends mocking men in a patriarchal society. The resistance act must confront and challenge its target, visibly so, yet it is enacted by individuals or loosely organised collections of individuals so it is on a smaller scale than mass movements. The first criterion outlined above in Section 3.1.1 (small-scale everyday practices enacted by an individuals or a group of individuals that are not centrally organised) narrows the scope from one side of the continuum, thus discounting larger, organised, much more glaring instances of resistance. Reducing the range from the other side of the continuum is the criterion (discussed in Section 3.1.4 below) that resistance must recognisably confront or challenge state power, and not be hidden from view. This excludes the much smaller, less confrontational acts such as covert mockery, hairstyles, or not engaging in communication. Thus, we find ourselves in the middle, and while within this middle part of the continuum there is scope for differing scales of resistance, the variation of size and scale is not too broad so as to make the actions contained therein analytically distinct.

A final point related to actions is that of 'repertoires.' In one of their tools with which to frame everyday resistance, Johansson and Vinthagen (2019, p.88) draw on Tilly's 'repertoires of contentious politics' to encompass what the resistance literature variously describes as tactics, strategies, acts, techniques etc (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019, Chin & Mittelman, 1997). Thus, adapting Tilly's repertoires of contention to 'repertoires of resistance' allows us to frame resistance acts as being shaped by historical configurations of power and their mutations, are adapted to the circumstances, and are part of the arsenal of tactics available. For the purposes of this research, the repertoires of actions available to villagers in south-eastern Myanmar are shaped by the Myanmar state's practices of domination, what has been tried and tested in the past, historical and cultural aspects, and material realities. The assemblage of actors and dynamics evolves during the period of research (2012-2018) and this ceasefire capitalism period thus shapes the form of violence and subsequent actions or repertoires that are available. As with Tilly, repertoires are not static, they draw in already existing tactics and actions, but can creatively diverge from them as opportunity or constraint impacts what is possible and what is known. Thus, actions form part of a repertoire of possible resistance.

Therefore, the third criterion to identify resistance is that it only needs to be qualified by the action - an assertive physical or verbal act conducted in relation to the target of relation - not

the intention or understanding, and these actions form part of a repertoire of available practices. It would probably be the case that the intention *is* there, but it is not important to qualify. This is because the need to identify intent can potentially lead to some trouble, where all kinds of acts are classed as resistance. I will address this in the next criterion, by defining what the action must do.

3.1.4 A Direct and Recognisable Challenge from a Position of Subordination

In this section, I will argue that for resistance to be identified, it must be an act that challenges and confronts state domination. It is here that I will address a long-standing criticism of Scott and many other 'everyday resistance' scholars' tendency, that is to see resistance in potentially every act. I will do this by discussing the influence of Foucault in resistance studies and clarifying what the target of resistance is for this research.

Foucauldian notions of power and resistance have seeped into resistance studies literature, and these have expanded understandings of both power, famously so, but also resistance (Brown, 1996, Courpasson & Vallas, 2016). A Foucauldian understanding sees power as decentred, circulating, discursive, and productive (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). If Scott focuses on the "less organised, more pervasive, and more everyday forms of resistance," then this complements Foucault's articulation of "less institutionalized, more pervasive and more everyday forms of power" (Ortner, 1995, p.175). As per Baaz et al (2016), this has implications for how we understand resistance. "If the decentered powers produce regimes of truth/knowledge, specialized institutions of discipline, and ultimately the very subject that makes resistance, then it has to have consequences for resistance studies" (Baaz et al, 2016, p.139). Therefore, it is not just sovereign power, or state power that resistance acts against, but disciplinary and biopower too (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018). This has led Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) to present two different forms of resistance – counter-repressive resistance that pushes back against sovereign power, and productive resistance that resists biopower and disciplinary power. For them, productive resistance "negotiates discursive regimes and various claims to 'the real', as well as resistance that – through counter conduct and techniques of the self – undermines the production of particular ways of life, desires, subjectivities and institutions via disciplinary and biopower regimes" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p.211).

For studies on resistance, these Foucauldian ideas have been instructive to highlight the ambiguities and ambivalences of resistance in a world where power is intersectional (Ortner, 1995). It breaks down dichotomies between those who exercise power over and those who are dominated by power. This understanding of power and resistance addresses a criticism of Scott's focus on class, which can be rather limiting. Hart (1991) has highlighted this in respect to gender in her study of labour relations in rural Malaysia. For her, gender differences and positionality within labour relations "requires a conceptualisation of agency based on multiple (and possibly contradictory) sources of identity and interests" (Hart, 1991, p.117). The intersection not just of class but also gender thus leads her to suggest that "gendered analysis of class formation in Muda calls for a major rethinking of Scott's notion of everyday forms of peasant resistance" (Hart, 1991, p.96). Einwohner and Hollander also draw attention to the complexity of resistance and the existence of multiple hierarchies as opposed to a simple binary between domination and resistance. "Dichotomizing resisters and dominators in this way ignores the fact that there are multiple systems of hierarchy, and that individuals can be simultaneously powerful and powerless within different systems" (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p.550). Through the prism of class, a binary between domination/resistance can potentially lead to the essentialisation and exoticisation of resistance (Theodossopoulos, 2014) that marginalises for example, the particular experience of violence faced by women in rural settings.

In the foreword to Johansson and Vinthagen's (2019) book, *Conceptualising Resistance,* Scott admits as such, "It is true that my analysis of resistance is both centred on relatively static class relations and therefore ignores a wealth of situations that cannot be reduced to class differences. For example, racial or ethnic stratification, gender identity, or generational differences" (Scott, in Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019 p.x). In the context of south-eastern Myanmar, class is just one aspect of identity through which domination and power exerts itself and violence is manifest. Ethnic identity and gender are two additional aspects that play a hugely important role.

Yet this broadening of our understanding of resistance also complicates our understanding of who is in a position of subordination. The recent right-wing populism in the US manifest in those who avidly support Donald Trump, many of whom would perceive themselves as resisting liberal cosmopolitanism and 'woke culture,' is an example. They believe themselves to be resisting yet are they really in a subordinated position? There is an argument that

perhaps yes, socioeconomic indicators would say that *some* of them are vis-à-vis a more cosmopolitan, urban dwelling middle class. Bur racially and culturally, most people would see that White, Conservatism is still the dominant culture in the US. Theodossopoulos' (2014) research on the anti-austerity protests in Greece demonstrates that while protesting from a position of material subordination, such protests were often xenophobic and ethno-nationalist in character, reproducing hegemonic discourse that in turn, subordinates immigrants (Theodossopoulos, 2014).

The point here is that determining if someone is in a subordinated position is subjective and downright tricky. Power intersects with different aspects of identity, position and status, so in some contexts, someone could be in a subordinate position and in others, in a position of power. Hence why I am focussing on resistance against state power and its manifest assemblage that also includes state-connected private sector – ceasefire capitalism. In south-eastern Myanmar, the people resisting are rural villagers, living under a repressive Myanmar military, as ethnic minorities in the nation. They are clearly in a position of subordination vis-à-vis the Myanmar state. There are power dynamics within this resistance of course, related to gender, religion, age, and other axes of hierarchy. Power, resistance and domination within the micro-dynamics of communities in the southeast are certainly a topic of interest. However, these fall out of the scope of this research which is focussing on resistance against the state. Thus, while Foucauldian notions of power and resistance have broadened resistance studies, especially in terms of intersectionality, this research will focus on just one aspect – that of resistance against the state and the complex assemblage of ceasefire capitalism.

Furthermore, Foucauldian understandings of power, and subsequently resistance, have also contributed to a tendency to see resistance everywhere and in every action, given that power is everywhere (Brown, 1996). Thus "by reading too much into the ordinary behavior, interpreting it as necessarily conscious or contentious acts of defiance" (Bayat, 2000, pp.544-545) scholars risk inserting their own political stance into subjectivities' of those being studied (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, Bayat, 2000). It is Foucault's notion of power, so influential in the resistance literature, that has influenced this. Rather I would like, as Bayat and Chandra have done, to bring the state back in as a criterion for resistance. As per Bayat "although power circulates, it does so unevenly – in some places it is far weightier, more concentrated and 'thicker', so to speak, than in others. In other words, like it or not, the state does matter" (Bayat, 2000, p.544). This reinforces that point made earlier, that the resistance

is a reaction to state, or in Foucault's terms, 'sovereign power,' from a position of subordination. However, I will go further, and for my definition of resistance, it is an act that must confront, challenge and/or negotiate this state power.

In this respect, I address the other bone of contention highlighted by Hollander and Einwohner (2004) in their review of resistance and its definitions - that of recognition. Recognition, for Hollander and Einwohner (2004), involves three actors - the resister, the target, and the observer (such as a researcher, or a by-standing member of the public). It can be commonly agreed that certain acts of resistance such as protests against a repressive government are recognised by all three actors as resistance. But for smaller, everyday acts, let's say Scott's example of poaching, these are not meant to be recognised by the target, e.g. the landowner. It may be the case that acts that are recognised as resistance by the target would be too dangerous and face repercussion and are thus hidden from view. On the other hand, Einwohner and Hollander point to scholars who believe that recognition of the oppositional act is important, otherwise, all manner of acts can be classed as resistance and the concept becomes too broad and all-encompassing, losing its' analytical purchase (Einwohner & Hollander, 2004). The recognition aspect is important for this research in order to narrow the possibilities of what resistance is. While earlier I discounted intention as a criterion, this move potentially broadens the scope of inclusion, and I am in need of narrowing this scope so as not to fall into a trap of seeing resistance in every possible action. Thus, a resistance act must challenge and confront state power, even if on a tiny scale, and this must be recognised as such by the subject (the villager), the target (the arm of the state authorities, whether army or crony business) and the observer (that would be me, the analyst). For example, the resistance of a one-off, small-scale protest, of refusing to leave land that is being confiscated, of verbal negotiation with developers, public complaint letters, or forming small village-level action groups are visible to each of the subject, target and observer, and directly challenge and confront state power, even if they are not ultimately successful in their endeavour.

Concluding this section on the fourth criterion for identifying resistance, this research does not dwell on the Foucauldian disciplinary or biopower aspects of domination that influences Baaz et al (2016), Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) and others. This is not to say that those forms of power and domination are not present in south-eastern Myanmar. But it is to say that the most violent and explicit, and therefore most pressing form of domination comes from the

Myanmar state and its' related institutions, laws and agents of power and practices of territorialisation outlined in the previous chapter. Resistance acts therefore must recognisably challenge and confront state domination from a position of subordination. Moreover, as per the previous chapter on ceasefire capitalism, the private sector in Myanmar and in the southeast specifically, is very much imbricated in policies of state expansion. The private sector can only access the conflict-affected borderlands via permissions from the state, joint ventures with military companies, or through legislation promulgated through the government. Thus, when referring to the state in this definition, I am also referring to private companies that are acting as proxies for Myanmar statebuilding as part of a complex assemblage of power. This is because the institutions of the Myanmar state, particularly the Myanmar military, use economic means to entrench political power in ceasefire areas.

3.2 Defining Resistance

In establishing the above criteria, I am moving towards my definition. This is a definition that has Scott's conception of 'everyday resistance' as a starting point but goes beyond these covert quotidian measures to be more recognisably confrontational without necessarily entailing large-scale, organised, movements or revolutions. Resistance is shaped by the state, and from a position of subordination, actions must be directed against this manifestation of state power. Thus far, based on the criteria outlined above, resistance would be defined as:

> Localised, small scale, self-organised actions, shaped by state domination, that challenge and/or confront these power relations from a subordinated position.

There are two other definitions in recent literature that my definition has been influenced by and has similarities with, albeit with subtle differences. I will present them here, explain what is useful from them, and how they specifically add to and modify my own definition of resistance. I will also discuss how I differ from these two, rather than simply adopting one of them wholly. This will lead to a revised and final working definition that will be used throughout the rest of the thesis. To recap, the purpose of this definition is to make clear what constitutes resistance, based on criteria that will help me to identify specific instances of resistance in the data corpus.

The first definition comes from de Heredia's (2017) work on resistance to the peacebuilding-statebuilding nexus in the Democratic Republic of Congo. After careful discussion of Scott, de Certeau, and other prominent theorists of resistance, de Heredia provides a definition that addresses key debates in resistance literature. For her, "Resistance is the pattern of acts undertaken by individuals or collectives in a subordinated position to mitigate or deny the claims made by elites and the effects of domination, while advancing their own agenda" (de Heredia, 2017, p.17).

De Heredia's definition directly specifies resistance as patterns. This follows on from Scott, who does reference the patterned nature of resistance, stating that "when such acts are rare and isolated, they are of little interest; but when they become a consistent pattern (even though uncoordinated, let alone organized) we are dealing with resistance" (Scott, 1985, pp.295-296). The aggregation of acts in a pattern denotes meaning in a social sense. Furthermore, if acts make a pattern, it can be discerned that they are not just one-off acts of self-regard, but part of a broader phenomenon of resistance. One-off actions could also quite easily be acts of domination or maintaining a status quo. For de Heredia, however, she believes that directly referring to the "patterned nature" (de Heredia, 2017, p.17) of resistance also means that we do not have to focus on the intent. For example, if we find an incidence of someone who has not paid their taxes to the local authorities, but if this is just one incidence, this person may well have forgotten, were not well, physically unable, or another whole host of reasons. However, if there are consistent instances of villagers not paying their taxes it can be reasonably inferred that this is indeed a pattern of resistance rather than a random act. The pattern demonstrates that intent is there without having to conduct interviews with the said persons to discern their motivations, intent, and thought processes. However, they must fit into the other criteria of my definition - that these acts involve their challenging of state domination and are enacted by people in a position of subordination vis-à-vis the state (de Heredia, 2017). The actions link together to form patterns in ways that challenge state domination. Thus, I take from de Heredia's definition the explicit use of 'patterns.'

The second definition comes from Chandra (2015) who seeks to provide a definition that is more restrictive than Scott's notion and some of the other everyday resistance work that is too inclusive. His focus is also on the role of the state in shaping resistance.

> To resist in our narrower but arguably more robust sense of the term is, therefore, to minimally apprehend the conditions of one's subordination, to endure or withstand those conditions in everyday life, and to act with sufficient intention and purpose to negotiate power relations from below in order to rework them in a more favourable or emancipatory direction (Chandra, 2015, p.565).

Here, Chandra's introduces 'negotiate' as a more realistic aspect of resistance, i.e. it is not part of a coherent political project that will upend political and social relations. This is in contrast to Scott's definition which includes *any* resistance act as part of a class-based opposition (Filc, 2021, p.25). This implies that any resistance act is thus counter-hegemonic i.e. Scott "creates an equation between the full spectrum of resistance practices and counter-hegemony" (Filc, 2021, p.25). But are all resistance acts counter-hegemonic? Clearly not. Some are simply much more local micropractices that seek to undermine power specific to that context. As put by Filc, many resistance practices "do not usually present an alternative to the current distribution of power and resources and the symbolic framework that supports it" (Filc, 2021, p.25). Similarly for Chandra, resistance acts are undertaken "in a manner that makes one's life more bearable or ameliorate the material conditions of one's subordination, but we do not intend to imply that such a change in individual lives and society at large is either revolutionary or the harbinger of future revolution" (Chandra, 2015, p.565). What does this mean for this research? It means that resistance acts do not necessarily need to be counter-hegemonic revolutionary, political acts aimed at the reworking of the Myanmar state or defeat of the Myanmar military. It means that what is most important is that there is a micro-level, localised challenging of power relations, of undermining actors and institutions of an oppressive state, and mitigating the worst of the violence. We do not necessarily need to see a revolutionary intent in these practices. Resistance can have more humble outcomes. Hence, Chandra's use of the term 'negotiation' is an apt and relevant addition to this project's resistance definition.

Both de Heredia and Chandra use the term subordination and, given that their work is focussed on resistance to the state, or to be precise in de Heredia's terms, "state-making," this corresponds with my own definition. However, I want to be more precise. Resistance can include a multitude of intersecting axes of domination or even perceived domination, and hence subordination. This is why I explicitly include that it is the state that is being resisted in

my own definition. This is not to exclude other forms of power, domination and resistance that are surely present, but it is specifically resistance to state power, manifest in the assemblage 'ceasefire capitalism' that I outlined in the previous chapter, that I am concerned with.

Both of these definitions allow for two parts. First there is the denial/mitigation for de Heredia, or negotiation in Chandra's terms. Second, there is the asserting aspect - this is agenda advancing in de Heredia's terms, or reworking power relations for Chandra. This is relevant because in a context of violence and state repression, as I have characterised south-eastern Myanmar during this time period, the option may only be the first - to deny or mitigate the states' violence and domination. On the other hand, it allows for resistance to be conceived as something dynamic, able to adapt to the changing context and new opportunities that are arising. Economic and political changes occurred during the time period I am investigating. This has led to, in certain situations, villagers at a local, or micro-level expressing their agency through resistance actions, attempting to renegotiate and rework power relations as per Chandra, or advancing their own agenda in de Heredia's terms, in times of flux.

However, I believe that de Heredia's use of 'agenda' is too strong. It is too closely related to Scott's reliance on class as a counter-hegemonic move. It elides the everyday nature, the non-collective part. What is the agenda of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar? There is the agenda of the armed opposition, the political parties, as seen in official statements, announcements policy etc., but this is not necessarily clear for individuals or groups of individuals. Their resistance acts may have different, very localised agendas, for example to stop a particular dam being constructed, for the local military base to be moved, to reclaim their land, or for a stronger sense of security. Hence Chandra's language on advancing, or making gains, is more apt. "To rework power relations from below in a more favourable or emancipatory direction," (Chandra, 2015, p.565) allows for a diversity of 'agendas,' and is about smaller scale gains. Moving something a little more in a favourable direction is more suited to the types of resistance acts that I am researching. As outlined earlier, wholesale revolutionary change, and advancing counterhegemonic agendas are not a part of the definition of resistance of this research. Rather, the resistance under scrutiny is at a smaller scale, without centralised or institutional organisation and is much more contextually-driven.

However, Chandra's definition also includes criteria that I believe is too broad. "Minimally understanding" and "enduring" subordination are undoubtedly present, but I would argue that they are prerequisites for resistance, rather than resistance itself. Chandra justifies this by pointing to the Latin root of the word resistance, "re + sistere, literally enduring or withstanding" (Chandra, 2015, p.565). He does this in order to "re-orient the older emphasis on opposition or negation towards a logic of negotiation" (Chandra, 2015, p.565). However, recalling the previous discussion on agency and consciousness, understanding and enduring are not a necessary element of resistance for my definition. Whether villagers understand their position of subordination requires an assumption of a mindset and subjectivity that is beyond this research. Second Chandra employs the wily concept of intent. As outlined earlier, and related to the point regarding understanding, this requires an assessment of villagers' subjectivity at the time of the action – which is not a very easy task, is subjective, and therefore not a criterion for my own understanding of resistance.

This section has served to refine my definition of resistance by discussing two recent and prominent definitions of resistance. From de Heredia I can add 'patterns' and from Chandra, I can add 'negotiation.' Thus, the working definition of resistance is now as follows:

> Patterns of localised, small scale, self-organised actions, shaped by state domination, that challenge, confront, and/or negotiate power relations from a subordinated position.

However, while Chandra and de Heredia's definitions have influenced my own, and thus have similarities, I have also discussed the aspects of them that do not fit my criteria, and therefore why I have not simply wholly adopted one of these two otherwise valuable definitions.

3.3 Conceptualising Resistance

The objectives of the previous sections were to provide a definition of resistance, and to specify its properties so I can identify instances of resistance in the data corpus. The purpose of this section is to present a concept that fits the definition above, encapsulates the four

criteria outlined, and will thus be the working overarching concept of this thesis. The definition allows me to identify specific instances of resistance, while the concept allows me to frame the overall social phenomenon. This concept is 'dispersed resistance' taken from Lilja and Vinthagen's article of 2018.

'Dispersed resistance' describes small-scale manifest oppositional acts that are not necessarily hidden, can be individual or part of loose networks, and can inspire other similar acts to form a pattern (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018). It covers the "the many scattered, dispersed and small-scale resistance practices that we see today – which are not mass-organized – are more complex and richer than those being covered by the concept of (hidden and subtle) 'everyday resistance'" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p.212). Thus, the utility of dispersed resistance is that it lies between the mass organised resistance seen in social movements, revolutions, armed rebellions and the like, yet is more public and recognised than hidden, or disguised, everyday acts of resistance expanded on by Scott. It can be of an "everyday character or have a more glaring appearance…it may appear once… or it might evolve into a sustained and organized communication-network of collective action: a social movement" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p.216).

Lilja and Vinthagen give an example of male Swedish railway staff, in protest at the company policy of attire limited to long trousers even in Summer, who as individuals wore skirts to work. They were individual, overt acts but became part of a collective protest. Another example is of Tibetan monks committing self-immolation in resistance to Chinese State persecution. They were scattered practices, self-organised rather than being part of an organisation or coherent social movement, yet at the same time were overt and confrontational rather than hidden.

Furthermore, echoing the earlier contention that power relations shape resistance and that state power lies at the heart of this power, Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) posit, from a Foucauldian perspective, that dispersed resistance depends on what type of power this resistance opposes. Thus it "seems to be performed according to different scripts, with different aims and techniques depending on what form of power it is reacting against" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p.216). For them, dispersed resistance is either productive resistance that resists dominant discursive regimes and disciplinary biopower, or it is a counter-repressive resistance that resists repressive sovereign power and its associated laws, institutions and

subsequent attempts to control people and territory (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018). These resistances – counter repressive and productive - are not mutually exclusive and "are combined in different ways" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p.217).

It is the latter – counter-repressive resistance - that this research is concerned with. Such resistance practices can be overt and openly challenge the repressive power of laws, institutions and state bodies. Counter-repressive resistance acts are individual but can become part of a collective, even if there is no prior formal organisation, depending on how the state reacts to individual acts of resistance. They are targeted at the "rulers, practitioners of regulations, decision-making bodies and authorities whose actions have the legal force, and within whom the ultimate power resides in order to lay down, modify, and control people and territories" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p.219). Importantly, it is state power, armed with laws, institutional mechanisms, military force, and tactics of commercialisation, that is being resisted.

Lilja and Vinthagen's concept of dispersed resistance in its counter-repressive form has been significantly influenced by Bayat's concept of 'quiet encroachment' (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, Bayat, 2000). Bayat focusses on rural to urban migrants, dispossessed and displaced by neoliberal forces of globalisation, who make up the precarious, non-formalised populations in cities of the Global South. They are the street vendors, squatters, street children, and refugees who lie outside of the 'modern' city (Bayat, 2000). In this context, Bayat advances the notion of "quiet encroachment" which "describes the silent, protracted but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive and improve their lives" (Bayat 2000, p.545). Examples of this quiet, direct, individual action includes the squatting on public or private lands, gradually increasing to create whole communities such as in cities like Cairo, refusing to pay utility bills in neighbourhoods of Beirut, of street vendors occupying main commercial areas of Tehran and Istanbul without paying the formal taxes or abiding by official regulations (Bayat, 2000). For Bayat, these individual actions are not part of a social movement, but when aggregated, they resist the authorities' attempts to control, regulate, and police their livelihoods. While these actions are quiet and subtle, when faced with threats from state authorities such as removal, they mobilise together as "'passive networks' of dispersed individuals," despite not having a formal or prior organisation (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p.218). One person squatting may not produce a broader social phenomenon, but when a pattern forms, this emergent form of resistance becomes a more

significant challenge to authority. Thus, these aggregations of interactions between individuals produce a phenomenon – resistance - larger than the sum of their parts.

Bayat's influence on 'dispersed resistance' is that it also frames a type of resistance that is more than everyday, survival strategies but is not part of a social movement or organised opposition. The aggregation of resistance actions by individuals or groups of individuals in Bayat's research is a rather different setting than rural, conflict-affected parts of south-eastern Myanmar, but it is shaped by and directed against the state and is part of a pattern of acts that are not formally or centrally organised. However, one of the key differences between 'quiet encroachment' and 'dispersed resistance' is that Bayat's resistance is less confrontational, and less recognisably visible. It is more than 'everyday' but it is often hidden. 'Dispersed resistance,' however, is more explicitly concerned with resistance actions that recognisably challenge the state. Thus, while 'quiet encroachment' is useful in that it is one of the few concepts that conceptualises the resistance that lies between the everyday and the large-scale, organised opposition, and that the state is central to shaping its form, it is 'dispersed resistance' that is a concept that more suitably frames the overall social phenomenon being explored by this research.

This is because the resistance that I am researching attempts to challenge, confront, and/or negotiate the violence caused by the complex assemblage of military actors, government entities, international investors, and local elites outlined in the previous chapter – ceasefire capitalism. Dispersed resistance, in its counter-repressive form, applies to this research because the acts of resistance of the villagers of south-eastern Myanmar are not hidden or disguised, as per much of the 'everyday resistance' literature based on Scott, nor are they part of a connected, larger organised movement. They are acts that form a pattern and they are "glaring" in that they are recognised by the target of resistance and the observer because they challenge, confront or negotiate state domination from a position of subordination. Other forms of everyday resistance surely exist, such as the poaching, pilfering slander and the like, as do the larger, organised resistance movements such as the armed organisation – the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), and its political wing, the Karen National Union (KNU). But it is the instances of fencing land, small-scale protests, verbal confrontations with developers, submitting complaint letters and such like that are examples of the dispersed resistance that is the focus of this thesis. They are dispersed throughout the southeast of Myanmar, loosely connected, and oppositional to state power.

The concept of 'dispersed resistance' (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018) is therefore a useful conceptual lens through which to think about the resistance of Karen villagers in south-eastern Myanmar to the deleterious effects and structural violence of ceasefire capitalism. It builds on foundational work of 'everyday resistance' but addresses some of the criticisms of it, and can encompass the four criteria of resistance that this research takes i.e. resistance is shaped by the state, is a pattern of acts, lies between the everyday and the centrally-organised, and challenges, confronts and negotiates state power. Furthermore, as Lilja and Vinthagen outline, dispersed resistance captures the practices of resistance that are "more complex" than everyday resistance typologies. These individual, self-organised actions aggregate and produce a politically significant emergent phenomenon of resistance. Furthermore, because they are dynamic and without strict organisation they are able to adapt according to the specific history, context, and constraints and opportunities that they are situated in.

3.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter, as outlined in the introduction, was threefold. First, I have established criteria for identifying resistance. This will guide the data analysis as I will be able to distinguish what it is I am looking for in the empirical data. These criteria are that: a) the practices of individuals or small groups form a pattern with no central organisational actor or organisation; b) resistance is a response to the specific form of state domination and violence which is manifest in the assemblage of power that I detailed in the previous chapter under the rubric of ceasefire capitalism; c) while understanding, motivations, and intent are all part of an agency that determines the decision to practice resistance, insights to people's mindset and subjectivities are very difficult to capture, thus focus is on the action itself; and d) not all acts denote resistance and they must be directed against the state, challenging and confronting power relations from a position of subordination.

The second purpose was, using the four criteria as well as components of two other key definitions, to establish my own definition of resistance. This is: *patterns of localised, small scale, self-organised actions, shaped by state domination, that challenge, confront, and/or*

negotiate power relations from a subordinated position. This is a working definition that is used throughout the thesis.

The third purpose of this chapter was to present a concept, taken from Lilja and Vinthagen's (2018) scoping article – 'dispersed resistance' – that frames a type of resistance that lies between the everyday and larger scale organised movements. The four criteria and my definition inform the choice of this concept, as dispersed resistance adequately captures the overall phenomenon under investigation.

Underpinning the four criteria for inclusion, the definition and the concept of (dispersed) resistance outlined in this chapter is the relational aspect. As iterated by Johansson and Vinthagen, "resistance is as per definition relational as it will always be in relation to power" (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020, p.164). Being in a position of subordination is defined in relation to who is in a position of superordination and, as established in this chapter, the power of the state plays an essential role in shaping the constraints, opportunities, and forms of resistance. Yet confronting the state-linked actor or entity which poses the threat or actuation of violence is an interaction between resistor and target. Thus the relations between the villagers and the state shapes resistance. Capturing these relations is important to analyse the changes in this time period.

Furthermore, in terms of the need for acts to be present, as per the third criterion of defining resistance, acts come into being as part of a back and forth - a relation. The focus in this thesis is on the emergent phenomenon that is produced by interaction between actors, not the actor itself. If two people are connecting or interacting with each other, for example the Swedish train drivers wearing skirts to work, their actions, in relation to each other, produce an emergent pattern. It is not the Swedish train drivers themselves that are the resistance, but the emergent patterns of acts that are produced based on their relation with each other that form the social phenomenon of resistance. Similarly, the aggregated acts of self-organised resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar, who are in a position of subordination vis-à-vis powerful state actors yet directly challenge or confront the source of violence, becomes identifiable as dispersed resistance because of their relation with each other and their target.

The following chapter then, will introduce a novel approach to framing resistance in response to the research question that seeks to explain how the non-armed resistance of villagers in

south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved to new forms of structural violence. The self-organised, non-institutionalised, and decentralised actions, that, when aggregated, produce emergent patterns of dispersed resistance are well suited to the use of a complexity lens and its related concepts. This is because a complexity lens can capture the relational aspect that underpins the dispersed resistance analysed in this thesis. It is an approach equipped to narrate the dynamic change of relations and subsequent resistance catalysed by a shifting political and economic context.

Chapter Four: A Complexity Framework for Dispersed Resistance

The previous chapter outlined what it is I am analysing – dispersed resistance. The properties of the concept of dispersed resistance, in which interaction and relations shape resistance modes, require an analytical lens that focuses on the dynamic nature of these relations, what these relations produce, and how villagers adapt to this dynamism. As presented in Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism, what is being resisted in south-eastern Myanmar at this time is a complex assemblage of actors and threats. Yet the changing political and economic context created opportunities for new forms of interaction and relation. This in turn meant new dynamics and forms of non-armed resistance that confronted Myanmar state and military actors and the businesses connected to them. The reaction to structural violence then, is itself a complex assemblage of resistance in which adaption is key.

In a similar vein, when analysing global patterns of land grabbing – a form of structural violence – Peluso and Lund (2011) note that "there is no one grand land grab, but a series of changing contexts, emergent processes and forces, and contestations that are producing new conditions" (Peluso & Lund, 2011, p.669). This is similar to the situation here, where there is no grand project to inflict structural violence upon the villagers of south-eastern Myanmar, but a series of emergent processes that form Ceasefire Capitalism, and a series of emergent contestations, which form the dispersed resistance. These emergent contestations, defined as dispersed resistance, are continually adapting and co-evolving with the political and economic context and changing relations.

Furthermore, dispersed resistance does not rely on centrally coordinated, hierarchical forms of organisation, but rather, is decentralised, and emerges based on local-level interaction. Crucially, these actions are self-organised. The emergence of these self-organised, small-scale resistance acts, when aggregated, become patterns. In turn these patterns create the phenomenon of dispersed resistance studied in this thesis. This emergent resistance is dispersed, self-organised, and based on interactions. Therefore, linear cause-and-effect reasoning, which focuses on single components, variables or entities, does not make for suitable analysis. Rather, there needs to be a lens that can capture the dynamism and openness of relations and interactions which produce emergent outcomes.

Thus, this thesis is looking at dispersed resistance which itself is characterised by actions emerging out of relation and interaction, is small-scale and self-organised, and adapts based on the relations that villagers have with state and state-linked entities. Being able to analyse the dynamics of these relations and how these impacted resistance modes will allow elucidation and narration of dispersed resistance in this time period. This in turn allows me to answer the central research question of this thesis of how the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved amid new forms of structural violence. A complexity lens, I will argue, encapsulates the key aspects of dispersed resistance – self-organised, emerging out of interaction, and adapting to changing dynamics of state violence.

This chapter is in two parts. First, it introduces complexity theory as a novel lens with which to study resistance, and, specific to this thesis, dispersed resistance. I will then highlight three key concepts of a specific strand of complexity, that of complex adaptive systems, which will frame the research. These three concepts are emergence, self-organisation, and adaption. Second, this chapter will present how these three concepts link with each other, the mechanisms that strengthen the presence of these concepts, and how, together, they will frame the specific social phenomenon under investigation – dispersed resistance.

4.1 Introducing a Complexity Lens

4.1.1 Complexity

A complexity frame views the world as consisting of systems of interconnecting, interacting components that produce non-linear effects (Byrne, 1998, Jervis, 1997, Urry, 2005, Sawyer, 2005). A complex system is open, nested within other systems, and is more than the sum of its individual components. It is a self-organising system that adapts to and co-evolves with its environment, and has emergent properties (Cilliers, 2000). The study of complex adaptive systems looks at "the patterns of relationships within them [the system], how they are sustained, how they self-organize and how outcomes emerge" (Zimmerman et al, 2009, p.3).

The classic example in the natural world is a flock of birds flying through the sky (Sawyer, 2005, p.3). The flock is a complex system made of up individual birds interacting with each other, forming patterns yet without linear, cause and effect factor(s) that explains the flock's overall movement. Rather, the interactions between individual birds create emergent collective behaviour. This flock, or complex system, is nested within other systems such as the ecosystem in which the birds live, or the weather system. The birds themselves are not the system, but the effects that they produce are - the effects being the collective movements based on interactions with each other. The boundary is not a single bird, as other birds can join the said flock, catalysing new interactions and emergent properties (Sawyer, 2005, p.3). Rather, the boundary is the movement of the flock (the emergent patterns based on interactions) that define where the system starts and ends.

Complexity is a useful lens to encapsulate the dispersed resistance outlined in the previous chapter because of the parallels between the characteristics of dispersed resistance and the key components of complexity theory. It offers a set of concepts and tools through which to analyse modes and patterns of resistance enacted by villagers in south-eastern Myanmar that are non-linear, decentralised, not formally organised, and that display a dynamism in a changing context. Furthermore, given that what is being resisted is the complex assemblage of power described as 'ceasefire capitalism,' as outlined in Chapter Two, I am, in a sense, tackling complexity with complexity.

4.1.2 Relationality

A complexity approach is a step away from an analytical focus on entities and structures as fixed and having linear cause and effect interactions. In complexity thinking it is not possible to break down each component or characteristic of that component and reliably predict what will happen if they are in relation to others. Complexity is thus a break from this Newtonian way of thinking (Zimmerman et al, 2009, p.2) which uses a metaphor of a machine such as a clock to treat societal processes. In this Newtonian metaphor, change "can be described in mechanical terms as a predictable series of interactions among discrete objects" (Day, 2022, p.26). This type of reductionism relies on the fixity of entities and their properties for analysis and is applicable to *complicated* mechanical or industrial machines. Yet in society, when components such as people interact, the processes and outcomes are much more dynamic, and produce effects that are not necessarily predictable, or possible to break down into

individual components that could be exactly modelled. Rather, complexity captures the dynamic processes that produce social phenomenon. If a system did not have this dynamism created by the interactions, it would "whither away into a state of equilibrium, another word for death" (Cilliers, 2000, p.28). Complexity can mean that small inputs have large effects on social phenomenon, or vice versa. Thus, it is important to look beyond entities and their characteristics as fixed, and look at the relations, the processes between things, that produce dynamic effects.

Complexity thinking, therefore, should "direct our focus towards processes of interaction and exchange, evoking a relational sensibility" (Brigg, 2013, pp.14-15). A relational sensibility means that systems, and certain social phenomena are not defined by entities or the components themselves. They are defined by the patterns of behaviour, i.e. the emergent effects that these interacting components produce. Rather than looking at such entities as static, these relational approaches "depict social reality instead in dynamic, continuous, and processual terms" (Emirbayer, 1997, p.281). It moves away from myths of agent-focussed approaches that see a person as a "pre-existing entity" and the structuralist approaches that see society as a pre-existing entity to focus analysis "on such phenomena as social ties, communication, exchange, and practice" (Nexon, 2010, pp.100-101). If we apply a relational approach to resistance, we see that it is not a static unit or entity, it is a social phenomenon that emerges out of the relations between people. Mustafa Emirbayer, a sociologist and one of the pioneers of bringing a relational approach into the social sciences, references Elias and his example of the wind to demonstrate this. Elias notes that, in the way the English language is constructed, we say that "the wind is blowing" as if the wind is an entity in itself that could decide to pick up and blow. Yet in reality, if the wind is not blowing, it does not exist (Elias, 1978, pp.111-112 in Emirbayer, 1997, p.283). There is no such thing as wind that is not blowing. Similarly with resistance, it is a concept that emerges out of the doing. In the case of this thesis, the doing is the interacting between villagers and between villagers and the target of resistance. Rather than saying 'the resistance was resisting,' it is more instructive to say, 'the villagers resisted the development project.' The resistance action is not an entity, it only comes into being when there is an interaction between the villagers, or between the villager(s) and the target of resistance, i.e. the company or government. Giving analytical priority to the interactions between agents, in this case villagers, means that relational approaches to social phenomena are an important part of complexity theory.

Brigg (2013, 2016, & 2018) has been one of the foremost scholars in bringing this relational approach to peacebuilding and specifically "relationality." For him, "'relationality' can be provisionally defined as giving greater conceptual importance – and in some cases priority – to relations over entities by attending to the effects of interactions and exchanges" (Brigg, 2016, p.58). Thus, it "turns attention to mobile relations that bring entities and things into being" (Brigg, 2018, p.355). He goes on to describe a typology of approaches within relationality, differentiating between thin, thicker, and thick relationality (Brigg, 2016, pp.58-62). 'Thin relationality' refers to the relations between entities, such as individuals or organisations, where the entity is pre-existing and how that entity came into being is not questioned. 'Thicker relationality' refers to relationships that constitute and transform the entities that are in relation with each other, i.e. they are "changed through interaction" (Brigg, 2016, p.59). 'Thick relationality' prioritises relations themselves, and these relations "do not derive from, or are beholden to preexisting entities or structures" (Brigg, 2016, p.59).

Brigg contends that this conceptualisation of relationality is a complement to complexity applications to peace and conflict studies because it is a tool to analyse dynamic processes and "the importance of phenomena that are dynamically self-organising through local interaction" (Brigg, 2016, p.61). Similarly, in Day's (2022) application of a complexity lens to map patterns of governance in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo he finds utility in Brigg's 'relationality' spectrum. He emphasises the 'thick relationality' that underscores political and social organisation in these countries and how UN statebuilding attempts have failed because they focused on entities rather than these relations. For Day, "In thick relationality, the relations between and among actors and entities are not merely important to a governance system, they *are* the system" (Day, 2022, p.5). Thus the relations and the emergent outcomes of these relations create the system of resistance, they are the boundaries of the system.

What relationality, when used as a lens to look at peace (Söderström et al, 2021), peacebuilding (Martín de Almagro, 2018), development (Wilcock, 2021) or governance (Day, 2022) shows, is that it can capture the dynamism of these contexts. This is in contrast to a focus on static entities such as states, armed groups, and villages, as well as characterisations such as local, international, liberal, or traditional, which cannot capture such dynamism and change (Chadwick et al, 2013). In the same way, this relational approach can also be an analytical tool to help us look at a complex adaptive system of resistance,

including power relations. A focus on relationships "reveals power struggles and constellations forming and reforming in and across local, state and international spheres" (Moe, 2013, p.52). Furthermore, "relational complexes also indicate collaboration, interdependence and attempts to address everyday challenges and to contest established power structures" (Moe, 2013, p.52). The agents in the system, in the case of this thesis, the villagers of south-eastern Myanmar, are situated in their position of subordination *in relation* to others. Yet such relations are dynamic and changing, especially with the changing political and economic context.

Thus, in this thesis, it is not the villagers themselves which we find resistance, it is the action which only comes into being by the relation that the villagers have with each other, and the target itself. Resistance thus emerges out of interaction. We cannot otherwise locate 'resistance' without analysing the relations between entities, in this case villagers and the complex assemblage of actors with which they interact with, such as businesses, armed organisations, and various components of the Myanmar state. By framing resistance as an emergent outcome of relations between villagers and the sources of the structural violence, we can explore and analyse how changes in relations result in patterns of resistance adapting and evolving with new threats and opportunities.

4.1.3 Complexity and Resistance

Little has been written that applies a complexity lens to resistance studies. The closest link between complexity and resistance has been in the Peacebuilding literature, developed from the 'local turn' in liberal peace critiques that sought to problematise and analyse how local communities, organisations or actors resist peacebuilding or peacekeeping programmes of international actors (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015, Jackson, 2015, Mac Ginty, 2011). In order to analyse and address this resistance, there is an increasing acknowledgement of the complexity of the context in which the 'subjects' of peacebuilding live and how adapting programmes to this complexity is necessary for more effective intervention (de Coning, 2020, Millar, 2016). Within this subset of literature lie critiques of complexity that are linked with peacebuilding and resistance, that sees the application of complexity as a means of governmentality (Chandler, 2014, Randazzo & Torrent, 2021). Thus, there exists a critique that a complexity approach, and indeed relational approaches more generally, can sometimes

elide unequal power relations (Joseph, 2018) and any application of a complexity lens needs to be aware of, and address, politics, power, and inequality.

In terms of this critique of complexity that it elides power relations, I will address this in the thesis by emphasising the 'complex adaptive system' strand of complexity - "a special class of complex systems" that "is made up of adaptive agents…which react to the system and to each other, and which may make decisions and develop strategies to influence other agents or the overall system" (Jones & Ramalingham, 2008, p.44). The benefit of this particular strand allows for a discussion of agency of the villagers who are forming patterns of resistance that make up the complex system. Agency does not necessarily equate to resistance here, and agency may be expressed in various other aspects of life that seek to mitigate the situation they find themselves in. This may be evasion, such as moving village or even moving to another country to become a migrant worker, changing farming techniques or schedules, or other forms of mitigation. Hence the previous chapter that clearly defines what dispersed resistance is will be referred to when analysing the patterns of resistance in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018.

Furthermore, while villagers do have agency to resist, at the same time they are limited in this capacity by more powerful actors and structures of violence. The interactions themselves are not necessarily the only loci where an analysis of power can be made (Joseph, 2018). The villagers who resist the Myanmar military are in a structural position of unequal power. Thus it is necessary, as some complexity approaches urge, to contextualise this resistance in terms of a decades-long history of conflict, violence, and marginalisation of rural south-eastern Myanmar communities. This history structures the interactions and relations that are occurring in this time period. However, the relationships with these powerful actors and the structures of violence and opportunity are shifting in this time period. The concept of adaption is therefore useful to describe the shifting patterns of resistance in a dynamic, post-ceasefire context, of capturing how rural Karen villagers have agency to adapt to power imbalances, resisting and mitigating the worst effects of violence. Remembering how complexity thinking is aided by a focus on relations/relationality/a relational sensibility, means that by focusing analysis on the dynamic nature and change of such relations, whether between villagers, the government, the Myanmar military, the armed group, the Karen National Union, or private businesses, allows us to narrate the changes occurring in this

period. This will be discussed in more detail in the third major concept of complexity – adaption.

The following three sections will outline the three complexity concepts of emergence, self-organisation, and adaption, before explaining their utility for dispersed resistance. These three core concepts of complexity will be used together to describe a complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018. They are a tool to narrate how such resistance has evolved and strengthened during the period of political and economic change. A complex system of resistance would be *self-organised*, in which there is *adaption* among actors to the surrounding environment, out of which there is the *emergence* of resistance. By framing resistance using these concepts, I will introduce the mechanisms of feedback loops, facilitation by strong agents, and thickening of relations that result in the presence and deepening of emergence, self-organisation and adaption. First, I will explain the three concepts, before moving on to the framework.

4.2 Three Key Complexity Concepts

4.2.1 Emergence

The first aspect of complexity theory that is useful for this study of dispersed resistance is emergence. Emergence refers to the outcomes of interactions between agents that "generate new collective effects" (de Coning, 2020, p.843). Emergence reflects the "process-orientated" (Duffield, 2001, p.85) aspect of complex systems rather than the more structured, entity-based linear cause and effects of the Newtonian machine metaphor referred to earlier. As Sawyer puts it, emergence accounts for "how individuals and their relations give rise to global, macro social phenomena, such as markets, the educational system, cultural beliefs, and shared social practices (e.g., politeness and power dynamics)" (Sawyer, 2005, p.6). Thus, patterns of resistance, like conflict or peacebuilding dynamics, are a macro, social phenomena that emerge from interactions between individual agents, or in this case, villagers.

These interactions are between what are variously named agents, components, or elements of a system. Components within a complex system can include individuals, organisations,

institutions, states or any other manner of social entity. A diversity and multiplicity of components breeds more complex systems. What is important is the relations, interactions, and interdependence between them, not the individual components. For the type of resistance that is relevant to this research, agents refer to individual villagers and local, community-based organisations who experience violence and act accordingly. Individuals, or agents as they will be referred to forthwith, are goal-orientated and react to the environment around them (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.45). They have agency and to achieve these goals they interact with each other, the results of which form emergent properties of resistance. In a context of state repression, conflict and structural violence, actors will have different goals and it is not the purpose of this thesis to analyse in great detail the individuals' specific aims, goals and ideal situations. However, given that what is going to be analysed are the actions of villagers, it can be reasonably inferred that these actions are based on a goal, and broadly these goals are to mitigate and resist the violence that they experience, whether direct or structural, in order to make their lives easier.

These interactions, as well as being based on the goals of the agents, are based on local, context-specific rules of interaction. Thus, "each element *[agent]* possesses its own behavioural rules on the basis of which it interacts with other elements. These elements themselves possess a set of rules according to which they behave and interact" (Geller, 2011, p.66). These rules are social, political, cultural, and legal, and are context-specific. For example, it may be that women rather than men, come together to negotiate forced labour demands with local battalion leaders, because cultural practice means they have a level of maternal authority vis-à-vis soldiers who are mostly young men (Malseed, 2009, p.376).

The local-level interaction is what shall be termed the micro-level for this research. By micro-level it means specifically the interactions between individuals or community organisations. Villagers interacting with each other, based on local context-specific rules give rise to emergent outcomes. The emergent outcomes, at a macro-level, are the patterns of resistance that form the complex adaptive system. These are the boundaries of the system.

There are other components that villagers engage and interact with. These include media outlets and journalists, companies, armed organisations, and government administrative authorities such as township administrators. However, it is the villagers themselves, and the local assemblages that they form, such as community-based organisations or networks

between villages, that are the primary elements of this complex adaptive system of resistance that concerns this research. This is a practical boundary that is being drawn around the system and will be discussed more in Chapter Five: Methodology. The other actors such as authorities, armed actors, companies etc., are part of other complex systems that are not part of the dispersed resistance that this thesis is concerned with. For example, armed groups would be part of a much larger, nationwide, complex system of armed resistance with multiple armed actors interacting in different ways.

Complex systems are open, fluid, embedded in one another and with various components also part of other systems. However, there is a boundary that is being drawn in this thesis as a practical measure to focus on and comprehend one particular social phenomenon – resistance of villagers. Here it must be acknowledged that there is a level of subjectivity and interpretation when defining the boundaries of the system. There are two aspects at play here – conceptual and practical. In this chapter I will discuss the conceptual implications and the next chapter on methodology will discuss the practical implications.

Conceptually, the boundaries of the system, what makes the system a system, are the emergent effects that result from interaction. Boundaries do not start and end with entities, but with relations and what these relations produce. In this case, the boundaries are the patterns of resistance actions. Conceptually, a villager is not a boundary, but the patterns of resistance actions that emerge from a group of villagers interacting with each other and acting in concert, for example a small protest, is the boundary. The boundaries of the complex system begin and end with the patterns of resistance. Villagers working together to plant rice paddy is not part of the system of resistance because the emergent effect of their working together is not a resistance action. Rather, it is a livelihood strategy or a food production action. Thus, where there is a pattern of resistance–- a series of resistance actions repeated and dispersed throughout south-eastern Myanmar at the village-level that are identified in the data according to the definition of dispersed resistance outlined in Chapter Three–- this is the boundary.

The emergent outcomes of these interactions display *nonlinearity,* another complexity concept. Nonlinearity describes how the effects, or emergent outcomes, are not necessarily proportionate to the inputs to, or the components of, the interaction. Small inputs can have large effects and vice-versa. When Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) present the concept of

dispersed resistance – as discussed in Chapter Three: Resistance–- the nonlinearity of emergence can be identified in their examples. They use the self-immolation of a street vendor that sparked the first revolution of the Arab Spring in Tunisia as one example of a dispersed act of resistance, the disproportionate emergent effect of which was a nationwide uprising (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p.216). The outcome was more than the sum of its parts – i.e. of one person's tragic actions–- and this shows how nonlinearity, i.e. the disproportion between individual parts and overall effects, is a feature of emergent outcomes. However, this example also demonstrated the unpredictability of emergence, as self-immolations in other parts of the Arab world at this time did not catalyse the same emergent nationwide resistance as Tunisia.

In relation to dispersed resistance in south-eastern Myanmar, interactions between certain individuals at a very local, village level, for example human rights awareness trainings that have occurred in the region between 2012 and 2018, seen in their singularity may not render significant consequences. Yet if they are repeated and form patterns throughout a region, together these small-scale trainings have the potential to have disproportionate impacts in terms of raising collective consciousness to resist a particular nationwide development strategy.

This thesis then, uses the concept of emergence, within a complexity lens, to explore the extent of whether dispersed resistance in south-eastern Myanmar, is indeed a complex adaptive system. In this case, it is enough to define emergence as the macro-level, collective outcomes of the micro-level interactions between individual agents, or components, which are based on simple context-specific localised rules and behaviours, the nonlinearity of which makes it impossible to accurately predict. In terms of resistance, the micro-level interactions are those between villagers that give rise to emergent outcomes which are the patterns of dispersed resistance.

Emergence is thus a concept that is an integral part of complexity thinking and is produced by the interactions between agents. These interactions, captured by a relational approach, is a key analytical focus of how to understand the changes that this thesis is investigating. Tracking the shifting dynamics in these relations therefore, and analysing these changes in relation to the broader political context, can help to narrate the changes in resistance during the time period of this research.

4.2.2 Self-Organisation

The second aspect of complexity theory that this framework utilises is self-organisation - a key concept within complexity thinking that is closely linked to emergence. Self-organisation in complexity means that systems are able to "organize, maintain and sustain" (de Coning, 2016, p.841) without external intervention or control, or an internal coordinating or organising body or element. It is "where macro-scale patterns of behaviour occur as the result of the interactions of individuals who act according to their own goals and aims and based on their limited information and perspective on the situation" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.49). It is thus at the micro-level, individual agents, where self-organisation occurs.

Related to the process of self-organisation are *feedback loops*. A complex adaptive system develops through an iterative process. Certain actions are reinforced by positive feedback or response, creating momentum for further actions, while some patterns of action face negative feedback, which curtails a certain path. The escalation or de-escalation of action is influenced by feedback loops which then feed into the individual's (adaptive agent's) intentions and their goals. The overall patterns of behaviour are not planned, but a series of actions and interactions, shaped by feedback loops, give rise to these emergent outcomes.

In contexts of state repression and violence, it can be the case that negative feedback stymies the potential for the development of a pattern of resistance. Kavalski (2017) gives two opposing examples of feedback loops in contexts of state repression. The fall of the Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu and communist rule in 1989, was triggered by the eviction of a local priest in the small town of Timisoara, and a series of escalating demands and actions. Positive feedback gave momentum for the eventual nationwide revolution (Kavalski, 2017, p.440). On the other hand, in the same year, the crackdown at Tiananmen Square in China stymied the escalating movement for political reform, returning the situation to one of stability (for the ruling Chinese Communist Party) (Kavalski, 2017, p.441). This is an example of negative feedback, not in normative terms, but in the sense that it blocks dynamic change, and retains the status quo. I will return to feedback loops later in the chapter to outline its utility as one of the mechanisms that describe how patterns of resistance emerge and escalate.

Feedback loops in a complex system that shape emergent outcomes are not processes that can be easily controlled and directed from an external intervention or an internal agent or body. When applied to local dispersed resistance, the interactions are at a local, individual level, and are based on the goals and aims of those doing the resistance. Individual agents are the ones who have the information available locally to them, can assess the risks and potential gains, and make decisions on what kind of action to undertake and who to engage with. Other actors or dynamics, including the context/environment (detailed in the next section – Adaption) may influence their actions and shape the information available to them. However, self-organised resistance acts have the most ownership as the individuals are ultimately responsible for their own actions. Self-organised patterns of local resistance are the result of a micro-level, bottom-up process that is flexible enough to adapt to local conditions, changing circumstances, and specific characteristics of other components of the system.

Not all examples of resistance throughout the world display the property of self-organisation. Even within south-eastern Myanmar, there is a clear example of a highly organised resistance movement – that of the armed group the Karen National Liberation Army - which has a clear hierarchical and relatively coordinated mode of organisation. However, the dispersed resistance of villagers does not have a central organising body directing resistance actions. In fact, dispersed resistance by definition is self-organised, hence its complementarity with complexity. Rather, resistance emerges from the ground up and the spread of certain patterns of actions are self-organised, based on the interests of the individual agents, shaped by feedback loops. Hence why this is an important concept applicable to the kind of resistance that this thesis is researching. The interactions ultimately come from individuals and their interactions with each other in which they attempt to mitigate and resist the worst effects of violence without central coordination or organisation. Furthermore, because they are self-organised, they are decentralised and distributed throughout the system. This also adds to their unpredictability and makes it harder to govern against or control.

Self-organisation thus makes social phenomena more complex, and more complexity means a system can endure. Some contemporary resistance movements against repression are understanding this concept as an effective principle to oppose states and authorities that have much greater resources. One example is the recent protest movement in Hong Kong, which saw mass demonstrations in 2019 against the perceived puppet government of Carrie Lam and increasing Chinese Communist Party control over Hong Kong’s political and legal life.

The phrase 'Be Water,' taken from a Bruce Lee film, refers to the protesters' tactics of being shapeless and formless, moving around quickly to occupy certain places, with no leader or directive from a central body (Dapiran, 2019). Rather, the protesters on the ground self-organised, interacting with each other based on information available at the time and with their own goals and objectives. Patterns of resistance strategies formed, and it became very difficult for the authorities to quash the movement as it had done previously such as the 2014 Umbrella Revolution by arresting high profile leaders like Joshua Wong. This complexity within the 2019 resistance movement made it effective at paralysing the functioning of the Hong Kong Government at the time. It was a self-organised complexity, decentralised, that created emergent outcomes.

While the above examples pertain to larger social movements, the self-organisation concept of complexity also applies to dispersed resistance. Lilja and Vinthagen (2018), in their conceptualisation of dispersed resistance, give examples of patterns which are self-organised and not directed from a centralised body or from external intervention. The aforementioned example of Swedish train drivers and conductors, who wore skirts to work in protest at the railway companies' policy of no shorts in the summertime despite the heat is a case in point. These actions were individual, with no lead organiser or external agent directing the protest, but were self-organised, and formed a pattern. The theme of self-organisation is apparent when Lilja and Vinthagen draw on Bayat's work on the mobilisation of those working in the informal sectors such as street vendors in urban areas. "When these atomized individuals – for example, the street vendors – are threatened with removal by the police, they get together and mobilize around each other despite not having a previous organization or movement, often not even knowing one another in advance" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p.218). These individuals at the micro-level interacted with each other, based on the specific context and information available to them, and self-organised, forming a network to conduct collective action against a common threat.

Self-organisation then, an important concept within complexity thinking, is key to understanding the resistance this thesis is concerned with. Dispersed resistance lies between the everyday and larger, organised resistance, comes from the bottom-up, is influenced by positive and negative feedback loops, and is decentralised and distributed throughout the system. There are no headquarters, central office, key leader or figure. Hence why there is no central node of dispersed resistance. Rather, it is distributed throughout the system which

makes it harder to counteract by state forces as there is not a central target to take out that would decimate the system. Some patterns of action always have the potential to emerge, self-organised from the ground-up.

Self-organisation is a concept that is used to describe how emergence occurs and how interactions occur. It also allows us to focus on the relations between villagers. Prioritising their relations rather than villagers as entities gives us an analytical focus with which to describe and narrate interactions that form the complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance.

4.2.3 Adaption

The third concept of the framework is adaption, and this relates to a specific strand of complexity theory that analyses complex adaptive systems. A complex adaptive system consists of agents, which can include individuals, organisations, companies or other actors, that are adaptive in that they have the agency, or capacity, to respond and react to the environment and context around them, making decisions based on their goals and circumstances, as well as previous experience. The capacity of these agents "to perceive the system around them and act on these perceptions means that their view of the world dynamically influences, and is influenced by, events and changes within the system" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.44). This is not to say that systems are based solely on the decisions of individual adaptive agents, but that the emergent behaviour that comes out of the aggregations of interactions between adaptive agents displays the property of adaption.

Adaption links to debates around agency and structure. Through their ability to adapt, individuals demonstrate agency not just for their own patterns of behaviour, but they influence the environment around them. Adaptive agents respond to both the emergent effects of the interactions with other adaptive actors, and they co-evolve with their surrounding environment. This is what distinguishes a complex adaptive system from a complex system, as this thesis seeks to do, "it is their *[adaptive agents']* capacity to cope with new challenges that makes the system adaptive" (Kavalski, 2011, p.444).

In a situation of state violence and armed conflict, adaptive agents are able to process information, and behave in a way to achieve a certain goal or mitigate the deleterious impacts

of the context they are living in. Furthermore, the relations that villagers have vis-à-vis each other and more powerful actors such as the Myanmar military or the KNU shapes the limits and possibilities of this agency. This goes back to power relations, as noted earlier, as shifting relations "endow actors with varying degrees of agency" (Nexon, 2011, p.109). Thus, while actors possess agency to act, "their purposeful strategic goals are immanently and constantly trumped by an iterative complexity, rooted in uncertain relations" (Randazzo & Torrent, 2020, p.12). It is not that actors do not have such goals and purpose, but rather, "acknowledging how uncertain and messy relations between actors are co-constitutive of their very essence binds agency with this relational condition" (Randazzo & Torrent, 2020, p.13). What this means is that actors have agency, but this is not exercised in linear, teleological fashion. Rather, it is an "adaptive" form of agency, situated in a complex web of relations (Randazzo & Torrent, 2020, p.1) that is shaped by power imbalances. The agency of adaptive agents is not unrestricted and more powerful actors can reduce the capacity and agency of other actors to adapt. This is clear in contexts of state violence, such as the subject of this research – south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018. The Myanmar military, state agencies, and large companies are much more powerful and can impose conditions onto much less powerful villagers. Within villages or at the community level, power imbalances, for example in terms of age, gender, or connections to more powerful actors such as an armed group, also influence the capacities that each individual has for adaption. The point is that while all actors within the complex adaptive system have agency to adapt and to influence their environment in some way, this agency can be, and is often, limited, depending on relations with other actors.

Resistance is a form of agency, although not the only form, and the changing forms and patterns of resistance demonstrate adaption to changing contexts. Adaption then, can be both an assertion of resistance, as villagers see new opportunities to confront powerful actors, or it can be a mitigation or evasion, adjusting to violence or threat by evading or avoiding resistance. Adaption is a concept that is a feature of any complex *adaptive* system, allowing it to evolve and be dynamic. Adaption could also be applied to various other complex adaptive systems, for example of systems of food security measures, small-scale business activity, or any other social phenomenon under investigation. However, investigated in *this* thesis is how actors, who possess agency, adapt in their dispersed resistance actions.

In contexts of state violence and armed conflict, the history of conflict, repression, and deeply uneven power imbalances influence how actors adapt. Previous instances of arbitrary arrest, torture, sexual violence, or extrajudicial killing means that many villagers would be reticent to directly confront armed soldiers. A judicial system that is historically weak and politically pliant means that taking a land confiscation case to court would be ineffective and bring unwarranted scrutiny. However, in a particular village, the village head and the local battalion commander may have good relations going back several years. Thus, negotiation may be a strategy for villagers to mitigate, for example, the destruction of community land. Taking a view that historical conditions shape resistance allows us to look at historical configurations of relations of power, at a micro and macro level, and reflect on how these shape the adaptive behaviours of actors at a micro-level (villagers).

Furthermore, the history of a system is, again, linked with agency. Actors are adaptive, they have the capacity to act on the information available to them, which includes the history of their circumstances, to resist state violence, however imbalanced the power relationship may be. Additionally, their acts evolve with the system and the system evolves with the acts. History is an ongoing dynamic, process, and resistance acts, while shaped by history, also shape the present and future.

Dispersed resistance, as put forward by Lilja and Vinthagen (2018), is ultimately a reaction to power, and the type of power and domination shapes the type of resistance strategies that people employ. Actors are often forced to adapt to the circumstances that they are faced with to resist the worst effects of domination and they do so in varying ways and degrees, one of which is resistance. Furthermore, simply copying strategies tried elsewhere is not as effective as the specific actions that an adaptive agent (villager) will undertake based on their own particular knowledge, experience, and goals. Their individual actions adapt to the specific context and the disproportionate power of certain actors, and when aggregated form the emergent phenomenon of dispersed resistance. Their actions are part of a process of continuous adaption to changing circumstances and new or altered threats. Through their actions, not only is there a possibility that they can resist violence, but they shape the environment around them, albeit in small ways given the significant power imbalance. However, due to the nonlinearity of complex adaptive systems, there is the potential for small adaptions to have knock-on effects, creating a path in which actions and reaction escalate into a much broader scale.

The prominent example that Lilja and Vinthagen use in their article to conceptualise dispersed resistance draws on Bayat's work on informal workers in urban areas mobilising and organising due to threats from the state on their ability to pursue their livelihoods. They adapt to the changing circumstances, in this case, street vendors facing the threat of removal by the police. However, other changes such as "sudden increased opportunities to move forward in times of state crisis; crises of legitimacy and capacity due to economic problems, wars, revolutions or other similar major processes of change" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, pp.218-219) can catalyse collective action. What is relevant here in the concept of dispersed resistance is that it includes the capacity for adaption to new threats and opportunities.

Thus, adaption is a useful complexity concept when analysing the resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar because it can capture the changing nature of the resistance. This research is concerned with a particular time of political and economic change in this region of Myanmar. New threats to villagers, as well as new opportunities to resist emerged during the time period of 2012-2018. Adaption thus captures the dynamism of villagers in the southeast at this time. It is also sensitive to agency, structure, and power. As a concept, adaption can help elucidate the ability of people to survive, mitigate, and resist violence, even potentially catalyse much bigger, disproportionate effects, but without eliding the deep power imbalances and the limitations to agency.

4.3 Narrating Resistance through a Complexity Framework

The above section outlined what complexity is and three of the key concepts within it - emergence, self-organisation and adaption. It also pointed to how a relational approach complements and aids our understanding of complex adaptive systems, i.e. the dynamic interactions between people that create emergent effects, in this case the phenomena of resistance. This section will introduce a complexity framework to understanding dispersed resistance.

In this thesis I am interpreting a particular aspect of the world of villagers of south-eastern Myanmar – dispersed resistance - and applying these complementary concepts of emergence,

self-organisation and adaption to narrate the dynamics of a complex adaptive system. The more they can be demonstrated to be present, identified in the data using the guidelines presented in the following Methodology chapter, the more complex the system of resistance is. These concepts, taken together, are thus used to narrate an answer to the question of how the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved amid new forms of structural violence. I will link these concepts together to make sense of this particular social phenomenon with a framework that I unpack in diagram format below.

First, in order to identify these concepts in the data, I will state three propositions that serve as ideal types to be confirmed in the empirical investigation:

Proposition One: Emergence – *Patterns of resistance emerge that confront, challenge and negotiate state power from a position of subordination.*
Proposition Two: Adaption – *These resistance patterns adapt and are in response to changing political, economic and conflict dynamics.*
Proposition Three: Self-organisation - *The patterns of resistance acts have no central organisation or coordination mechanism, are spread throughout the area, and begin at the village level.*

For the purposes of framing this complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance, I will assess the presence of these concepts which, taken together, form a narrative model. How I will operationalise these propositions is by first, mapping out categories of resistance in the dataset before, following a concept-book, identify the presence of emergence, adaption and self-organisation using guidelines for inclusion. This is detailed in the next chapter, Methodology.

To analyse the dynamic nature of this system, three mechanisms are utilised, each of which draws attention to the relational aspect of complexity, and provide a focus for analysis. These are feedback loops, thickening relations, and facilitation. These three mechanisms are the links between the three concepts, bringing everything together in a narrative model. The model, would be summarised as such:

In this project, a complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance is one in which villagers interact with each other to produce emergent effects – patterns of actions that resist structural violence in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018. They are self-organised i.e. without external direction or an internal coordination body, and they are adapting to the new threats, testing new actions and changing actions where necessary.

The three mechanisms which provide detail on how emergence, self-organisation and adaption evolve and develop are as follows:

Feedback loops – The resistance acts of villagers are shaped by feedback loops, positive and negative. For example, if an act of resistance proves successful at mitigating violence, it is tried again, hence a positive feedback loop develops. If, however, an act is responded to with more violence or repression, such as arrest or threat, this stymies the path of continuing those actions and is thus an example of a negative feedback loop. This feedback shapes the path of patterns of resistance as they give encouragement to continue certain actions or strategies, or can stop a pattern forming as villagers perceive a certain action as ineffective or too risky. A negative feedback loop can play a role in balancing the system, keeping it from evolving and maintaining the status quo. A positive feedback loop can serve as a catalyst for adaption and dynamic change.

Thickening relations – The more connections that there are between villagers, the more interactions there are which results in the emergence of resistance. This can take the form of networks, local organisations, or loose associations of villagers, coming together to connect and take subsequent action to counter or mitigate threats. Importantly, it is not the entities that are important, it is the relations. By interacting with each other, whether confronting, negotiating with, or other forms of engagement with say a company or a local army battalion, it is the relations that are the loci of resistance. These relations are not static and evolve and adapt over time. Thus, the shifting dynamic between the Myanmar military and local villagers in ceasefire time can mean that villagers gain more confidence to actively confront the military as there is less threat of violence. What is important, and is related to complexity thinking and particularly the complexity concept of emergence, is that the more connections there are and the deepening of relations among villagers produces more interactions which, among other social phenomena, leads to the potential for more resistance actions when faced with threat. Thickening relations are thus a mechanism that produces more emergent effects

of resistance. The more that actors in the system are connected and networked, the more complex the system is.

Facilitation – The thickening of these relations can be guided or facilitated by "strong agents," (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.45) which are part of the system itself and serve to bring people together. Ramalingham and Jones distinguish between strong and weak agents in a complex adaptive system. For weak agents, or reactive agents, self-organisation is "driven entirely by their interactions with other actors" while for strong agents "interaction may still be significant, but their internal cognitive structures, beliefs and perceptions are also significant" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.50). While not necessarily coordinating resistance actions, strong agents can, in a sense, enable them or help them along. As nodes in the system with more connections than a typical agent, they can link people together and channel information throughout the geographical area. These strong agents "have 'beliefs', 'desires' and 'intentions' that are used to formulate plans for future behaviour" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.45). I am using the term 'facilitation' to describe how these strong agents work to catalyse this resistance. In a similar vein, Alex Williams, whose book contends that a theory of hegemony is best explained through the lens of complexity theory, writes of "guided self-organisation" in which actors can draw on and work with existing tendencies within society to further a particular form of hegemony (Williams, 2020, p.145). This in turn, creates emergent phenomenon which acts as a downwards causation, i.e. the emergent effects of the interactions between people, shaped by particular actors, then works back downwards on those people in terms of further shaping self-organisation practices. Similar to self-organisation, he names this "intrinsic generativity" (Williams, 2020, p.144). By incorporating Ramalingham and Jones' (2008) notion of strong agents, this can be transposed to the resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar, whose role is 'facilitation.' They facilitate the self-organisation of villagers by providing information and resources, building capacity, and creating networks of communication and exchange. This role is played by a local civil society and community-based organisations, village-level associations or inter-village networks. Such organisations, or strong agents, are spread throughout south-eastern Myanmar, and are not formally attached to each other in a social movement sense, but are dispersed and loosely connected. They do not coordinate or organise resistance actions concerned with in this thesis, but they facilitate the coming together of people to self-organise. This relativises the notion of self-organisation, and this will be discussed more in the empirical chapters and conclusion.

The diagram below is a framework to describe and explain dispersed resistance if it were a complex adaptive system, shaped and formed by these three key concepts, with the three mechanisms in place. The three main concepts that connect to form a complex adaptive system are in orange, while the three mechanisms that connect the concepts are in green.

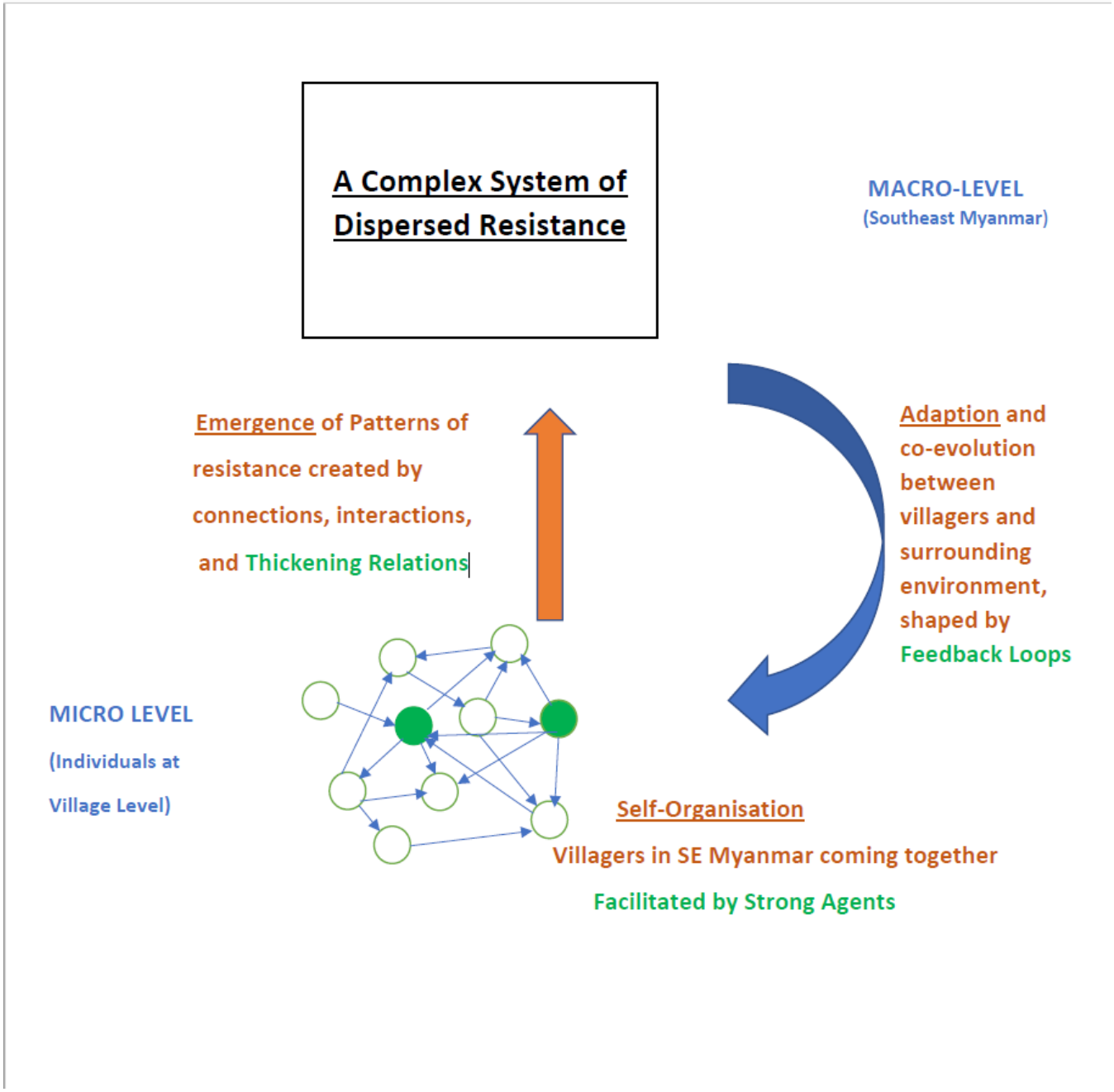


Figure 2: A complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance

(Adapted from Stauffer, 2018)

At the micro-level, which in this project is the level of the village, interactions between adaptive agents (villagers and local, community-based and civil society organisations) produce *emergent effects* (patterns of resistance). It is these micro-level interactions that, when aggregated, create the macro-level emergent phenomenon (Stauffer, 2018). The villagers, or agents in a system, are represented by the green circles and the arrows are these villagers connecting and interacting. The more connections that villagers have with each other, the thicker their relationships and thus the more interactions they have, therefore producing more emergent effects of resistance. If villagers do not interact, they are less connected, and thus the less resistance there is. Resistance comes into being when there is a relation between two or more entities (villagers), and the interaction produces the resistance. Alone, the villager is a villager, an entity. When interacting with another villager, or confronting a company, this is a relation, and the emergent effect of this relation is where resistance is found. Hence, for the system to become more complex, it is necessary for there to be more connections.

The villagers' behaviour is *self-organised*, in that it does not rely on external direction, nor has an internal coordinating body. These actions, however, are a reaction and in relation to the world around them. They are decentralised and distributed through the system. By this, it means that resistance patterns are organised from the ground and are spread through different villages and townships throughout south-eastern Myanmar. A key mechanism that helps this self-organisation along is the facilitation done by strong agents i.e. local level organisations, networks and leaders. They are part of the system itself, and provide the resources, information and capacity to assist villagers who themselves organise and carry out resistance actions. The green circles that are filled in represent the facilitating agents, or strong agents. These are often community leaders or community-based organisations. They have more connections because they do the work of facilitating interaction. Villagers still interact without their presence, but more so if they are present and active in communities. Thus, there is a form of facilitated self-organisation.

The changing external environment influences both the micro-level interactions between villagers and the overall emergent resistance patterns that are the properties of the system at the macro-level, with both the micro-level and macro-levels co-evolving with and adapting to each other. The external environment in this case is the political and economic context that is undergoing significant shifts due to ceasefire and economic liberalisation. These changes

have brought about new threats (as outlined in Chapter Two – Ceasefire Capitalism) that the villagers of south-eastern Myanmar are adapting to and one particular manifestation of this *adaption* is dispersed resistance. Actors learn from past experience and history, self-organising to produce new patterns of behaviour. The system undergoes a "a continuous process of inductive adaptation, regulated by its own self-organizing processes" (de Coning, 2016, p.840). An important mechanism that produces this adaption are feedback loops, in which information travels between the agents (villagers) and their surrounding environment, leading to "small changes and nurturing learning capacity" (Stauffer, 2018). With new threat but also new opportunity villagers can change the way they resist or mitigate the various destructive consequences of the new context. There is thus space to attempt new resistance actions which were thought of as not possible before. Some of these may face the same violent or oppressive consequences, and are thus not viewed as a viable strategy moving forward – a negative feedback loop. Yet if there are not disproportionally adverse costs to this action, or if it proves to attain positive results, it can be tried again, copied by other villagers, and repeated, forming a new pattern. The concept of adaption also means that the actors have agency to change the system, although, as explained earlier, this can be restricted due to power imbalances. Thus, the villagers are the ones partly driving the system of dispersed resistance, whilst at the same time limited by the repressive and dangerous conditions that they live in which more powerful actors restrict their agency and capacity to adapt. For example, a group of villagers may organise a committee to protest and ultimately stop the extension of a gold mining project. However, a powerful battalion commander with links to the mining company may threaten the villagers with violent reprisals if they continue their action. This not only restricts their adaptive agency, but is also an example of a negative feedback loop.

As Figure 2 shows, these three complexity concepts of emergence, self-organisation, and adaption are closely linked in that they shape and are constitutive of each other. The emergence of certain behaviours is based on the self-organising, adaptive capacity of the individual actors at the micro-level. One of the tasks of the analysis is to map out these patterns of resistance in order to present whether there is indeed an adaption by villagers to this dynamic environment and the extent of self-organisation.

4.4 Conclusion

These concepts – emergence, self-organisation and adaption – are key components of a complex adaptive system that can help to interpret a social phenomenon such as resistance. If these three concepts can be found to be present - as stated by the three propositions and linked with each other when investigating the social phenomenon of resistance - it is possible to describe dispersed resistance as a complex adaptive system. Focusing on the dynamic relations within this system, through the mechanisms of feedback loops, thickening relations, and facilitation, allows us to narrate a model of a complex adaptive system. This in turn, allows us to explain how the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved to new forms of structural violence. The task of this research then, is to analyse the shifting relations within the dataset available, and investigate the presence and extent of adaption, self-organisation, and emergence. The next section will explain the research methodology and how this framework is operationalised.

Chapter Five: Methodology

5.1 Overview

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical lens with which I will explain how the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved amid new forms of structural violence. This chapter will present the methodology of how I operationalised this framework, what methods and data I used, and how I applied the complexity concepts of emergence, adaption, and self-organisation to this data.

The main research method I employed was a thematic analysis of already existing documentation. A primary reason that this data corpus was used is because the political crisis in Myanmar and the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic rendered extensive fieldwork almost impossible and not permitted by Durham University during the period of this PhD. The thematic analysis was applied to documentation that was produced by a local, ethnic Karen, human rights organisation (the Karen Human Rights Group) and published as appendices for three reports on human rights issues in south-eastern Myanmar – in 2013, 2015, and 2018. This data corpus is comprised of interviews, situation updates, photographs and other pieces of data. This data was published as part of KHRG's work to document human rights violations and advocate accordingly. The thematic analysis of this data used coding to identify the patterns of resistance - which in complexity terms are the emergent outcomes - as well as the complexity concepts of adaption and self-organisation. I used a concept-book that contains the three concepts, related propositions, and guidance for inclusion. I also conducted an interview with KHRG staff in order to glean more information about KHRG's own research process. This interview does not form the main body of data, but contextualises the data corpus in terms of how and why it was produced.

5.1.1. Methodological Approach

This thesis is based on a qualitative interpretive design. By this I mean that there is not a singular understanding of the political and social dynamics of the world of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar that is objectively correct. Thus, epistemologically, "the signs and symbols

that the knower(s) select represent only part of the complexity of the known, this act of sense-making will always be partial and generative of multiple interpretations" (McAllum et al, 2019, p.360). My interpretation then, is just one that is itself based on interpretations given in the data corpus by villagers to KHRG (more on this in later section). When using the language of resistance as a complex adaptive system to cope with violence, this is an interpretation that I, as a PhD researcher and all the experiences, aspects of my identity, positionality, education, and interactions that I have had with people in Myanmar, am investigating. I am using information regarding one aspect of the communities in south-eastern Myanmar, and applying abstract concepts of adaption, emergence, and self-organisation that are part of a complexity lens to explain and make sense of a phenomenon that I am labelling resistance. I will expand on my own positionality in Section 5.4.3 below, but it is brought up here as it informed the interpretative epistemology underpinning the methodological approach.

In order to undertake this investigation, however, I needed data on the examples of resistance of those villagers. Even though computational methods such as agent-based modelling tend to dominate in complexity approaches, (Geller, 2011, p.68), instead I used a qualitative, thematic analysis of an existing data corpus produced by a human rights organisation that documents villagers' voices in the geographical area that is the focus of this thesis. A thematic analysis involves rounds of coding into categories, and then themes. The process of coding – summarising, sorting, and finding meaning in a text - is itself an interpretative act (Saldaña, 2013, p.4) and is thus consistent with an interpretative epistemology. As per Saldaña, for:

> the individual researcher, assigning symbolic meanings (i.e., a code) to data is an act of personal signature. And since we each most likely perceive the social world differently, we will therefore experience it differently, interpret it differently, document it differently, code it differently, analyze it differently, and write about it differently (Saldaña, 2013, p.39).

Furthermore, I did not want to predict the possibilities of what may happen in the future which is what simulations and modelling, the dominant complexity methods, often aim to do. Rather, I used existing data from a set time period to ascertain patterns and meaning of social

and political dynamics that have already happened. Lastly, I took a deductive approach, applying preconceived concepts to the data.

5.1.2 The Data Corpus

In 2021, the time of when the research methodology was being designed, the military coup attempt[13] of 1st February, 2021 and related spread of violence meant that fieldwork in Myanmar was impractical and potentially dangerous. Following this coup attempt, healthcare workers were at the frontline of a civil disobedience movement with many refusing to work in junta-run hospitals. A subsequent crackdown on medical workers, including arrests, violent assaults, attacks on medical facilities, occupation of hospitals by the military, and threats to family members meant that many doctors went underground to treat patients and the public healthcare system collapsed (Médicins Sans Frontières, 2021). With the healthcare system in tatters, the country then became a breeding ground for COVID-19 for several months in 2021 as the Delta variant surged. Reliable statistics are hard to come by regarding exact numbers of cases and deaths but a December 2021 report by the international health NGO, Médicins Sans Frontières, stated that beds in hospitals were full, the staffing of such facilities skeletal, and people were scrambling to find oxygen which the junta was hoarding (Médicins Sans Frontières, 2021). Media stories at the time reported of crematoriums not being able to deal with dead bodies fast enough and funeral services being overwhelmed ("Myanmar funeral services overwhelmed," 2021) and Physicians for Human Rights stated that at the time "COVID-19 deaths were amongst the highest in the world" (Physicians for Human Rights, 2021, p.1).[14]

The reason this situation is being outlined is that this is the context in which I was designing the methodology for this PhD and given the uncertainties of the pandemic in general, it was unclear when the situation would end. Community groups and civil society organisations in Myanmar and the border areas were engaged in emergency response activities to deal with

[13] I use coup 'attempt' here to draw attention to the lack of success the military had in consolidating power after its putsch. At the time of writing, the various resistance forces, including groups such as the KNU, have successfully prevented the junta from enjoying 'effective control' over the country. For more, see this report by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/2022/09/statement-briefing-effective-control-myanmar/

[14] On a personal note, my own personal social media feeds were full of desperate posts of Myanmar people trying to secure oxygen supplies or speaking of relatives who were seriously ill or had recently died of the pandemic.

both COVID and increasing displacement due to armed conflict (Karen Human Rights Group, 2022). This hugely impacted the methodological choices of this PhD, including the data corpus used. Balancing the benefit of this research and the valuable time of people facing multiple crises meant that extensive fieldwork or even the use of in-country research assistants or online interviews was therefore very challenging. With the pandemic emergency compounded by the violence of the coup, it became clear that the most ethical choice of research method was to primarily use data that was already available. Therefore, most of the data I used to explain resistance is that which already exists, is available online, and is produced by a local organisation – the Karen Human Rights Group. However, I conducted one 45 minute interview with a member of the information processing team of KHRG to provide additional information on the production of this data corpus. This interview and the broader methodology was approved by the School of Government and International Affairs' Ethics Review Committee at Durham University.

The Karen Human Rights Group was established in 1992 and "quickly rose to become the premier fact-finding organization in southeastern Myanmar" (MacLean, 2022, p.76). It was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, in 2000 and 2001 (Karen Human Rights Group, n.d.), and in 2013 received the Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award from the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, n.d.). It claims to be "independent and unaffiliated" and conducts documentation, report writing, local and international advocacy, and workshops and training on human rights related issues covering south-eastern Myanmar, where predominantly ethnic Karen people live (Karen Human Rights Group, n.d.). In particular they have a "focus on villagers' responses and the way these responses can be supported" (Karen Human Rights Group, n.d.).

KHRG is part of local networks of Karen community-based organizations, with the Karen Peace Support Network – a network of 30 Karen CSOs in Myanmar and Thailand - the most prominent. KHRG regularly joins national CSOs and other ethnic CBOs in advocacy activities, for example co-signing open letters to the UN Security Council urging concrete action against the Myanmar military, or calling attention to the situation of refugees on World Refugee Day through joint statements with other CSOs. It regularly shares its data with international mechanisms such as the UN Special Rapporteurs, makes submissions to UN Conventions such as the Universal Periodic Review and CEDAW (Matelski et al, 2022) and engages with the international bodies, for example giving an oral statement to the UN

Security Council ("Reforms Make Little Difference in Rural Burma," 2012). International human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International rely on KHRG and other local documentation groups for data, contacts, and contextual information for their own work (Matelski et al, 2022). Academic researchers also use KHRG data or conduct interviews with their staff and KHRG has their own policy and decision-making process for any such cooperation.[15] KHRG documents violations in mostly rural parts of south-eastern Myanmar and has been criticised in the past for a perceived "close relationship with Karen armed groups" (MacLean, 2022, p.76) but as Matelski points out, this is necessary for access to many parts of southeastern Myanmar. KHRG also states that it maintains its political independence (MacLean, 2022, p.76), including through documentation and statements of condemnation of human rights violations by Karen armed groups.

KHRG produce regular reports on the human rights situation in south-eastern Myanmar, with various thematic focus, such as land confiscation, women's rights, and ceasefire dynamics. As part of their reports, they also publish lengthy appendices which contain translated raw data of anonymised interviews with villagers, situation updates from field-based staff, photographs, maps, and other relevant documentation. The field researchers of KHRG are community members themselves, who live and work in villages and collect information based on the most pressing human rights concerns at that time. Given that they are embedded, indeed part of the community, they are best placed to assess, plan for, and act upon any local security concerns. Furthermore, any equipment or documentation they possess is destroyed or thrown away if security concerns do arise.[16] The original language of the data collected is in Karen or Burmese language and is transcribed and translated into English by KHRG staff for their own analysis and publication with a policy of review and cross-checking by editorial staff if said material is published. KHRG has its own process of anonymisation to ensure that the names of people, villages, the specific authority that perpetrated the human rights violation (if it would reveal the identity of the villager who was affected) and specific place of the incident (beyond broader area names) are redacted when reports and appendices are published.[17]

[15] Personal communication with KHRG Information Processing Team member, 17 February, 2023.
[16] Personal communication with KHRG Information Processing Team member, 17 February, 2023.
[17] Personal communication with KHRG Information Processing Team member, 17 February, 2023.

A typical appendix would include around 100 separate testimonies or interviews with local villagers. This is a description by KHRG of their data collection process:

> KHRG trains villagers in southeast Myanmar to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format, conduct interviews with other villagers and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, villagers are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics. KHRG translates all documents for publication and undertakes minor edits only for security and clarity (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.1).

In the period of research for this thesis, 2012 - 2018, there are three thematic KHRG reports, with accompanying appendices, that I primarily used. These three reports, published in 2013, 2015, and 2018, focused on business-related human rights violations, threats to land security, other major development projects such as infrastructure construction, and post-2012 ceasefire dynamics. These reports are most closely related to my research question, i.e. the changing political economy and the response of villages to the new forms of violence that ceasefire and liberalisation wrought. The appendices contain the interview transcripts, villager testimony and various photosets, incident reports and complaint letters. This amounts to over 1,000 pages of data and over 300 pieces of documentation. Appendix A provides a breakdown of each type of data according to each of the three thematic reports. KHRG also publishes other data on their website on particular incidents or updates, which were also referred to where necessary. Part of the reason that they publish these appendices, beyond transparency of their evidence, is for third parties, such as myself, to make use and get more detailed information about the broader human rights issues that KHRG documents.[18]

[18] Personal communication with KHRG Information Processing Team member, 17 February, 2023.

5.2 Operationalising the Framework

5.2.1 A Two Step Process

I used a deductive, two-step thematic analysis as the primary research method based on the above data corpus. As summarised above, these datasets are the three appendices to KHRG reports, containing over 1,000 data items in the form of transcribed interviews with villagers, situation updates by KHRG field staff, photographs, land confiscation forms, and other miscellaneous pieces of documentation. My analysis is not an overall description of the data corpus, but a focus on one particular aspect - resistance. Other aspects of the data, such as gendered nature of violence, the ebb and flow of particular human rights violations, or impacts on livelihoods are important in their own right, but not the focus of this research.

I conducted two rounds of thematic analysis. The aim of Round One was to produce an analytic narrative of the patterns of resistance of villagers between 2012 and 2018. In complexity language, these patterns are the 'emergent outcomes' produced by the interactions of adaptive agents. In this respect, I address proposition one regarding the concept of 'emergence':

Proposition One: *Patterns of resistance emerge that confront, challenge and negotiate state power from a position of subordination.*

The narrative description of the resistance patterns thus allowed me to see what the system looks like. I referred to the four criteria, definition, and conceptualisation outlined in Chapter Three: Resistance, which reviewed the relevant literature to aid identification of resistance.

Round Two analysed the system, i.e. the patterns of resistance, to identify the presence/absence of the two complexity concepts of adaption and self-organisation. This addressed propositions two and three:

Proposition Two: Adaption – *These resistance patterns adapt and are in response to changing political, economic and conflict dynamics.*

Proposition Three: Self-organisation - *The patterns of resistance acts have no central organisation or coordination mechanism, are spread throughout the areas, and begin at the village level.*

Both Round One and Round Two followed a thematic analysis process based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) succinct set of guidelines for conducting this qualitative research method, going through several steps to go from codes to categories of emergent patterns of resistance and the presence and manifestation of adaption and self-organisation. Both rounds used a concept-book of preconceived concepts based on my analytical framework and the theoretical lens I used to approach this research. This concept-book is composed of the three propositional statements as well as guidelines and questions that served as rules for inclusion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.203). The concept-book's ultimate purpose was to guide the identification of the presence of these complexity themes, or concepts, in the data.

The reason I used a two-step process is that it is necessary to investigate the presence of adaption and self-organisation (the two concepts that are the focus of Round Two of the methodology) from within the emergent patterns of resistance itself rather than the whole data corpus. The data corpus contains a significant amount of information regarding other social phenomena, whether that is regarding livelihoods, conflict, or governance. These other social phenomena may or may not also contain valid information related to adaption and self-organisation. I could end up coding data that relates to adaption to changing weather patterns, or tactical adaption of armed actors in a ceasefire period. However, it is (dispersed) resistance that is the focus of this research. Hence why it is necessary to present resistance first, and then investigate the presence or absence of adaption and self-organisation *within* that resistance.

5.2.2 Drawing Boundaries Around the System

An irony of designing a methodology and research methods within an analytical framework that utilises complexity concepts is that the design will *reduce* complexity by placing a boundary, or boundaries, around the system (Hetherington, 2018, p.74). I have already outlined the conceptual implications of boundaries in Chapter Four: Complexity, while here I discuss the methodological, practical implications.

Defined as "an artificial frame or socially constructed reference point which connects (not separates) a system with its environment" (Gear et al, 2018, p.2) a boundary will naturally limit the aspects of complexity being studied in terms of time, space, and actions. Practically, however, there is a need to place a limit around the system in order to narrate the system of resistance in this thesis and to aid comprehension. As per the epistemological stance of interpretivism, it is the decisions that I am making as a researcher to define the limits of this adaptive system, thus reducing its complexity in terms of presentation to the reader. As argued by Hetherington, "the necessity of locating a focus of interest and setting boundaries on what will be included in the research is an act of complexity reduction that locates the research within the research field *and* in the system that is researched" (Hetherington, 2013, p.79).

Indeed, the issue of where to place the boundary around the system is a difficult and tricky exercise (Emirbayer, 1997, p.303). Emirbayer notes two strategies to address this. First, the "realist" approach, in which the social phenomenon can only be said to exist in that it is consciously recognised and acknowledged by the actors involved in creating it. The second, "nominalist" approach, relies more on the subjective interpretation of the scholar/observer, who draws the boundaries themselves (Emirbayer, 1997, p.303). This thesis takes the latter approach for practical reasons. The methodology I am using is that of existing data, and the possibility of directly asking villagers in south-eastern Myanmar how they interpret their actions was not possible due to security reasons. Furthermore, I analysed secondary data that had already placed boundaries on temporality and spatiality. Resistance patterns could be narrated for a much longer time duration than this thesis (2012-2018) and could potentially include a much broader spatial scope, i.e. the whole of Myanmar, or even across regional borders to neighbouring countries. Unless boundaries are drawn, the description would be as complex as the social phenomena itself.

Boundaries, then, are unavoidable and "moreover, we cannot accurately determine the boundaries of the system, because it is open" (Cilliers, 2016, p.28). If we were to accurately describe the system, "we therefore have to model each and every interaction in the system, each and every interaction with the environment— which is of course also complex—as well as each and every interaction in the history of the system. In short, we will have to model life, the universe and everything" (Cilliers, 2016, p.28). However, I am engaging in an exercise of knowledge production that needs to set limits to what I am examining in terms of

practicalities. Hence it was necessary for me, the author and researcher, to place practical limits on what this thesis is concerned with, otherwise, the system would eventually encompass a huge, untenable scope. The time frame is one in which significant political and economic change occurred. It is a period of dynamism, where relationships were unstable, new actors were entering the area, and decades-long patterns of conflict, threat, survival, and indeed, resistance, were shifting, providing fertile grounds for inquiry. It is an interpretation of what was happening, with spatial and temporal boundaries defined by myself, but justified in that the social phenomenon – dispersed resistance – was occurring in this spatial and temporal limit as per the definition outlined in Chapter Three: Resistance, which itself is based on existing resistance scholarship.

The practical boundary then, is limited to the temporality and spatiality of the research question and the data available. The temporal boundary is between 2012 and 2018 and the spatial boundary is the geographical region of south-eastern Myanmar. In forming this boundary, I am interpreting the extent of a complex adaptive system of resistance in south-eastern Myanmar in a particular time period.

5.3 Methods

5.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis "involves the searching across a data set - be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts - to find repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86). For this thesis, the thematic analysis was composed of several rounds of coding data into categories using the software programme, NVivo. Coding is "a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or "families" because they share some characteristic – the beginning of a pattern" (Saldaña, 2013, p.9). I adopted Braun and Clarke's six-step process that guides thematic analysis. However, I adapted their guidelines in one minor aspect to better suit my method. For Braun and Clarke, steps four and five are both concerned with reviewing and refining a set of themes – in my case categories. Step four involves "checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis," while step five

involves "ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87). Therefore, given, in my view, the lack of substantive difference between steps four and five, I conflated the two so that Part One consists of five steps, not six as per Braun and Clarke. This five step process will be detailed in the section 5.3.3 - 'Coding' - below.

5.3.2 Concept-book

There are two types of thematic analysis – deductive and inductive. During inductive coding, themes 'emerge' from the data without trying to fit them into pre-conceived categories. It is thus 'data-driven' (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.83). Deductive, or theoretical thematic analysis, starts with codes based on the researcher's analytical or theoretical framework, which is my approach as I am applying a complexity lens and its associated concepts to social phenomena, rather than generating theory from the data. In a deductive thematic analysis, Crabtree's and Miller's suggestion of a "codebook," which is produced before the start of thematic analysis, is a useful research tool (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Such a codebook is a "data management tool" that "is used to organize segments of similar or related text for ease in interpretation and to search for confirming/disconfirming evidence of these interpretations" (Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p.99). It consists of pre-conceived concepts or codes based on the theoretical approach to the research. This is exactly the purpose that I conducted this thematic analysis. I was looking for evidence within the patterns of resistance that confirms or negates the presence of complexity concepts of adaption and self-organisation. However, I adapted this idea of a codebook, and used the term, 'concept-book' instead. This better reflects the theoretically-driven themes I analysed, rather than 'codes' which is a term better suited to description through categorisation. My concept-book resembles a table that has three components: a) the concept; b) propositional statements describing how those concepts relate to the research question; and c) guidance notes (Saldaña, 2013, Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). I formed these propositional statements based on a review of literature on resistance and complex adaptive systems and is a summary of the defining and consistently mentioned features and properties of these concepts. For example, for the concept of resistance I used the four criteria developed in Chapter Three: Resistance. The concept-book is best viewed then as a guiding document that helped me to identify the data that fits the preconceived concepts. i.e. which segments of data "captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.82).

Table 1: Concept-Book

Concept	Proposition	Guidance
Emergence	Patterns of resistance emerge that confront, challenge and negotiate state power from a position of subordination.	- Small scale or individual acts. The action itself is important. Understanding alone does not suffice. - Carried out by a villager, group of villagers, or small organisation in a subordinated position vis-à-vis the Myanmar state. - It is directed against the assemblage of actors that create the violence. This includes the Myanmar military, Myanmar military proxy forces, government officials/representatives from either local or central government, private companies, and local authorities/administrators, i.e. it is in relation to the target. - The action recognisably challenges/confronts/negotiates i.e. it is not hidden or covert or ambiguous in terms of who it is aimed at. - What forms a pattern? If a similar act is noted more than once, this suffices for inclusion. If more than twice, this is a pattern. - An act of resistance that occurs once but is not successful could be a

		useful indicator of a negative feedback loop (a complexity concept). - Resistance acts that appear several times in the data, however, give richer details on the interactions that catalyse such emergent effects, and will thus have utility in terms of potential identification of complexity concepts of self-organisation and adaption. Hence patterns are important. - Look for actions that are spread around different villages/village tracts/townships. If there is a geographical spread, it can be said to be dispersed. - In interviews, focus especially on any questions around 'Village/Villager Agency.' - Words such as 'negotiate,' 'we tried,' 'addressed,' and 'took action,' are indicative of resistance.
Adaption	Resistance patterns adapt and are in response to changing political, economic and conflict dynamics.	- Changes in resistance actions are noted. This could mean that earlier in the data corpus, a particular type of resistance action is more common, such as appealing to higher authorities, but later in the time period, the resistance becomes more confrontational, such as small

		protest. Note changes in *patterns* over time. - Related to this, note changes in resistance acts in certain locales. i.e. townships, villages, or village tracts. For example, in one village, they may have tried to resist a development project through appealing to other authorities in 2012 but in 2017, they formed a committee and directly confronted the company. If this is the case, note what political, economic, or conflict-related changes occurred in that locale. - A villager states that they previously did something, now they did something else. Look for what that previous action is, what is the new action, and if the villager stated why they adopted a new tactic. - Note trial and error type scenarios E.g. villagers try one action, it does not work, and they try something different. Or if they try something and is later repeated by villagers in the same village or village tract. - Villager stating that they tried something new/something they had not done before. - Any information that relates to changes in villager action with larger level political and economic

		changes. For example, do they mention the 2012 ceasefire and if that catalysed change? Do they mention the NLD government, or new laws that facilitate investment? - Note the response to the resistance action from the targets of the resistance, where possible. Note the impact that this has on the nature of the resistance action. Do villagers change their action in response to this? This is related to feedback loops. - Note if a new dynamic catalyses action. This new dynamic could be: • Threat of violence. • New battalion or armed group becomes active in the area • Receiving training or advice e.g. from a community organisation. • Announcement or learning of a new development project. • Expansion of an existing development project. Note any direct response to that. - Does a villager explicitly state that the action is in response to the new dynamic? E.g. 'After the announcement of the gold mine expansion on our land, we formed a committee.' - Words and vocabulary that includes 'past,' 'before,' 'could,' 'couldn't,'

		'now,' 'these days,' 'in the current situation,' 'after x,' and 'because of x.'
Self-organisation	The patterns of resistance acts have no central organisation or coordination mechanism, are spread throughout the areas, and begin at the village level.	- Note who is enacting the resistance practices. Note whether it is individuals, groups of individuals, or organisations (big or small). If it is at a village level, this is self-organised. - If there is an organising body, what level is it? Village? Township? State? If it is village, village tract, or township level, it can be classed as self-organised, because this is still the micro-level. - Look for organisations/institutions/agencies that are part of the action. If there are organisations that are involved, state if they are large/small/community-based/international. Describe the impact these external agents/forces had on the resistance actions. Do they help villagers to understand their rights/context/opportunities? Or do they do more, and organise, plan or even coordinate the resistance action? Note the details. - Do villagers mention a leader as part of the action? Describe the interaction/relationship between the villagers that preceded the

		resistance action. E.g. villagers from three different villages came together to form a committee. - Are the resistance acts decentralised and distributed throughout the region? Note the different townships where each type of resistance action takes place. Note if they are concentrated in one area or township. If they are geographically spread, i.e. documented in several places, we can say that they are decentralised patterns, distributed throughout south-eastern Myanmar. - Are the targets of resistance local i.e. at village or township level, or are they national, such as a government ministry? If it is national or even regional, interrogate if such resistance practices were part of a social movement or national campaign. For example, there is a petition letter against a localised dam project, but is this part of an organised campaign throughout the region or country against hydropower. Looking at the target will aid investigation. - Note instances where a resistance action is repeated. Was there a success or encouragement? E.g. a

		petition letter forced the company to negotiate, so the villagers at the next village also tried a petition letter. This is positive feedback. Also describe instances of negative feedback loops that stymie action. Are certain resistance actions met with violence, repression, or further loss of land/livelihood/cultural resources? This is an example of a negative feedback loop. - What, if any, resources do villagers use in their resistance actions and where do these resources come from? Are they provided from external actors? - Look for words such as 'organised' 'assistance' 'told' 'coordinated,' 'we,' 'came together,' 'formed' etc.

5.3.3 Coding

Armed with this concept-book, I implemented the five-step coding process, based on Braun and Clarke's model (2006) of thematic analysis. Round One of this five-step analysis described the patterns of resistance. Round Two identified the presence/extent of the complexity concepts of adaption and self-organisation. The below explanation of the five-step process uses Round One to illustrate the process.

Step One

Step one of this thematic analysis was to familiarise myself with the data. This involved a close reading of the appendices identified, immersing myself in the data looking for initial categories that fit the concepts, the type of information, and different forms of data items (i.e. photographs, interviews, situation updates, etc.). This can be known as pre-coding (Saldaña,

2013, p.9), and certain aspects of the text were highlighted, underlined, or initial notes made. While time consuming, this was an important step before coding began (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcription is a good way with which to familiarise and conduct an initial immersion into the data, yet this was not possible as the data had already been transcribed and translated from the original Karen or Burmese language(s) into English.

Round Two of the thematic analysis did not repeat this step. Rather than the whole data corpus, this round only focused on the parts that discussed or described the resistance activities. Given that step one was already done and is a more general step, it did not need to be repeated.

Step Two

This step was the first round of coding. A code is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2013, p.3). This meant going through every single data extract and identifying initial codes (not categories or concepts yet) that formed patterns. For example, using this extract:

> After the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire, the situation has improved so villagers can exercise freedom of speech. Now, villagers have organised themselves and they have reported the [land confiscation] issue by sending complaint letters to the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government township, district and regional authorities (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.169).

In this case, a code was 'submitting complaint letters.' Some data extracts had more than one code. The codes formed the basis of the type of resistance acts of villagers. I used the NVivo software programme that is available at Durham University. Of course, coding is not in itself a completely objective exercise and my own individual decisions of what to code and how to code are editorial choices influenced by my own positionality, as discussed below, and the research project being implemented. This goes back to the interpretive approach outlined earlier. Therefore, while it is not necessarily something that can be or even should be, completely mitigated, it is important to be transparent and acknowledge that the interpretative

decisions of what to code were made by myself and all the bias, knowledge (or lack thereof), and experience that led me to such editorial decisions.

Step 3

This stage is where levels of analysis became more interpretative, as I sorted out codes into broader categories. Some codes became categories or sub-categories while some codes did not fit under a particular category. By creating a level of abstraction that sorts codes into different categories, it is here that the patterns became evident. The following is an example of how the codes were organised into categories:

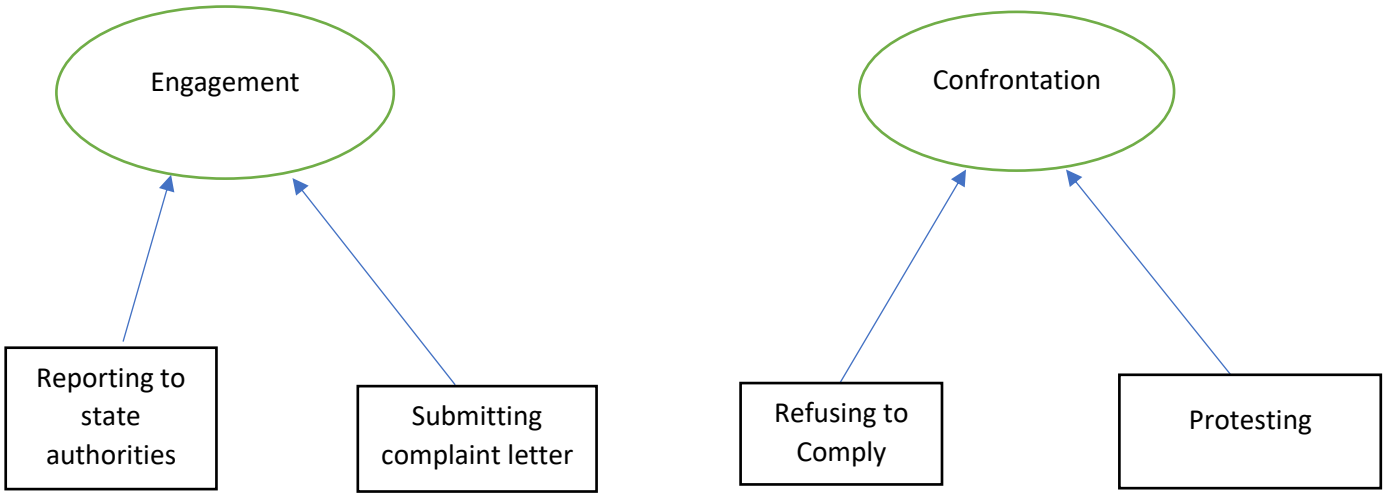


Figure 3: Codes into categories

The categories are in the green ovals and the codes are in the black boxes. Both of the categories of Engagement and Confrontation are resistance categories and fit under the definition and concept outlined in Chapter Three: Resistance. Appendix B presents every category and code.

Step 4

This is the review stage where I refined the categories and defined them more succinctly. Involved in this stage is ensuring that the categories fulfilled two criteria - "internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). This means that data

within categories was coherent with each other while categories themselves were distinct *enough* from each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to do this, I re-read each data extract that was under each category, rearranging themes and codes where necessary, i.e. certain data extracts did not fit under a certain category and needed to be reassessed. I also re-read the entire data corpus, with the final categories in mind, to check whether certain data extracts had been missed in initial readings where the categories were not as set in stone.

Step 5

The final stage is presenting the data, which is expanded in the following empirical chapters. This involved "going back to collated data extracts for each theme, and organizing them into a coherent and internally consistent account, with accompanying narrative" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). I explain in more detail what each category means, why it is important, how they relate to other categories, the broader context, and the overall research question. This stage ends the first round of the thematic analysis with a write up of the data on resistance into a "concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell – within and across themes." For Braun and Clarke this "write-up must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data – i.e., enough data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.93). Data extracts are not only a presentation of the themes, but they also include "analytical narrative" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.93) that link these patterns of resistance to the forms of structural violence that villagers in south-eastern Myanmar were facing in the new political and economic context of ceasefire capitalism, as well as identifying which themes were most important and why. Using data excerpts in the presentation of the findings, i.e., direct quotes from the data, to support the arguments being made, aids "interpretive rigor" by ensuring "that data interpretation remains directly linked to the words of the participants" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p.82). The write-up goes "beyond description of the data, and make an argument in relation to…*[my]* research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93). Thus, the findings analyse the nature of these patterns of resistance, in what ways they were a response to violence, and how they changed, adapted and evolved to the changing context and environment.

To summarise the final step of organising this data, there are four chapters based on four categories of resistance – Engagement, Mobilisation, Leveraging Local Leaders and

Organisations, and Confrontation, as presented in the next four chapters. It is important to remember here that the categories of resistance are interlinked, and complementary. While it is possible to identify and group together certain actions, as this thesis has done, these are not hard divisions, and there is overlap. For example, one resistance action of confrontation, such as a protest against a mining project, may be a result of the mobilisation of villagers the week before. Furthermore, this mobilisation may have been facilitated by a local community organisation and was only attempted after engagement did not stop the mining project going ahead. In this example, all four of the modes, or categories of resistance, are present. This shows that there are limitations in trying to maintain discrete boundaries between the categories. Additionally it is not the purpose to conceptualise the modes of resistance and further develop insights into what engagement, mobilisation, leveraging local leaders and organisations, or confrontation mean. Hence there is no linkage to say, mobilisation academic literature. Put simply, they are a means to categorise the modes of resistance, not to conceptualise them.

These categories however, while overlapping, do share certain elements or characteristics that means it is possible to loosely delineate them from each other as outlined in step four above. These modes of resistance, organised into different categories, are found to be repeated throughout the geographical region. Hence they become the various patterns of emergent resistance.

5.3.3 Triangulation

Thematic analysis of the three appendices was the main method of this thesis. However, there were other sources of textual information that were consulted in order to provide more information on the history and context of south-eastern Myanmar, to provide additional information that was not present in KHRG's documentation, and to triangulate data from the thematic analysis. Of particular use are reports from other local community-based and civil society organisations that have documented human rights abuses, peace process developments, and the effects of development projects in ethnic minority areas such as the Karen Peace Support Network and the Karen Rivers Network. Where necessary, I also referred to reports and policy documents of international human rights organisations, peace donors, international financial institutions, international NGOs, institutes and think tanks. These include the Transnational Institute, the Asia Foundation, UN Agencies, Human Rights

Watch, the World Bank, among others. International news outlets such as BBC, Al-Jazeera and the Guardian, national media such as Burma News International and the Irrawaddy, and local Karen media such as Karen News, were also consulted. For the most part I refer to English language versions of these reports and news articles. Lastly, official statements from local, regional and national government, ethnic armed organisations, and civil society organisations, were used. Just as the above, English language versions were the primary referent. However, if necessary, I could roughly (and very slowly!) translate Myanmar language statements. To reiterate, the above sources were not analysed as part of a systematic, granular process. Rather, they were reference points to get more clarity on particular incidents or developments, to provide context, and to triangulate what was in the documentation.

5.4 Discussion and Reflections

5.4.1 Advantages and Disadvantages

There were several advantages to this methodology. First, the data is published and easily accessible. Second, the data is rich in detail, and has been gathered with better access, resources, and capacities (such as Karen language) than I would have as an individual researcher. Third, it is ethical in that I did not put anyone in danger, there are less issues around extractivism, and the data collection was locally designed and implemented. Fourth, it was a mostly COVID-19-proof methodology in that, because COVID-19 did not leave me physically unable to complete the project, I was able to complete it remotely even as new variants of COVID-19 emerged and led to further lockdowns.

The use of secondary data however, which was produced for another purpose than this thesis, while having advantages in terms of ethics and practicalities, did pose challenges, as with any data collection process. First, I had no control over the type of data collected, the process through which it was conducted, and the content elicited. I was limited to what was already available, including the questions asked, the topics covered, and whether or not certain issues were probed or not.

Second, the publishing of the data meant that it has already been curated, and other pieces of information such as interviews or photographs may well remain outside of the public eye. Related to this, an issue that I was wary of is that KHRG had already organised their data into themes, chapters, and subsections. They had sorted the type of actions, derived from the raw data, into different types of agency in their final published reports. Indeed, KHRG have their own categorisation process. This could have potentially influenced my own coding process. To mitigate this, during the process of this PhD I refrained from reading KHRG's final reports in which the data had been organised until I had completed my own coding. This was not completely fireproof, as the various pieces of documentation that are part of the appendices were included by KHRG based on their own decision-making process. This decision-making process of what information to include relates to a further issue of whether or not this thesis interrogates the way that this data is being presented by KHRG, and the narrative that they constructed. However it is not the goal of this thesis to investigate *how* representations of violence, agency and local perspectives are presented, in English language, to an English-speaking audience, nor indeed the Burmese or Karen language versions of the KHRG reports. This is indeed important, but not within the scope of this research. Rather it is the content of what villagers have said in interviews, and the situation updates themselves that are important. It is the acts, not the narratives or discourses I am analysing. The narrative that KHRG does construct is manifest in their final, curated reports. Yet these final reports are not part of the thematic analysis and focussing on the appendices, as this thesis does, goes some way to ensure that the data is organised according to my own defined criteria.

Third, as a secondary researcher, I was not part of the process, in that I was not there while data was collected. Detailed contextual knowledge of the collection process is absent. For example, during interviews, fieldnotes on the atmosphere, facial expressions, and culturally specific dynamics were not available to me. In other words, I lacked the "embodied experiences of the research context" (Shukla et al, 2014, p.5). Inevitably with research during a pandemic, drawbacks will be present, and some of which I was not able to mitigate fully. However, the goal of this research is not to present a fine-grained ethnographic picture of resistance to state violence in south-eastern Myanmar. Rather, it is to examine the extent to which resistance makes up a complex adaptive system, identifying key concepts of complexity in the data available.

5.4.2 Interpretation

Crabtree and Miller do acknowledge a disadvantage of working with preconceived thematic concepts, as it can mean that the analyst misses certain information as they are too fixed on established codes (Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p.108). This is related to my deductive approach, in that it is I, as an individual analyst, chose which concepts to apply to the data. Others may have approached the data differently, had other concepts or theories in mind, or had a different objective. This is consistent with the interpretative approach I outlined earlier. Rather than trying to mitigate this fully, as this would mean that I am not taking an interpretative approach, I remained open to the possibility of the complexity concepts not being present, of new and unanticipated patterns and concepts emerging from the data, adhering to the concept-book and guidelines for inclusion, and most importantly, acknowledging that this is a particular interpretation – i.e. my own. This interpretation, however, does not come out of thin air, but rather is shaped by all manner of issues, including the demands of rigor while doing a PhD at Durham University, and my own positionality, which I discuss below.

5.4.3 Positionality

There are some important points to be made about my own positionality, and how this impacts this thesis. A key part of positionality is reflexivity, defined by England (1994) as a "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (England, 1994, p.82). I, as a researcher, am not without my own baggage, bias, beliefs or convictions. Some of these have been shaped by aspects of identity. I am male, white, from the UK, speak English as a first language, and am university-educated. These are not the only aspects of my identity, nor are they the only ones that impact my bias. However, they have played a huge role in getting me to where I am – a PhD student at a Russell Group university in the UK. I have also been shaped by my own capacities and abilities, at being able to grasp certain competencies, but not others, for example being poor at quantitative research methods. Specific to this research, however, is the knowledge and experience I have accrued through a decade working on the Thailand-Myanmar border with various local human rights organisations. I have worked extensively on the border since 2011, working with two local human rights organisations and co-founding another with Myanmar colleagues. I have collaborated with many Myanmar civil society organisations on

research projects, publishing analysis, and advocating at various platforms. I have built relationships over many years with individuals and organisations such as KHRG[19], while also learning about Myanmar and the challenges that people face. This experience has influenced how I think about how local organisations work in conflict settings vis-à-vis international and more powerful and well-funded groups. It has allowed me to value the importance and integrity of datasets such as those produced by KHRG which is part of the reason I was aware of the existence of this data and why I chose to use it for this thesis.

However, as someone who is, (I would like think as being) a trusted ally to the human rights work of border groups, would this mean that KHRG would give me special privilege, that they would have felt obligated to give me certain advantages because of my previous work? They do have a policy on dealing with researchers, having dealt with several of them over the years, and I was not exempted from this. When I asked the organisation permission to interview some of their staff about their research process, I was told I would need to send the questions first, and approval from KHRG management would be granted according to their own policy. Kappler (2013) has written about such occurrences, i.e. the "tactics through which research subjects may resist and respond to research on their own terms" (Kappler, 2013, p.126). This is exactly what happened in this case. The power relations between a representative from a UK university (myself) and the local human rights group that is dealing with all kinds of threat and vulnerability, is at least partially addressed by their own agency, through the development and implementation of a policy that protects them from potential adverse effects of uneven power relations manifest in exploitative research practices.

Another aspect of my positionality is the question of whether my experience on the Thailand-Myanmar border then makes me an insider, or am I still an outsider due to my identity? I would rather avoid this binary (Mullings, 1999). I am clearly more of an insider than someone who has never been to Myanmar, or the border area, and who has never worked with local human rights organisations. This has given me privileged insight and shaped my knowledge, both in terms of the context of what is happening but also of how to conduct research. For example, I know that *many* PhD and Masters researchers come through the border areas, seeking to interview organisations, refugee councils, armed groups etc. I also know, through my own experience, how much that can be a waste of time for the

[19] To clarify, I have never been employed by KHRG.

organisations involved, how they never hear from these researchers again, do not benefit or even know about the subsequent research, and in some cases such research can be misrepresentative or damaging. The instances of over-researched populations and communities is certainly not unique to south-eastern Myanmar (Kappler, 2013). Yet this is not necessarily always the case. Several academics are appreciated by those local organisations who give back in bigger or smaller ways. For example peer reviewing reports that these organisations draft, sending academic articles that are otherwise inaccessible, or providing capacity-building sessions on say, research methods, or a particular field. My role as an insider, i.e. being part of these organisations, gives me an idea of how academics, as I am wearing this hat as an academic, are perceived.

Yet in both roles, as an academic researcher and an employee of a Myanmar human rights organisation, I will always be to some an extent an outsider. I can always go back to my home country. Karen people, for the most part, cannot simply move away. They are either part of the struggle to make their communities safer and the country more democratic, or they simply struggle in a repressive environment. I will never have that experience. Suffice to say, I am neither an insider, nor an outsider. This binary is rather false, and is based on "a boundary that is not only highly unstable but also one that ignores the dynamism of positionalities in time and through space" (Mullings 1999, p.340). Thus, I prefer to view this as a spectrum. I am more inside than some, less inside than others, and this is a shifting position as I move from being a border-based human rights worker to being perceived mainly as a PhD student coming from the West.

Often, academic literature on positionality discusses the researchers' relationship with people in the field, and the ethical considerations that must be taken into account. This is, of course, very important. However, in this research, the main research method I used did not involve a dialogic process with people, but it did involve a relationship with three datasets. Yet these datasets (the data corpus) themselves can be viewed not merely as 'object,' but 'subject' (MacLean, 2022, p.12). They were produced for a reason, in KHRG's case to document human rights abuses of the Myanmar military and to advocate for stronger action from the international community as outlined earlier, but their ongoing life cycle means that their meaning and the way they are utilised can change. I visited these datasets several years later as an academic and put them into conversation with an academic theory – complexity – which was not the intention of their original production. The point here is that a dataset is not

an object, unchanged in the passage of time and how it is used, but rather it can serve different functions and objectives with different effects and impacts. It has a life of its own that goes beyond a curated record of abuse. The potential use and role of the datasets in the context of this thesis, can be to (hopefully) advance our understanding of resistance through the lens of complexity, and this could then be published into articles that are read and subsequently used across different fields. What are the ethical implications of this? Do the datasets as subject undermine KHRG's efforts to advance human rights in south-eastern Myanmar. This would depend on how the datasets are used, but, given that KHRG publishes and attempts to disseminate their information as widely as possible, and as they agree that academics are allowed to use their information as long as it is cited and referenced properly, this would be up to the discretion of the researcher/academic.

5.4.4 My Role as an Academic

This moves on to an important ethical consideration in regard to the role of the academic in engaging with the struggles of the people they are writing about. I am writing about rural people of south-eastern Myanmar who have experienced armed conflict, brutal military dictatorships, and poverty for decades. I engaged with the work of a local human rights organisation that is led, managed and mostly staffed by ethnic Karen people, whose work is intended to improve the lot of those populations. I believe I have an ethical duty not to undermine their work while I also have an instinctive sympathy for the situation for people in Myanmar and a moral support for the work that KHRG do. I do not necessarily view this as something to be mitigated. Emotional attachment or feeling towards people and groups such as KHRG who help them is natural. For some, there is a moral, ethical duty on the part of the academic to become part of the resistance to state injustice and power (Clarke et al, 2017) when researching those very communities. In a way, I have already done this with my previous work although I did not work with or for KHRG during this period of PhD research. Despite this, it is necessary for university standards of rigor to critically view the dataset they produce, and to be transparent regarding why it was produced and for what purpose, as this is the main corpus of data behind what should be a rigorous approach to research. This was why I conducted the interview with KHRG themselves to probe more about their own processes of documentation. However, drawing unnecessary and unfair criticism to a human rights organisation that is not in a position of wealth, power or authority, especially in relation to larger, international, and well-funded agencies, organisations and networks would be wrong.

Many years before this PhD and quite possibly for many years after, KHRG has been and will be documenting important information in south-eastern Myanmar, working under significant pressures and difficult conditions. Therefore it is not the place to intentionally criticise their work, but to put it in context so as to appreciate the strengths and limitations of using their data for this thesis.

Another point in regard to this research and my role as an academic is that there is a benefit of using datasets that were designed, produced, and curated by KHRG. I have avoided a hubris that goes with believing that any kind of research I do with or about marginalised communities is inherently 'good' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) or emancipatory (Routley & Wright, 2020, p.86). There are unfortunately too many examples of academic research doing more harm than good to the communities that have hosted or afforded their precious time to the said academic (Kelly, 2020). While KHRG may or may not be fully representative of Karen people of the southeast of Myanmar, nor do they necessarily claim to be, it can be safely said that they are in a much better position to *present* the voices of those people that I, a non-Karen speaker, could. Does this totally avoid the danger of 'othering' that a white, male academic coming from the UK could potentially do? Perhaps not, but it does go some way. Furthermore, the restrictions of using this data means that I was not putting anyone in danger by travelling to the jungle, embedding myself within populations and telling tales of personal heroism and overcoming danger in a masculinist projection of an 'Indiana Jones' style researcher (Routley & Wright, 2020, p.86).

5.4.5 Agency

It is important to discuss 'agency' because it is a prominent part of the language of KHRG's documentation. I have already discussed agency in relation to the literature on resistance, as well as complexity theory. However, because of the role this concept plays in KHRG's research process and framing, it necessitates a specific discussion here with reference to how this thesis utilises 'agency'. KHRG use the term "village agency" to describe the "capacity, strategies, and efforts taken by villagers to understand, confront, and prevent human rights abuses" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.2) and it is incorporated in the questions they ask and the type of information they present in the documentation. An example of a question on a KHRG-produced questionnaire form about land confiscation is as follows:

> What type of strategies, either individual or collective, did villagers employ to resist the project? (E.g. submitting complaint letters, forming committees, conducting demonstrations, etc.) Please explain clearly in detail (including the time and place) (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.316)

This question, answered by a landowner who had lost his land in 2012, was responded to thusly:

> The villagers tried to appeal [the agreement] and reported the information to the responsible [KNU] leaders, and we tried to report about it as much as we could (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.316).

Chapter Three discussed how resistance is just one form of agency and what this means for my working definition of resistance. To recap, agency is a much broader concept that also includes capacities for self-reflection and is a part of individual subject formation, whereas resistance, in the definition in this thesis, is focussed on the act itself and is directed against the state. Agency covers all manner of acts that are not necessarily resistance. As Mac Ginty has pointed out in a conceptual scoping of 'non-participation,' "non-participation can be regarded as a form of agency but that we should resist shoehorning it into pre-prepared narratives of compliance or resistance" (Mac Ginty, 2012, p.173). Agency thus involves acts that are non-necessarily resistance and, as argued by Lilja and Vinthagen (2018), involves subject formation, consciousness, and gaining understanding. In this respect, on a closer inspection of KHRG's definition of "village agency" which is to "understand, confront and prevent human rights abuses" I suggest that the "understand" component is not a resistance act. It is agency, but it is not resistance. What does this mean for my own analysis? It means that evidence of increased 'understanding' falls into agency, but not resistance, and therefore will not be coded.

However, the use of agency in documentation is important because KHRG have proactively attempted to document the type of actions – defined as agency – *some of which* could be classed as resistance. Put simply, data on resistance acts as a form of agency exists in the corpus, however, I will not use agency as a driving concept which will frame this analysis. Agency is necessary for resistance, but it is not sufficient.

5.5 Conclusion

There were methodological limitations to this study, and this is mainly reflected in doing a PhD during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the 2021 coup attempt and resultant violence meant that conducting fieldwork during the most violent period in Myanmar since the 1940s was not permitted by Durham University. The reliance on already-produced documentation, while critically addressed above, still limited the data available. In an ideal world, more in-depth, ethnographic research would have been conducted in village(s) in south-eastern Myanmar. This would have allowed me to go further into detail on certain issues, and in particular, to ask - where safe and appropriate – the intentions behind resistance actions. Rather than patterns of resistance, broadly categorised, this would have allowed me to follow up on particular resistance actions, their sequence, and explore the intricate details of what was done, how, what the effects were and how relations changed over time in a particular location.

Despite these limitations, the methodology outlined above was safe, secure and viable with a rich data corpus with which to apply a complexity lens. The two-round deductive thematic analysis, with the use of the concept-book, allowed me to a) describe the patterns of resistance (emergent outcomes) and b) identify the presence/absence/extent of the complexity concepts of self-organisation and adaption.

The following chapters will present the empirical findings that resulted in the application of this methodology. Each chapter will present the patterns of resistance identified, giving examples of how these actions occurred and adding broader context of the political and economic environment which shaped both threat and resistance. This is as per Round One of the methodology – identifying emergent patterns of resistance. After each section of modes of resistance, these resistance patterns will then be narrated through the lens of the complexity concepts of ‘adaption’ and 'self-organisation,’ as per Round Two of the methodology – identifying the presence of 'adaption’ and ‘self-organisation.’ I will thus frame these patterns of resistance through a complexity lens, using the three mechanisms of ‘thickening relations,’ ‘feedback loops,’ and ‘facilitation’ to describe this complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance.

Chapter Six: Engagement

The first category that emerged from Karen Human Rights Group's documentation as a resistance action is *Engagement.* Engagement in this sense is a non-confrontational interaction with the target of resistance, such as a company, local authority or armed group. These targets of resistance are part of the complex assemblage of power that make up the 'ceasefire capitalism' mosaic presented in Chapter Two. It is of course, relational in that it is an interaction between the resisting agent (villager) and the target – i.e. the company or government. It can include negotiation which, referring back to Chapter Three on defining and conceptualising resistance, I include in my definition of resistance. Resistance acts do not necessarily need to be revolutionary actions aimed at the overthrow of structures of domination. Rather, they are often localised acts aimed at specific instances of oppression in which subordinate actors *negotiate* power relations to mitigate the worst effects of such oppression (Chandra, 2015) rather than counter-hegemonic opposition. Hence why the various forms of negotiation, occurring multiple times across different districts of south-eastern Myanmar, are classed as resistance.

Negotiation, however, means a (minimum) two-way conversation, a back and forth in which there is an overarching goal to reach agreement. In this chapter, there are also certain aspects of engagement that do not have a back and forth and are a much more one-way direction. Examples documented here include complaint letters or reporting to government, companies, or the Karen National Union (KNU). What all these categories have in common is an attempt to engage with a political authority, state, or business. This is reminiscent of Chandra's discussion of what form resistance can take outlined in Chapter Three: Resistance. For him, making claims through state institutions and frameworks is an interaction which constitutes resistance (Chandra, 2015) and this is included in this thesis' definition too. In particular, O'Brien & Li's (2004) concept of 'rightful resistance,' which is part of Chandra's typology, is commonly applied in resistance to land-grabbing literature throughout the region and beyond, and is a useful concept to frame some of the forms of resistance documented in south-eastern Myanmar in this time period. Rightful resistance means using the discourses or rhetoric of the state to assert rights – in this case the discourse of democratization and an open economy – and this is manifest in various forms of engagement documented in this chapter.

Engagement, however, is not a simple task in a repressive environment, where there is a myriad of actors within the assemblage of 'ceasefire capitalism' from which threats come from. This includes the Myanmar military, its proxy, Border Guard Force (BGF), the KNU, as well as other armed groups who operate in smaller areas, acting as personal fiefdoms (Buchanan, 2016). Furthermore, there are areas in south-eastern Myanmar in which a system of mixed administration operates. From the Myanmar government side, at the local level there are township administrators, and local village and village tract administrators. There are district level administrators at a regional level and ultimately, they are all under the General Administration Department (GAD). The GAD, at the start of the period under investigation, was under the military-controlled Ministry of Home Affairs, one of the most powerful ministries of the state, and, as designated by the 2008 Constitution, is headed by a representative of the Myanmar military.

Added to this mix are the companies themselves, local, national and transnational, that operate with approval or blessing from one or more armed actors. And while there are areas of mixed administration, and areas where the KNU or the Myanmar state is the primary governance actor, it should be remembered that the most powerful armed actor, in terms of territory controlled, human and material resources, and in control of a powerful, national administrative body, is the Myanmar military. Hence in the below sections, while there are some instances of villagers negotiating with ethnic Karen authorities (represented by the KNU), mostly the villagers engage in a form of negotiation with the company involved in the project that is being resisted, or an actor that represents the Myanmar government or military.

The following five sections outline the different types of engagement that have been documented in the data corpus. These are: testing the 'rule of law'; reporting to state authorities; negotiating with armed actors; negotiating with companies; and sending complaint letters. Apart from negotiating with armed actors, all types of negotiation have been documented regularly across the time period and across the geographical space, thus forming patterns. The following sections present examples of each type of engagement, provide contextual information where necessary from other sources outside the main data corpus of KHRG documentation, including regional comparative examples, and draw some preliminary conclusions on how engagement as resistance has developed across this time period. This is the result of Round One of the thematic analysis – presenting the emergent

patterns of resistance. As with the other empirical chapters, after each section describing the emergent modes of resistance, I will then narrate these patterns of resistance using the complexity concepts of adaption and self-organisation, and, where they are present, the mechanisms that facilitate this complex system – feedback loops, thickening relations, and facilitation. In particular, how villagers adjusted to the new context, taking advantage of new opportunities, demonstrates clearly the *'adaptive'* part of the complex system. This chapter will also demonstrate how *negative feedback loops* stymied the development of certain emergent resistance patterns, particularly those enacted by individuals. However, when such engagement is done collectively, i.e. a group of villagers, this kind of resistance becomes more dynamic and gains momentum. It thus shows how the mechanism of *thickening relations* is an important motor for complexifying the system of resistance.

6.1 Testing the 'Rule of Law'

This first section will present how in some instances villagers attempted to engage official processes such as using the Myanmar national legal framework, made attempts to register land, and used the judicial system, especially in relation to land claims, to negotiate and challenge the new forms of violence they experienced. This time period was one where new legislation and purported reforms were underway to strengthen the rule of law, and hence why these forms of engagement were more possible than before 2011. This engagement can be framed as a way of villagers pursuing recognition from the state, such as in terms of land ownership documents, or becoming an active participant in the new political and economic context. This also includes bringing cases to court, a form of engagement that has been researched elsewhere as part of villagers' arsenal of resistance modes. Indeed, as Podder (2023) has pointed out, legal cases against corporate actors in land grabbing cases are becoming widespread throughout the global south, "be it Cambodia, Cameroon, or Sierra Leone, NGOs and local communities are turning to litigation to publicise and seek justice for the abuses they have observed and experienced" (Podder, 2023, p.297).

It is not just judicial processes that villagers can engage with. Land policies and changing broader political contexts provide opportunities for victims of development-induced structural violence to lay claims to their land. Schoenberger (2017) has extensively

documented a case in Cambodia where Prime Minister, Hun Sen, announced a moratorium on economic land concessions (ELCs) in 2012, as well as a process to "excise land from ELCs to distribute to smallholders as private titles via a nationwide land titling campaign that aimed to redistribute and title more than one million hectares to smallholders within one year" (Schoenberger, 2017, p.872). From this "rupture," resulted "possibilities for citizens to exploit and expose this upheaval to gain rights" (Schoenberger, 2017, p.874). It was a form of adaption to a changing political and economic context in which smallholders utilised an opportunity to gain more secure title of their land and/or to reclaim land that had been lost.

However, just as Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism argued, in Myanmar these new laws brought both opportunity and threat. They brought opportunity because in a changing legislative environment, villagers had the chance to register their land under the Farmland Law, as well as a freer political environment with which to engage authorities with less fear of violent repercussions. This section thus shows how villagers *adapted* to this new context, attempting new ways of political and civil engagement with a quasi-civilian government and a Myanmar military that had largely stopped treating every Karen villager as an enemy insurgent. However, due to negative feedback loops, including still not being able to register land, or a partial judicial system, this was a relatively weak pattern of resistance. This is comparable to the above mentioned policy in Cambodia which allowed an opportunity to regain land. Ultimately the policy was ineffective and very few smallholders secured such rights as the Cambodian government backtracked on promises after a survey had been conducted (Schoenberger, 2017). Yet the attempt to resist large-scale land grabs through engagement with official processes, similar to villagers in south-eastern Myanmar testing the rule of law in an era of policy and legislative change through their preparatory registering of land, shows that this is not a Myanmar-specific dynamic.

Summarising and reflecting on the new political environment, one interviewee, a coordinator of a local legal network in Mergui-Tavoy District noted in 2018, referencing recent legislation as well as the 2008 Constitution, that they would try to go through such official processes:

> We are doing our actions according to the law. Because we abide by the law, there are protections according to the 2008 constitution law, the ethnic protection law, the law protecting individuals or the citizenship law. Because

> we are acting according to the law, it is rare for [stakeholders] not to take actions for us. Because civilians are acting based on sufficient knowledge of the situation and their rights, there were some successes, even though they were not fully successful (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.75).

Thie reflects a confidence and changing relations with authorities. He felt confident to test this new political context by "acting according to the law."

6.1.1 Trialling a 'Reformed Judiciary'

The new context in which a national discourse on 'rule of law' became more prominent meant people began to engage the judiciary and court system more, particularly around land restitution cases (Kapoor et al, 2018). A villager in Thaundaunggyi Township, Taungoo District interviewed in November 2017 noted that confidence in using official procedures had increased, in particular courts and the judicial system, and that:

> it will not work out with only the villagers' voices and protests, but that it is better to face the court and justice system…They are not afraid to face the law, but the real problem is that they do not have knowledge about the laws (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.134).

Despite this confidence, reflective of a changing relations between villagers and the Myanmar government, the data shows that engaging with these official processes can face the same problems of corruption and partiality that those engaging with the authorities historically experienced. There are several instances where villagers have reported going through official channels, only for the case not to be resolved in a satisfactory manner. For example, from a situation update from Taungoo Township, in the northwest part of Karen State, the researcher reports on a failed case of trying to reclaim land that was confiscated in 1996 by the Ministry of Industry, with no compensation provided to local villagers. The researcher notes that:

> In 2014, local villagers opened the case in a court in order to reclaim their ancestral land and won the case. Nevertheless, in 2017, Ministry of Industry No.(1) sued villagers and reopened the land case in court. The villagers did not

> win the [reopened land] case (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.539).

The judicial system of Myanmar is historically corrupt and politically pliant. Research by the International Commission of Jurists shows that judges decide on cases based on orders coming from political or military authorities, especially in cases that challenge vested interests such as investment and development projects. They find that this is particularly so in local and regional level courts, the level of courts which villagers in south-eastern Myanmar would be using. The ICJ also shows that corruption "in the form of misuse of influence and monetary incentives for particular legal outcomes is prevalent throughout the legal system, and some judges condition favourable decisions on bribes" (International Commission of Jurists, 2014). Thus, in south-eastern Myanmar, the use of courts by powerful companies who are able to bribe judges, or cases that involve government or military-affiliated investments, while potentially an avenue for effective resistance, are rather the opposite. A 2016 Human Rights Watch report on land confiscation in Karen State found that farmers were increasingly being charged for trespass or squatting on what they have always perceived as their own land or foraging in community land that is now deemed vacant. They thus face arrest and criminal charges (Human Rights Watch, 2016). This dynamic is reflective of both years-long entrenched practice alongside new structural forms of violence that villagers are facing.

The costs of going to court to either file charges or to defend against charges of trespass are high in an impoverished area, and this is demonstrated in the Kaung Myanmar Aung Company (KMAC) case. KMAC had confiscated 2,400 acres of land for a teak plantation in Taungoo District in 2009 with permission from the government. Since 2009, the company had been grabbing more land from the villagers whose land tenure was based on customary practice. After villagers continued to use their land, KMAC sued farmers in 2014 and in the first instance at the Township-level court, the villagers won the case. Yet the company appealed and sued again at higher courts at the district and then regional level (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.60). During this process the company representatives often did not turn up to court dates, court dates which the defendants, the villagers themselves, attended at a financial cost that they were struggling to afford. A villager interviewed in 2017, stated:

> If the appointment date was set for three different dates, Kaung Myanmar Aung Company workers only went to court on one of those dates. That is why villagers face livelihood challenges because they have to pay lawyer fees,

> transportation fees, and other service costs as well (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.139).

Regarding the same case, this villager stated:

> The first time they sued the villagers they lost. The second time they sued the villagers and they won. I have no idea how they won the second trial. But, one thing we clearly know from this situation is that villagers could not pay lawyer fees…Worse than this, one of them, who is an old lady, could not even pay for the transportation fees [to travel to court] so she walked from her home to Taungoo [the location of the court], which is around 15 miles between, to attend the court meeting. Actually, transportation only costs 500 kyats [$0.37 US]. She walked a long distance to reach the court and she was late. She apologised for being late but she was rejected and she lost the trial. Actually, she won the first time she faced trial but she lost the second time. After they [villagers] lose a trial the second time, they cannot do anything. They want to get back their land but they do not have any way to. They cannot afford to solve the problem in court and the laws are also not protective of them. Finally, the whole village cut down bamboo and fenced their land to protect their territory (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.133).

Not only does the case of KMAC suing villagers exemplify the costs of going to court but also demonstrates the perceived corruption. At the time, the CEO of KMAC, Khin Maung Aye, was serving as a member of the government's National Economic and Social Affairs Advisory Committee as well as being an advisor to the President of Myanmar between 2011 and 2016, Thein Sein (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.60).

As the ICJ analysis points out, investment and development projects are especially defended by the Myanmar judiciary. Thus, on the one hand, the new framework of legislation and policy legitimises land confiscation, and on the other hand, this is facilitated by underhand tactics such as bribery and partiality of judges who side with, or support, more powerful government-backed companies and investments. Conversely the new political climate and greater sense of political and civic freedoms meant that villagers were more willing to at least engage with the courts when faced with land confiscation and the destruction of their

livelihoods. The relations between the authorities and villagers had changed sufficiently in the above examples to catalyse new resistance actions yet the negative feedback that this resistance came up against is a reflection of an entrenched lack of independence in the judiciary.

6.1.2 Preparatory Registering of Land

As well as court cases, the possession and attempted use of land form titles - official Myanmar government-issued documents for land registration – became another avenue for a kind of preparative resistance to land confiscation. Land documents are a way for villagers to make themselves and their claims seen and legible in the eyes of the state (Schoenberger, 2017, p.887). They are documents that act as demands to be included. Thus, legibility could potentially be seen by villagers, no longer as a tool of control and state-building as per the historical mapping and land tenure attempts of colonial and post-colonial authorities, but a document in which legibility and inclusion resists dispossession of their land (Schoenberger, 2017). Schoenberger has noted how in the aforementioned Cambodia land policy change, the survey results left "documentary traces" that "imbued peasants' claims with a legitimate character that helped them to take to the streets to present visible evidence of their (temporary) inclusion" (Schoenberger, 2017, p.887).

In a similar vein, policy and legislative change in Myanmar catalysed some attempts to use documents to demand rights. As outlined in Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism, the Farmland Law, which was passed in 2012, allows for farmers to apply for Land Use Certificates (LUCs), otherwise known as Form 7, to cultivate land (Htoo & Scott, 2019). They apply at the Township-level Farmland Administration Body (FAB) and the LUCs are issued under certain conditions including what can be cultivated on the land and what kind of construction can happen. If conditions are not met, which are quite strict, the FAB can revoke the LUC and evict the farmer. LUCs can be revoked if the "Central Government seeks to confiscate land for purposes of national development" (Htoo & Scott, 2019, p.38). Furthermore, research on the State Land Records Body, the national government agency responsible for the funding, administration and infrastructure for the issuance of LUCs, finds that it was "understaffed" and with "very low capacity to fulfil its responsibilities" (Henley, 2014, p.9).

Some villagers, fearing this threat to their land, a very real threat given the uptick in land confiscations and the legislation, outlined above, that facilitates this, sought to take precautionary measures to resist this by registering their land. However, they did face difficulties. In one example, a female hill farmer from Naypyitaw Territory interviewed in February 2017 explained that while she does not want their village land to be confiscated, she has no idea how to attain Land Form 7, which grants right of usage of land, stating "Land form #7 is something that we can never get whenever we try to apply for it" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.490). For her and her community, military officers have acquired this land form, but they feel they do not have access to it. The lack of documentation of landownership is thus an obstacle when engaging official channels and processes to resist land confiscation.

A situation update from Hpapun District explains how difficult it is to attain Land Form 7:

> Acquiring the recommendation letter from the village tract land management leader to work on paddy fields which have been confiscated [by the Tatmadaw] is very difficult. This is because the village tract leader is very afraid to ask the Tatmadaw [soldiers for permission] in order to write the recommendation for the farmers whose land was confiscated. Some of the land owners whose lands were confiscated have to pay money [to the Burma/Myanmar government] to work on their land [because they do not have the signed permission form]. In order to apply for the Form 7 [which gives them permission to work on their land], they first need the recommendation letter from the village tract leader [who needs permission from the Tatmadaw]. The land owners also need a recommendation letter from the chairman of the Land Management Committee. [In Bu Tho Township], the village tract leader and the chairman of the Land Management Committee at the village tract level is the same person. Therefore, it is very difficult for a farmer to get this recommendation letter [as the village tract leader/chairman is too afraid]. The farmers who do not have the Form 7 do not get compensation for the land or compensation for their crops. There is a high possibility that the villagers' land will be confiscated indefinitely (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.292).

The following is an example from a situation update on how a villager wanted the local government office to survey his lands so that he has an official claim:

> Saw P---, the village head of M---, said that he asked [for] official land registration from Kawkareik Township to survey the size of his villagers' lands. Saw P--- said that, in case there is an attempt at confiscating his land, he can prove with official evidence that he owns the land. He said that there are gardens, farms and community lands but there are no vacant lands. However, the official [from the Burma Government] refused to come to measure and said, "We can't as those areas are black areas". The official also said that it is dangerous for them to enter those areas (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.53).

This attempt to go through official channels is illuminative of two aspects of the situation for villagers in this area, which is on the border of Hpa-an and Dooplaya Districts. First, farmers are vulnerable to losing their land if they do not register it. As noted in Chapter Two, under the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Law (VFVL Law) of 2012, any land that is not registered under the 2012 Farmland Law can be deemed "wasteland" and is thus available for confiscation by the government for large-scale development projects (Htoo & Scott, 2019, p.38). This is problematic as many villagers, especially in ethnic minority areas such as Karen State, use customary land practices in terms of land ownership, and common land for foraging and grazing is prevalent. Yet this is the type of land that could be deemed vacant, fallow, or virgin under the VFVL Law, and hence is thus a dangerous tool for rural villagers who do not have official Myanmar government land title. As the quote above demonstrates, attempts to engage in this official process, of gaining land title in order to resist land confiscation is very difficult. It also illuminates the precarity when living in a conflict area. The villager mentions that the government will not measure his land because he lives in a black area. To recap, a black area is one designated by the military as not under state control. This villager cannot get his lands measured, leaving him vulnerable to a future land confiscation due to the unsettled conflict in Myanmar. A ceasefire is not enough to resolve land claims and land disputes in areas of mixed (Brown) or EAO-controlled (Black) territory. This is corroborated by an interviewee who works for a local women's organisation in Mergui-Tavoy District who alludes to the lack of human security in conflict-affected rural areas compared to the city:

> In the city, they used many Myanmar government policies to implement their project. In rural areas, they do not need policies because the villagers are afraid and it is hard for them to access the justice system or report the injustices to the authorities due to distance. Moreover, authorities cannot always go and observe the situation in the field. Villagers are easier to threaten (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.259).

The situation update below from a KHRG researcher from Nyaunglebin District regarding confiscated land on which cashews were planted tells us that even if they did have the correct land forms, they could not get their land back:

> Local villagers reported this situation to the Myanmar government and responsible authorities according to [Myanmar land] laws. However, none of them have helped this community. The villagers whose lands were confiscated were in possession of the [land title] Form 105 granted by the Myanmar government. In addition to this, the villagers had KNU land grants (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.41).

Form 105, referenced above, is attached to the LUC (Form 7) and demarcates the boundaries of the plot of land (Boutry et al, 2017, p.139). However, the above quote also tells us about the reality of mixed political authority in certain areas of south-eastern Myanmar. The situation update from which this quote derives references how villagers were in possession of KNU land grants. The KNU also has a land policy that "address land tenure rights, as well as the categories of claimants who are eligible to claim such rights" (KNU Land Policy, 2015, p.2). Yet, despite having both KNU and Myanmar government forms, they were not able to successfully negotiate through official processes for land restitution. In another case, a villager interviewed about the local communities' resistance to a stone mining project expressed frustration at living in an area of mixed administration, "If the villagers do something according to the law, which law do they have to follow?... They feel that the ones who know the law win over the ones who do not. So, it is clear that they do not use the law because they do not have knowledge about law" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.159). The "state-making" (Kyed, 2021) efforts of both the KNU and the Myanmar state thus led to

a confusing situation on the ground in terms of land registration when faced with threats of confiscation.

Perhaps the best explanation as to why for the most part, such resistance tactics do not work was given by a woman from the Tavoyan Women's Union in Tavoy-Murgui District:

> In reality, policies and laws are useless. Nobody can do anything against the Myanmar government. We can open lawsuits, but no one would take actions against Myanmar government. When we reported a case to the court, the jury did not take actions. All of the juries and policemen are under the control of Myanmar government. We cannot rely on the police and juries (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.257).

The obstacles and stymieing effects faced when attempting to use official government processes documented in the data, in complexity language, is a negative feedback loop. This form of engagement was certainly an *adaption* to the new political environment as new relations changed the way that villagers could interact with authorities in a manner that would have previously been perceived as too dangerous. However, this form of resistance of engaging with state laws and institutions, faced with a weak and politically pliant judicial system and where powerful actors, such as government-connected companies, can use the legal system to stymie any attempts by villages to resist land confiscation reflected the new forms of structural violence. Furthermore, the new land law regime, while providing opportunities to register and claim land, was confusing, difficult to access, and ultimately, created more of a threat for villagers as the above examples show. Yet, such resistance acts *were* tried at least minimally. The aforementioned example of the people being sued by KMAC is a good example. After a lengthy and expensive court battle, which the villagers eventually lost, they reverted to another resistance act, cutting down bamboo and fencing their land.[20] However, the engagement as resistance here was stymied by the court case.

Thus, new legislation, while making rural communities vulnerable to land confiscation, also provided new opportunity to attempt to secure their land claims. This shifting dynamic thus

[20] Fencing is a culturally-inflected assertion of their land ownership that is more confrontational than engagement.

demonstrates how the villagers adapted to the new context and legal framework, used new resistance acts, but due to their relative failure, did not replicate and expand significantly throughout the time period and region.

6.2 Reporting to State Authorities

More common than utilising courts and legislation, but still engaging with government officialdom, is direct negotiation and reporting to local government officials. This reflects how the perceived threats or dangers when using such tactics if they go wrong are considerably less and are thus more attractive, at least as a first step. This is a common mode of resistance throughout the world in which the state consists of "multiple actors, factions and interests, many of which are in direct competition for political influence" (Hall et al, 2015, p.475). Indeed, "seemingly solid coalitions between investors and state officials may in reality show cracks and openings that smallholders may use to forge alliances with officials willing to consider their interests" (Rutten et al, 2017, p.906). Kenney-Lazar (2015) has shown in rural Laos that sometimes resistance is more effective when affected villagers are able to use connections and engagement with particular state authorities (Kenney-Lazar, 2015). In particular, in rural, marginal areas where villagers are faced with corporate land-grabbing, engagement with the state rather than direct confrontation with private sector actors may be the best recourse in terms of resistance (Hall et al, 2015).

Furthermore, reporting, or appealing to, new democratic entities such as the local parliaments, offices of MPs, or even the President's Office, reveals a willingness to test new ground, adapting to a new political context. This relates to what the earlier chapter on conceptualising resistance referred to as "rightful resistance" (O'Brien & Li, 2004). Based on their fieldwork in China, O'Brien and Li analyse how victims of land grabbing in China "invoke the official promises of the state to demand disciplining of those who are disloyal to the official state narrative, and mobilise around this political master frame" (O'Brien & Li, 2004, in Franco & Borras 2013, p. 1733). In Myanmar, the new democratic discourse gave opportunity for villagers to use these new entities and offices to test the extent of democratic reforms which were promised. Indeed, this is part of the relational aspect of this complex system of resistance. As Hall et al (2015) put it, "states are grounded in particular places and

times and are constituted through relationships with society. And just as there are multiple perspectives within the state, there are multiple relationships between state and society" (Hall et al, 2015, p. 477). These relations evolve, particularly so in this time period, and the relations that society or villagers have with the various actors and/or facets of the state are dynamic and become constituted over time. This is evident in the relations forming with the new democratic entities and the confidence to report to local and national government. For example, in 2011, the first National Dialogue on Land Tenure and Land Use Rights, which was organised by two large national and international NGO networks in cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry and the National Economic and Social Advisory Committee occurred with participation from grassroots rural and ethnic minority organisations. According to reflections of two founders of a national network that works to secure land rights across Myanmar – Land In Our Hands - 2011 marked a period where space opened up for "small-holder farmers, ethnic communities, and the displaced could represent themselves" (Ju & Ra, 2021, p.500). The opening of space at the national level and the discourse that accompanied it thus had implications for local level space for communities and subsequent engagement.

6.2.1 Reporting to Local Government

The attempts to negotiate with authorities were common throughout the geographical area. One example is in Mergui-Tavoy District where the Heinda Tin Mine is located, one of the oldest mines in the country, and is operated by the Thai-owned, Myanmar Pongpipat Company in a joint production deal with Myanmar's Ministry of Mining 2. The total concession of the land is 2,110 acres, while the mine site itself is 247 acres. It includes three open-pit mines, and much of the tungsten and tin that is mined is exported to China, Thailand, and Malaysia (Aung & Win, 2019). The flooding and contamination of local water sources, with high levels of lead and arsenic (Environmental Justice Atlas, 2018), resulted in local villagers reporting the issue to the government but they did not receive any response. This is according to the information in the first KHRG dataset, which consists of information documented between 2011 and 2013 (Karen Human Rights Group 2013a, p.423). According to media reports, the company promised government officials that it would address the flooding and contamination but nothing happened (Aung & Win, 2019). However, this case escalated, and the villagers eventually launched a court case against the Myanmar Pongpipat Company at the local Dawei (Mergui-Tavoy) District Court for $227,000 for "damages for

flooding, crop damages and property losses on the soil" (Naing Zaw, 2018). Eventually the case went all the way to the Supreme Court in the Myanmar capital, Naypyidaw, where the Court ruled against the local farmers and in favour of the company itself (Naing Zaw, 2018). Since 2016, the mining has been suspended three times due to environmental concerns but was resumed shortly after.

In other townships in south-eastern Myanmar, similar dynamics of villagers attempting to resist the impacts of land confiscation or damage from development projects by negotiating or appealing to local authorities were met with little response. For example, villagers reported to the local township authorities for three separate roads constructed in Thaton, Kyaikto and Hpa-an Townships that had destroyed their crops, but nothing was resolved (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.176). According to a situation update from 2016 that reported on in a village tract in Thandaunggyi Township, Taungoo District, the Myanmar Forestry Department confiscated villagers' lands, which were then designated as a protected area. Despite villagers' attempts to negotiate with the Forestry Department, the land with which they depended on for gardening and farming was not returned, nor compensation paid (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.361).

The impact of the repeated lack of success, or negative feedback loop in complexity terms, means that villagers can go one of two ways, either to stop this tactic, or escalate to a more confrontational form of resistance. In Dooplaya District, a farmer who was acting as a village head talked about the impact of the road construction of the Asia Highway beginning in 2013, a major infrastructure project that linked the Thai border to the town of Kawkareik in Karen State. The farmer reported that their attempts to receive compensation for their damaged rubber trees ended in them being too fearful to continue their resistance:

> Firstly, civilians wanted the local authority to discuss [about options for action and compensation] with them. They requested that the local authority arrange this [compensation] for them in a good way. Later on, civilians were depressed when nobody arranged it for them. They looked back to other villages and they found that those villagers also did not get any compensation [for their land which was affected by the road construction]. Therefore, they did not try [again] to mention anything [to the local authority as they saw that it was unsuccessful in other villages]. At the beginning, they always reported the

> impacts [of the road construction] to the local authority and talked to the local authority (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.401).

Obviously, their case was not successful, and this is an example of a negative feedback loop, where failed attempts at negotiation resulted in them giving up this particular mode of resistance to the road project. However, as will be detailed in the later chapters on Confrontation and Mobilisation, another option other than discontinuing their efforts at negotiation is that villagers escalate to more confrontational measures.

Not only can negotiation end due to lack of response, as demonstrated by the KMAC land confiscation case in the previous section, negotiation can have further adverse impacts on villagers. When the villagers in Taungoo District tried to report their land losses to the local government officers, as explained below, they were sued, and the authorities were perceived to have been colluding with the company:

> We do not want our lands to be confiscated. As farmers, we need our lands in order to survive. Therefore, we reported our difficulties to township administrator but they did not take any actions because they protect the company. We reported to the police that our plantations have been destroyed but they did not do anything to help us out. When we went to stop the company when they were working on our land, we were asked to go and sign a document at the police station that was drafted by the authorities. When seven villagers, including Z--- and his son, were sued, I went to the police station as an advocate, as an advocate was needed. I was not included in the list of villagers who were sued at that time. I am now included in the list to go to the court. The police were dirty [corrupt] (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.12).

The above examples show that despite a new democratic context and the willingness to test these reforms by appealing to the government, villagers often faced obstacles or a lack of action – negative feedback. This was not always the case, and the next section will give examples of where this resistance action yielded some benefit.

Sometimes, negotiation results in a partial success, or at least promises of resolution to the issue. In Bilin Township, Thaton District, villagers wanted to engage in logging but the

Township Officer did not permit them, and told them that he himself was the only individual authorised to do so, after which he sold the logs in Bilin town centre. However, due to villagers' group leaders' negotiation with the township officer in May 2014, villagers from one certain territory were permitted to conduct logging for a month in the township (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.247).

In other instances, there was a more concrete success of reporting to the authorities as an act of resistance. A Hpa-an incident report from February 2013 details how a local Border Guard Force (BGF) Commander had taken a woman's land, ordered villagers to clear it and then plant rubber. At the time of the interview, the woman whose land it was stated that she was trying to report the incident to the Myanmar government, and when the researcher followed up on this incident, a year later, it was found that she had had her lands returned to her (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.74). She did, however, have to cover the cost of clearing the land. Despite this, this appears to be an anomaly. The particular BGF commander, Maw Kya Aye, who is responsible for two battalions, is "a powerful, well-known figure" in Paingkyon Township, "feared" by villagers, and is "responsible for many of the human rights abuses in Paingkyon Township, either directly committed by him, or by BGF Battalion #1015 soldiers under his orders" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2014a). Thus other documented cases of land confiscation in this township, perpetrated by one of the two battalions that Maw Kya Aye commands, were not returned after negotiation.

6.2.2 Appealing to New Democratic Entities

It is not just local government offices with which people have appealed to. In what was promised as a new era of democratic transition and rule of law, new democratic offices, commissions and institutions were established. This includes the land investigation commission, the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, regional parliaments, and the Office of the President. There were some instances of villagers appealing to the President, Thein Sein. In 2010, just as the new era of quasi-democratic government was about to begin with Thein Sein as President, he announced that he would review all land confiscations by the military and unused land would be returned (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Thein Sein's government also established the Parliamentary Land Investigation Commission in 2012, sometimes known as the Farmland Investigation Commission, to receive complaints, investigate cases of land grabs, and propose solutions (San Thein et al, 2017).

A 2013 update from Shwegyin and Kyaukkyi Townships in Nyaunglebin District details a case where residents lost the opportunity to use a lake in which a customary system had been in place for generations where families would work for two years at a time on the lake for fishing before changing with other families. However, starting in 2012, they were banned from accessing the lake, as "the government only permits wealthy people and local authorities" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.153) to use the lake in an individual licensing system, as opposed to the common land customary tenure. The case ultimately went up to the level of the President's Office, and President Thein Sein declared that local villagers could access the lake and simply pay local taxes (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.153).

In Hlaingbwe and Hpa-an Townships, Hpa-an District, the construction of the Hti Lon Dam caused 3,000 acres of land to be flooded, affecting the land of 39 villagers as well as common land. After help from a local political/civil society group, the villagers managed to report their losses to Nan Say Hwah, the Lower House Phalon Sawaw Democratic Party MP for Hpa-an Township. She said that she would pass on this complaint to the relevant minister as well as the Chair of the aforementioned Farmland Investigation Commission (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.211).

In another case, the secretary for a local environmental civil society organisation in Thaton District discussed in an interview how villagers opposed a cement factory being built at Min Lwin Mountain. She said that they tried a variety of resistance tactics, including meetings with several government officials. For example, she reported on how her environmental group first met with the former Minister for Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development, Ohn Myint:

> Firstly, we met with a former state minister U Ohn Myint. He invited us to a negotiation so I went there. However, he supported the company instead of us. We argued with him. It was our first challenge dealing with the state government (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.249).

After, she also reports on how they would negotiate with visiting government officials and a local MP, all of whom supported the cement factory project and were trying to convince villagers not to resist. Eventually, this project was suspended after further mobilisation

(Burma News International, 2016) and appeals to the KNU which are detailed in Chapter Seven: Mobilisation.

The above examples, and there were more documented in the data corpus, mapped out a pattern of resistance actions of reporting to the government, including the newly established democratic entities such as local MPs or Ministers. They were attempted throughout the region and throughout the time period, hence they became a pattern of resistance. The increasing documentation of these actions reflects the changing opportunities for such engagement in a purported new era of governance in Myanmar and how villagers *adapted* to these changes. Elected politicians, including a 'reformist' President, a farmland investigation committee, and region-level parliaments added to the usual points of authority present in the General Administration Department, i.e. village tract, township, and district level administrators.

The lack of success of reporting to government officials reflects the infancy of the reforms, the lack of political weight behind empowering rural people, and most of all, the continuing power of the Myanmar military and its vested economic interests. Thus, while this type of negotiation and engagement is attempted, if it is not successful, this can create, in complexity terms, a negative feedback loop, which stymies further action. Furthermore, as well as facing some negative feedback loops, they were largely individual acts and did not rely on thickening relations between villagers, nor where they facilitated by strong agents. To recap, thickening relations means the denser the interactions between villagers are, this results in more emergent resistance actions. These acts of individual appeals were thus not a result of thickening density of interactions between villagers. They were individual acts that did not complexify the system. Despite this, in some examples, such as the Min Lwin mountain case, engagement garnered more results. This resistance was facilitated by local organisations and leaders, and hence there were thicker relations, producing more interactions, complexifying the system of resistance. Furthermore, as will be seen in the next chapters, if such actions are complemented by additional measures, including appealing to local Karen, particularly KNU leaders, or greater mobilisation and interaction among villagers, (as outlined in Chapter Seven), this resistance becomes more complex as more emergent resistance actions result from thicker relations.

6.3 Negotiating with Armed Actors

There were occasional cases of villagers attempting to negotiate with armed actors, but these were less common than attempting to report to government officials. Armed actors includes the Myanmar military, its proxy forces, other smaller armed groups that are usually in some form of alliance with the Myanmar military, and the KNU. Negotiating with such actors was difficult, rare, and tended to be ineffective – a clear example of a negative feedback loop preventing an emergent pattern. However, there were a small amount of instances documented with villagers negotiating with the military in Hpa-an District or Dooplaya District (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.77 and pp.214-215) as well as negotiating with non-state armed actors (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.205).

One example of negotiating with armed actors was detailed in an incident report of March 2013 in Hpa-an District, revealing how villagers adapted to the new context. It concerned a stone mining project implemented by the Border Guard Force (BGF) and villagers reported that their land was being damaged, particular the plot of one woman. They were worried that further damage would be done with continued mining so she approached the BGF to ask for compensation. While at the time she had not received it yet, the other villagers planned to continue to negotiate with the BGF leaders, and "for their security, they will rely on some BGF leaders whom they are friendly with" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.71). This boldness is striking and is explained further in the incident report as "currently they *[the farmers]* are not afraid of armed actors like they were in the past" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.72). This is consistent with other forms of engagement as resistance, in that even with armed actors, especially proxies of the Myanmar military like the BGF which are notorious in their treatment of local people, villagers were becoming more confident to negotiate with them directly.

Another marked change in this period in terms of villagers' negotiation with armed actors is that there are less reports of forced labour. In past documentation by KHRG, 'village agency' strategies often centred around negotiating with local commanders or unit commanders around the amount of forced labour to be provided (Malseed, 2009). For example Malseed (2009) analyses KHRG data from an earlier time period, (1990s to mid-2000s) and notes the prevalence of forced labour demands. In response:

> Village heads interviewed describe strategies such as ignoring first requests, then pretending absence from the village, feigning illness, sending a spouse to report, or pleading poverty and inability to comply. While complete evasion and noncompliance can be dangerous, demands for 20 forced labourers within 24 hours might be 'obeyed' by sending five forced labourers a week later, plus a bottle of rice whisky (Malseed, 2009, p.374).

Such negotiation and attempts at compromise around forced labour were largely absent from the data corpus this thesis analyses, reflecting the changing patterns of threats the villagers faced during this time period. The reduction of direct claims on villagers' labour and resources means that there were less occasions where it was necessary to engage directly with Myanmar military troops or their proxies. Just one example in the data exists, an interview with a farmer from Taungoo District in 2011 who stated that "the village head will negotiate with them to reduce the number of villagers they requested for forced labour. For example, if they asked for ten villagers, the village head will negotiate for five or six villagers" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.345). Tellingly this interview was conducted at the very beginning of the period under investigation (December 2011) and the start of the changing political and conflict dynamics in south-eastern Myanmar. This is not to say that forced labour did not occur, but that it had significantly reduced. This is because the relations between armed groups and villagers had changed and therefore, there was less direct violence and human rights violations. However, residual fear of negotiating directly with armed groups that still had a reputation of violence against civilians rendered negotiation with them a little-used resistance action. Of course, each village has its own context and set of relations, and the aforementioned example, of villagers negotiating with the BGF regarding a stone mining project, shows a specific case of adaption, and interaction resulting in resistance. However, it is still a little-documented tactic of resistance.

6.4 Negotiating with Companies

Reports of villagers directly negotiating with, or reporting negative impacts of projects to companies, were common. The burgeoning discourse in Myanmar on corporate social

responsibility, free prior and informed consent, and international frameworks on business and human rights complemented the political discourse on democratic transition (Sekine, 2021, p. 526). While the effectiveness of these discourses in land restitution may be mixed (Hall et al, 2015), it is clear that they provide an opportunity for local communities to demand rights and redress from companies who have caused damage or taken their lands. Nationally, negotiation with companies was also reported, in particular with mining companies (Kapoor et al, 2018). Negotiation with companies involved in-person meetings, appeals, or requests to the company directly, either to stop the project, receive compensation, or mitigate the negative impacts on their livelihoods and/or environment. Below are several examples of where villagers attempted to negotiate or appeal to the company, and these were documented across all districts, for example in Hpapun District (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.19 and p.63), Mergui-Tavoy District (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.161) and Dooplaya District (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.149 and Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.163), and throughout the time period under investigation, thus forming a pattern of resistance.

Despite several of these attempts yielding little benefit for the villagers, there were some instances of at least partial resolution. The Toh Boh Dam, the construction of which was completed in 2012 in Htantabin Township, Taungoo District by the Shwe Swan Company,[21] displaced 100 households (Karen Human Rights Group, 2014c).[22] Shwe Swan is a sister company of Asia World, which was described as "Myanmar's biggest and most diversified conglomerate with interests in industrial development, construction, transportation, import-export and a chain of local supermarkets" (McCartan, 2009). Villagers were therefore up against one of the biggest, richest, and most powerful companies in Myanmar, building a large dam in an agreement with the Myanmar military.

[21] Shwe (ရွှေ) in Burmese means golden, and is a common prefix to company names.

[22] The Shwe Swan Company is a sister company of Asia World, a large company in Myanmar founded by Lo Hsing Han along with his son, Stephen Law. Lo Hsing Han was one of the Golden Triangle's most infamous druglords, amassing a fortune through the production and trafficking of opium and heroin in the 1960s and 1970s (See Fuller, 2013). The Asia World company is therefore notorious in Myanmar because of allegations of Lo Hsing Han's previous role in the drugs trade and agreements with the Myanmar military.

Photograph 1: Construction of the Toh Boh Dam
(Karen Human Rights Group, 2012).

While the villagers were not successful in stopping the construction of the dam and the displacement that it caused, they did secure minor victories. The dam flooded a bridge between Hker La and Taungoo, with villagers only able to travel by boat (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.23). Photo documentation shows that Shwe Swan built a new road and provided a barge for villagers in December 2012 (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.21). However, villagers stated that the road was not built well, and was only usable in the dry season. In an interview with a farmer in 2017 in the same area, he stated that in 2014, after further negotiations with the Shwe Swan company, they promised that they would build a bridge to traverse the flooded parts of the road. However, at the time of the interview, this had not occurred (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.128). A third powerful actor was at least involved in this promise, as the interviewee stated that the KNU was involved in these negotiations.

Furthermore, in April 2013, negotiations with Shwe Swan company regarding lost land and plantations began with Taungoo District leaders (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.130) and in August 2013, the company provided compensation to landowners from four different villages for their lost land and plantations due to the construction of the dam, amounting to a total of just under $19,000 (Karen Human Rights Group, 2014c). However, as this plantation worker responded when asked about the perceived success of the villagers' actions to mitigate the worst effects of the dam construction:

> Some of the villagers received a small amount of compensation from the Shwe Swan Inn Company. Htone Bo village is flooded but local villagers have not received anything until now. They cannot measure the land that has gone under water. So, there are few successes that villagers have had so far (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.129).

As a caveat to this partial success of villagers negotiating with the company to receive some form of restitution, KHRG documented that "Saw Shway Way, a member of Than Daung Special Zone Peace group, demanded money from the villagers who received compensation and informed them that he organised the meeting and negotiated with Shwe Swan Company regarding providing compensation to the villagers" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2014c). The Thandaung Peace Group is actually a breakaway splinter group from the KNU and is now a militia operating in the area (Buchanan, 2016, p.15). According to KHRG it is:

> reported that they control a number of different illicit operations, including gambling and black market car licencing. They are also allegedly employed as security personnel by local companies and wealthy individuals involved in logging and mineral resource extraction, in addition to having direct involvement in the lumber and mineral business (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.539).

KHRG note that it is not clear if in fact the Thanduang Peace Group did broker the negotiation with the Shwe Swan Company, but given that the group extracted over $7,000 of the $19,000 compensation, it is difficult to conclude that this is nothing more than extortion. Furthermore, this partial success reflected highly contextual, uneven power relations where armed actors act as brokers to negotiate small victories for the villagers. Later documentation

in the same area - a situation update from 2017 - shows that the Thandaung Peace Group, collaborating with businesspeople, were involved in a separate land confiscation case (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.539).

A relevant aspect of this case is the confidence it gave villagers to negotiate and mobilise against other destructive development cases in Taungoo District. According to a villager interviewed in Taungoo District, the same company behind the dam construction, Shwe Swan, also began stone mining near the dam site, telling villagers that they needed to vacate the land as they had obtained a permit from the government to mine the land. However, villagers began to be "more proactive", attending meetings with the company and reporting how many acres had been destroyed by the company (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.112). A plantation hill-farmer reported that the villagers had a meeting in Toh Bo Village with the company and told them of how the operations were affecting villagers' lands, after which the mining project was stopped (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.111). A villager interviewed in 2017 regarding the KMAC land confiscation case, in the same district as the Toh Boh Dam and the stone mining, references the villagers' activism around the Toh Boh Dam:

> We do have villagers that have faced this kind of experience in places like Htoe Boh/Na Ga Mauk. At first, they prevented the company from coming in, but they could not so villagers took pictures of them [company workers] as evidence. They recorded the company name, the people who lead the project, incident date and other relevant information and they submitted it to CBOs/ CSOs who are working on documentation like KHRG. They also give the information about their concerns and how they feel about it to every CBOs/CSOs that comes into their areas (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.135).

They had the confidence to confront the company and try different resistance tactics. While success was limited, it demonstrates how a positive feedback loop develops, with momentum and confidence increasing due to minor successes and with no violent retaliation, as would have more likely occurred in the past. Furthermore, the thickening of relations among villagers, resulted in more interactions which resulted in the emergence of resistance actions.

It is an example of how the system became more complex as villagers came together and interacted, and hence there was more resistance.

An interview with a KNU official in December 2013 in Hpa-an District reflects another, at least partial success of villagers' negotiating with companies. The KNU official reports on a company called Mitsui that came to the area to do research as part of the planning for a dam to be built on the Ta Pa River. They came several times to conduct the research in September and October 2013 but each time, the villagers refused to allow them, not giving them permission. The villagers cited the plethora of armed actors in the area and were worried about potential for the dam to be a spark for renewed conflict, which dam construction had provoked in various parts of Karen and Shan States in recent years. The company came back with a government official, the township administrator of Kawkareik Township, who explained that they had the grant for the construction, and he outlined the various supposed benefits that the villagers would receive saying, "the area would be developed and the villagers would get the chance to grow rice in the summer" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.46). However, the villagers remained steadfast, fearful of an outbreak of armed conflict if one of the armed actors in the area such as the KNU, BGF, DKBA, KNU/KNLA-PC and the Myanmar military opposed the project (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.46).

The above examples of negotiation with companies show that this is a relatively common resistance tactic and is met with varying degrees of success. Success, however, tends to be partial, and this is because of the power imbalance between companies and villagers. Companies are often investing in projects in collaboration with, or in agreement with the Myanmar government and/or the Myanmar military. Hence approaching companies may result in some kind of compensation but is not enough to stop major projects. However, as with negotiating with the government authorities, if this is combined with other tactics such as village mobilisation or enlisting the assistance of powerful political and/or armed actors such as the KNU, resistance through direct negotiation with companies is more effective. This section has also presented an instance of a positive feedback loop, where minor successes of negotiation spurred on further actions, as seen in Taungoo District. Villagers gained confidence to use negotiation as a resistance tactic against stone mining after their initial experience attempting to mitigate the worst impacts of the Toh Bo Dam.

6.5 Submitting Complaint Letters

Another popular resistance tactic that combines elements of negotiation and engagement with the government and testing the 'rule of law' is sending complaint letters to local or national government, MPs, companies, and armed actors. Complaint letters, as with the land documentation documents, are a way to demand rights from the state, particularly land rights, through recognition. As Schoenberger puts it, complaint letters, like land titles, "draw in the state and its legibility projects" (Schoenberger, 2017, p.874). Complaint letters, or petitioning, is a common resistance mode in many other contexts. According to Dell'Angelo et al (2015), who used data from the Environmental Justice Atlas – the largest database providing information on environmental conflicts and mobilisations worldwide – complaint letters and official petitions were one of the most common community responses to large-scale land acquisitions. Accordingly, this mode of resistance was tried in 59% of the 185 cases in their sample. While this is limited to a particular form of structural violence, it gives an indication of the widespread use of this resistance tactic worldwide. This is also the case within Myanmar more broadly. A Parliamentary commission to investigate land-grabbing cases that was established under the President Thein Sein Government in 2011 received complaint letters "demanding the return of 250,000 acres of farmland that had been seized from the people" within eight months of its establishment (Parliamentary Investigation Commission for the Prevention of Public Disenfranchisements Connected to the Confiscation of Farmlands and Other Lands, 2013, in Ju & Ra, 2021, p.500).

In south-eastern Myanmar, complaint letters are typically sent to the Myanmar authorities, the company involved in the project, and/or the KNU. They are signed by the local villagers affected by the project, who are sometimes helped by a local organisation or network to produce and send the letter. The letters typically report the documented harms, requesting compensation, land restitution, or the suspension of the project.

The new era and discourse of democratic transition, while creating new democratic entities with which to engage with, as outlined above, also resulted in villagers making more official complaints. In an interview with a representative of a local community organisation who was also working for a Christian education group in Nyaunglebin District, one woman said that

since the 2012 ceasefire, local villagers took the opportunity to try and regain their lost land. This land had been occupied by the Myanmar military for several decades, and they wanted to rebuild their church, while also providing this land for returning IDPs. She reported that they did so by submitting complaint letters to various departments of the government in order to reclaim the land. Finally, one government official passed on their case to a general administrator who said they would make an appointment to gather information on the claim. However, this did not come to fruition and, according to the interviewee "while we are waiting for a response from him, they [Burma/Myanmar government] have started to build a cooperative department building, Kyai Let [Rural Development building] and commission offices" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.87). This case demonstrates that the 2012 ceasefire provided a sense of opportunity to engage with the government and reclaim land through submitting such complaint letters, adapting to the new context.

Similarly in Mergui-Tavoy District, villagers sent a complaint letter in January 2017 to the Tanintharyi Region Chief Minister, a member of the National League for Democracy (NLD) Party, to request compensation for the damaging of plantations that was occurring due to road construction (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.225). The NLD, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a resounding victory in the 2015 general elections, and both party and leader were wildly popular, instilling hope for many people who had lived for decades under harsh military rule. In another interview in Mergui-Tavoy District conducted in 2017, a 28-year-old plantation farmer spoke of the new freedoms that made the idea of even sending complaint letters possible:

> After the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire, the situation has improved so villagers can exercise freedom of speech. Now, villagers have organised themselves and they have reported the [land confiscation] issue by sending complaint letters to the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government township, district and regional authorities (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.169).

Despite this, in the cases the plantation farmer referred to, neither compensation nor land restitution was offered. The complaint letters catalysed a meeting between the local government and the villagers, but the township administrator admonished them for not raising the issue earlier, when the lands were originally confiscated in 2005. The farmer,

however, notes that in the previous time, before the ceasefire, it was too dangerous to send such complaint letters (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.169).

Complaint letters have also been sent with the help of local civil society organisations, including but not limited to KHRG themselves. For example, in Taungoo District, villagers attempted to recover land confiscated for the Bu Yin Naung military training school in 2016. This "team of villagers cooperated with a group that is working on land issues to submit a complaint letter to Tatmadaw[23] generals and Ministry of Defence in order to get back the land that was confiscated by the Tatmadaw," (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.436) according to a Thandaunggyi Township Update, from August to December 2017. In another incident in Taungoo District, the area where two large projects have caused damage to several villages – the KMAC plantation and the Toh Bo Dam, built by Asia World sister company, Shwe Swan - an interviewee in the area explained how complaint letters were part of the arsenal of villagers' resistance tactics, that escalated if needed to be more confrontational. As he explains:

> Firstly, they submit complaint letters to the village administrator but the cases cannot be solved by the village administrator. This is because the companies influence the village administrator. Then villagers submit [complaint letters] again to township and regional level administrators to solve their problems. However, their problems are usually ignored (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.130).

This resistance action was facilitated by an organisation that works on land issues. The organisation thus catalysed stronger relations between villagers, and more interactions which resulted in the complaint letter.

However, this interviewee also explains that as the complaint letters were not successful, as with other negotiation actions, they were either escalated, in this case to fencing land, which is a direct assertion of ownership (see Section 9.5: Fencing Land in Chapter Nine: Confrontation), or appealed to other local authorities, such as submitting the complaint letters to the KNU. The KNU, in turn negotiated with the company on behalf of the villagers.

[23] A Burmese word that means the Myanmar military.

Similarly in a case in Mergui-Tavoy District, a coordinator of a local legal network stated that complaint letters were the first tactic tried by villagers in the case of a huge palm oil plantation which covers nearly 50,000 acres of land. This plantation is a joint venture in which the Myanmar Start Prestige Platform (MSPP), a Malaysian company, owns 95% and was granted the concession in 2011 by the Myanmar Investment Commission. The concession overlaps with community land of four villages, which the government had deemed 'vacant' under the problematic Vacant Fallow, Virgin Land Law, and thus villagers had lost access to productive land for various orchards and plantations. Runoff from pesticides has caused illnesses among villagers and some of their livestock to die (Tarkapaw et al, 2016). This was highlighted in the Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism as a prime example of land confiscation facilitated by the new legal framework. Villagers had received no compensation for the loss or damage to their land. According to the interviewee, who was also a coordinator of a lawyers network, the first action villagers took was the complaint letter which did not bear fruit:

> For the MSPP case, there was some protesting. First, we submitted a complaint letter. When this case was investigated, it was found that some of the procedures the officials used were not correct. Because of this, there were protests [by the local community] (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.76).

Therefore, the community began to protest and mobilise (detailed in Chapter Seven: Mobilisation), creating an alliance to resist the project (Tarkapaw et al, 2016, p.39). Once they did this, they used the opportunity to send another complaint letter, as detailed in a report co-authored and published by the above interviewee's lawyer network. Thus, the alliance that the villagers created sent a complaint letter to the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC), an entity that is part of the peace process architecture and is aimed at monitoring and addressing disputes related to the ceasefires in Myanmar. The JMC decided that the MSPP must stop operations and the local police sent a letter to MSPP ordering them to suspend their project (Tarkapaw et al, 2016, p.39). This difference between the lack of action upon the first complaint letters and the effect of the complaint letters after the villagers mobilised demonstrates the impact of the local level organisation. It shows that complaint letters can be effective, but typically, not without additional resistance actions. This dynamic of additional actions making complaint letters have more impact was shown in the same area again when

complaint letters sent by the network to the regional government requesting that they investigate the project of the Thai palm oil company, Surisuban. Surisuban had received permission from the Myanmar Investment Commission to use 35,000 acres of land. As the same interviewee as above explains:

> The authorities promised that they would not allow the project to continue without the consent of the local community. There is cooperation between the civilians and the authorities. For example, the members of parliament and government ministers carefully worked on this issue based on the complaints of the civilians. In the Surisuban case, the members of parliament became involved and spoke for the local community (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.77).

The regional government ultimately released an official notice that the project had to stop (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.78). Again, the success of the complaint letter was dependent on the community's mobilisation as a complement to the letter. This was similar to the Pongpipat Company case presented earlier in this chapter, where two complaint letters sent to the government about the pollution the mining had caused in the river and destruction of villagers' livelihoods received no response. Yet after a local organisation, the Public Sustainable Development Committee, submitted a complaint letter on behalf of the affected villagers, and alongside other forms of resistance actions, the case gained momentum, reaching the Supreme Court and gaining national media attention (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, pp.429-428). This same committee also helped to send a complaint letter from villagers regarding the ITD's work on the Dawei SEZ, which was damaging villagers' plantations (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.312). In another involvement of this committee, they helped villagers send a complaint letter to the KNU regarding the construction of a dam for hydropower production, also in Mergui-Tavoy District, that subsequently damaged the land in five villages (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.14). This facilitation by committees and the thickening of relations by the committees was thus the catalyst for the emergence of more resistance actions.

Another dynamic with complaint letters is that they can reach the media and draw attention to the case. An interviewee in Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, reported the influx of companies following the 2012 ceasefire, confiscating land and plantations from villagers. For

the most part, when villagers tried to protect their land, they were not successful as "companies claimed that since they were given permission by the government, villagers' concerns and confrontations would be disregarded" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.148). However, the villager notes that there was one success, when the company paused the project that was damaging villagers' land after local media and organisations took up the case and advocated for the villagers after a complaint letter was sent. Yet the interviewee did state that the number of successes was small and will remain so until the government addresses the problem properly (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.149). There were several other reports of complaint letters also being sent after KHRG or another organisation gave trainings on what agency villagers have, the different tactics available to resist land confiscation and other deleterious effects of development projects. Such organisations also provided assistance on writing informed complaint letters. This is another example of how facilitation leads to more emergent resistance actions.

Complaint letters, however, can work two ways, especially in a context of mixed political authority. In a Taungoo District Situation Update from February to July 2013, after the ceasefire, villagers were trying to reclaim their land that was confiscated in 2005. They submitted letters to both the government and the KNU. In response, the KNU's agricultural department came with a GPS marker to measure their land and grant land title according to KNU land policy. However, the Burmese who came to plant on the confiscated land refused to acknowledge the original owners' claims and submitted their own complaint letter to the local government township administrator and the Myanmar military Infantry Battalion #39, the battalion which confiscated the land in the first place. The battalion came to the KNU Agricultural Department's GPS officials, asking them who gave them permission to measure the land (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.133). While it is unclear how this situation ended, it demonstrates the difficulties in navigating in a context of mixed political administration, and also shows that complaint letters can be used not just as a tool for those in a position of subordination, as outlined in this thesis' definition of resistance, but by those who benefitted materially from the original dispossession.

The above examples of complaint letters show clearly how the mechanisms of thickening relations and facilitation by local organisations results in more complaint letters. When local community organisations facilitate the writing and sending of complaint letters, it is a dynamic of bringing people together, catalysing interaction, and thus thickening relations

between villagers. This in turn meant more emergent resistance actions occurred and creates a more complex system of resistance. Furthermore, this was clearly a form of adaption to the changing political context, where there was more political and civic space, as well as confidence to engage in this form of resistance action – a complaint letter. By facilitating these actions and thickening the relations between people, community organisations thus helped to complexify the system of resistance, which the patterns of complaint letters being sent from villagers throughout south-eastern Myanmar contributed to. This will be expanded upon in Chapter Eight: Leveraging Local Leaders and Organisations.

6.6 Conclusion

The above section has outlined the various patterns of engagement tactics used by villagers to resist development and investment-related violence. These are: testing the 'rule of law'; reporting to state authorities; negotiating with armed actors; negotiating with the company involved in these development projects; and submitting complaint letters to an array of actors.

In response to the overarching question of how the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved amid forms of structural violence and what explains this dynamic, some conclusions can be drawn from the patterns of engagement as resistance. First, there have been several types of actions where villagers have engaged with or tested the new political discourse of rule of law, democratic entities such as MPs, or land registration frameworks to resist the destructive development projects. Examples include attempting to register land under the new Farmland Law, or writing to President Thein Sein about loss of access to common land. As several interviewees in KHRG's datasets stated, there was a burgeoning confidence to engage with the state, and more opportunities to do so. Hence, they adapted by engaging with the new political context and this shows the *adaptive* aspect of a complex adaptive system, which is able to maintain though constant evolution. Resistance is not stuck in old ways of mitigation, but responds dynamically to a changing context.

Second, individual acts of engagement were less common and less effective. However, when acts such as complaint letters are sent from a group of villagers, these result in more *positive*

feedback in terms of their complaints being addressed or at least acknowledged. This demonstrates that adaption and emergent resistance actions are more common, forming more patterns, and becoming more complex, when villagers interact, work together, and there is a *thickening of relations* between them. Referring to the complexity framework presented in Chapter Four, the thickening of relations is a motor that drives a complex adaptive system. It is thus telling that the resistance actions which are the result of more interactions between villagers gain more momentum and have greater impact than those individual actions in which there is less interaction. Furthermore this thickening of relations is facilitated by community organisations and networks, or in the language of the complexity framework, 'strong agents.' Hence the increasing use of engagement with the state, which is a form of adaption, is the result of these two mechanisms – *facilitation* of connections by strong agents which results in a *thickening of relations* creating more interactions - and therefore a more complex system of resistance.

Lastly, the tactic of engagement garnered more success in terms of response, reciprocal negotiation, or even restitution of land or compensation, if it was combined with other forms of resistance. In particular, village mobilisation such as committee forming, or appealing to local non-state leaders such as the KNU, gives greater weight to attempts at negotiation. This reflects a context where power and authority are still contested, and individual villagers' negotiation attempts such as sending a complaint letter or using government forms to register and protect their land are not sufficient to mitigate the worst of the violence. Power of an armed actor, or the strength of villagers mobilising is needed to broker more meaningful negotiations. It is these types of resistance that I will turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Mobilisation

The second of the four categories of resistance that villagers undertook from the ceasefire of 2012 until the end of the documentation period of 2018 is *mobilisation*. This mobilisation took the forms of forming committees, building networks between villages, or other forms of collective action such as holding meetings with other villagers and collectively planning what action to take. The most important facet of this mode of resistance is the working together, of villagers interacting with each other for a common objective. It is people coming together "to defend their interests by forging ties of solidarity for collective action, by creating networks of activist alliances to access crucial power resources" (Rutten et al, 2017, p.893) that defines this mobilisation. These kinds of mobilisation actions were documented throughout the region under investigation – south-eastern Myanmar – and throughout the time period – 2012-2018. This form of collective mobilisation has been documented and researched extensively in other parts of the world, particularly in land grabbing cases, including analysis of why villagers make the decision whether or not to engage in collective mobilisation. A major reason why this becomes possible is due to a "rupture" (Schoenberger, 2017, p.872) or a changing political context. As Borras and Franco (2013) explain, "changing political opportunity structure can partly influence poor people's decision to engage in overt political contention to struggle around their expulsion, either against their expulsion or to demand some kind of compensation or better terms of compensation" (Borras & Franco, 2013, p.1728). However, the literature on mobilisation also highlights the difficulties in forming a collective response, as structural violence impacts people differently, and cuts across, gender, class, age, and ethnic lines, sometimes dividing communities or at the least making it difficult for various groups to come together and mobilise (Barros & Franco, 2013, p.1727).

In south-eastern Myanmar, such instances of collective mobilisation, which were dispersed throughout the region and occurred repeatedly, formed one of the *emergent* patterns of resistance. These patterns emerged over time, *adapting* to the changing political and economic circumstances, including opportunities, of ceasefire capitalism and the new threats to villagers' lives and livelihoods. Furthermore, they were *self-organised,* emanating from the village or individual level, rather than a central organising entity or external agent. As the data will show, the mechanism of *feedback loops* is important, in which resistance actions centred around mobilisation were repeated if they did not face a violent reaction such as

arrest, or physical violence from an armed actor, ensuring that this mobilisation became a pattern. Villagers felt more confident in this time period, and positive feedback loops meant that mobilisation spread throughout the region as they adapted to the changing context.

This section also demonstrates how self-organisation, one of the key concepts that defines a complex adaptive system, works in practice. The committee forming and other forms of mobilisation were undertaken at the local level, with leadership and participation coming from the local villagers themselves rather than being centrally coordinated. Despite this, the role of local community-based organisations (CBOs) or community leaders in enabling this organisation, through taking the lead in meetings, or providing information to villagers, was significant. The role of such CBOs or leaders was therefore to *facilitate* self-organisation, leveraging villagers' opposition, as well as their increasing confidence to resist, in order to help form these committees or encourage collective action. On the part of the villagers, they could leverage the expertise and capacity of community organisations to further their own goals of resisting, for example, a destructive development project. It was the interconnections and interactions between the CBOs and the villagers that resulted in the *emergence* of patterns of mobilisation. While the role of such local organisations or entities will be detailed more in the next chapter, it will be introduced here to demonstrate how self-organisation worked in practice.

Lastly, this chapter will show the importance of one of the key aspects of complexity – relationality. As outlined in Chapter Four: A Complexity Framework for Dispersed Resistance, one of the key dynamics underpinning complexity theory is that it is the relations and the effects that relations produce which are given conceptual priority. This chapter will demonstrate this through examples from villagers in south-eastern Myanmar during this time period.

7.1 Forming Committees

One of the ways that villagers at a local level mobilised in order to respond to development projects is through forming committees to collectively organise, decide and plan further resistance actions. While the committees themselves were localised, they were often helped

by a CBO or individual with experience in organising. Committees here refer to village-level associations that, in turn could connect with other village-level committees, CBOs or national NGOs to form networks, as will be outlined in the next sub-section. Indeed the forming of such committees, or associations, is a common response to structural violence worldwide. For example, Podder's (2023) analysis of the association, Malen Affected Landowners and Users Association, formed in Sierra Leone after a police crackdown on protests demonstrating against an unfair land acquisition by a transnational company, shows that such local committees provide the node for connections between other NGOs or international allies. They become the focal point of resistance, facilitating, thickening relations and giving momentum to struggles against forms of structural violence.

For the most part, the forming of local committees was a consequence of the changing political context after the 2012 ceasefire, where political opportunity arose and villagers adapted by coming together to mobilise (Hall et al, 2015). The new political and economic dynamics emerging in Myanmar meant that the fear of retaliation for mobilising began to reduce. In Mergui-Tavoy District, a villager who reported about a committee formed by local villagers explains how the 2012 ceasefire influenced their resistance action. The case involves a palm oil plantation of the CKB company that began in 2002 but accelerated in 2012 after the ceasefire. The company had confiscated 200 acres of cashew trees and pasture lands from the villagers and even demanded compensation from villagers when their livestock ate the company's palm trees (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.162). Ten villagers formed a committee to meet with the government in their negotiations, but only after the ceasefire. Before 2012, it was "a conflict situation" and therefore the villagers were in a "dangerous situation" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.162). The villager reported that unlike before 2012, they do not face threats for their activities, and could now "work openly to get their lands back." After the ceasefire, they could meet monthly with the government, and those who felt they could not join the committee because they are "uneducated" instead donated money to its activities. They adapted to the changing situation to mobilise and form a village committee. These types of committees were formed in different areas of south-eastern Myanmar, showing how they were dispersed around the region and were repeated, forming a pattern. Their formation increased after 2012.

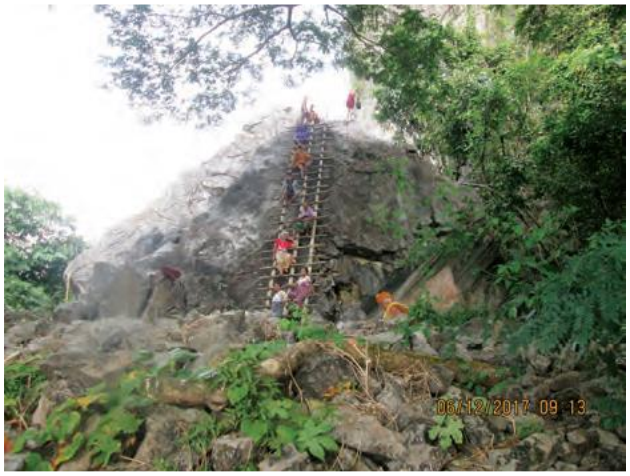
One emblematic example of committee forming which then led on to further resistance actions was documented in a Dooplaya District situation update from November 2016 to

January 2017. In Win Yay Township, the Karen National Union (KNU) had given permission for a company to conduct stone mining in order to build a cement factory. The company also had permission from the relevant Myanmar national government ministry, the Ministry of Mining, as the project site is an area of mixed administration (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.564). This is known as the Rocky Mountain mining case and involved the Asian Falcon company. Villagers objected due to risks to the mountain's biodiversity, the shade that the mountain provides for farmers' plantations, the potential for their water source to be contaminated, potential falling rocks putting villagers at risk, and the general disruption to their community. In response "villagers from eight affected villages formed an environmental conservation committee in order to have a more effective outlet for their concerns" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.557).

Photograph 2: Villagers meet to discuss the cement factory.
(Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.557)

The committee, the Natural Conservation Committee, served as the main vehicle for voicing villagers' opposition to the project, including through collective, village meetings and submitting a complaint letter to the KNU. First, they refused to sign documents related to the project. Then, they refused to allow the representatives of the Department of Geological Survey and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation to continue their surveying of the land (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.157). Although the project started in 2015, between 2016 and 2017 the refusal of the villagers to comply meant that no work was done on the development of the mine. Villagers even received a phone call from the ministry in the capital Naypyidaw, admonishing them for being "choosy and stubborn," and the ministry gave misleading information that a neighbouring village accepted the project. At one of the meetings, which was attended by 50 people, the villagers "set up the rules for environmental conservation" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.567).

Four monks were also part of the committee and in one action, led by one of these monks, the villagers built a stupa[24] on the top of the mountain in December 2017.



Photograph 3: Villagers carrying stone to the top of the mountain to build a stupa.
(Karen Human Rights Group, 2018b, p.116)

Monks are revered throughout Myanmar, "possessing a high degree of moral authority" (Walton, 2015, p.513) and the monks' participation in this action gave a moral legitimacy to their resistance in the eyes of the villagers, and quite possibly the company itself.

Despite this, KHRG reported that as of 2018, the project was set to continue, although villagers stated that they felt empowered by their efforts to resist the mining by raising their voices and putting pressure on the company and local authorities (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.120). However it was the committee itself that served as the departure point for this empowerment and the resultant resistance.

In another case in Nyaunglebin District, detailed earlier, in Chapter Six: Engagement, after the 2012 ceasefire villagers tried to regain land that was confiscated in the 1960s to rebuild their church and provide for internally displaced persons. Yet their initial attempts at sending complaint letters did not come to fruition (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.87). The villagers, with church representatives, then formed a committee with the local reverend acting as the chairperson and with help from a network of missionaries connected to the church. As the committee they submitted a letter, but they also made plans to clear and fence the land. As the interviewee states:

[24] A religious structure, common throughout Buddhist communities.

> If we cleared the land with a few people then the Tatmadaw[25] would not pay attention to us, because we were not very strong. I said that we want to get more participants in order to be stronger. Today we went to clear the land with over 20 participants and they seemed very shocked at us (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.88).

He went on to say that after clearing the land they would divide the plots of land for internally displaced persons. This increased mobilisation resulted in bringing both the local military officer and the township administrator to come to the committee to negotiate. In contrast with pre-2012 cases of villagers taking action, this was not done by appealing to the KNU to balance out unequal power relations because they could not rely on the KNU to help them in this case. The villagers had requested the KNU to move closer to the land after the ceasefire, reasoning that "if they (KNU) were based close to us we could depend on them and we could try to get our lands back, but they did not work with us" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.89). The interviewee did not want to explicitly criticise the KNU, but it is clear that the villagers felt they had to take the matter into their own hands, which they did, having gained courage and confidence. In the past, the interviewee said that they "had dared not protest" but after the founding of the committee, there "had been some improvement" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.90). As he states:

> the villagers have to know their own rights and claim their rights. If we do not do that then they will step on us because there is no transparency. We need transparency and equality, therefore, we voted for change in the election. Everyone [villagers] are trying to get change…To get our lands back we also have to work together and try very hard (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.92).

This demonstrates *adaption* to the changing context, specifically the 2012 ceasefire. The villagers felt there had been improvement and changed their resistance action accordingly. This also reflects *adaption* in that they did not feel that they could look to an armed group – the KNU – as leverage to balance inequal power relations. The way that the villagers felt they

[25] Tatmadaw is the Myanmar military.

could get their land back was to form a committee, to mobilise collectively with the guidance of a local religious leader - the reverend - and use their strength in numbers, rather than relying on the KNU to attempt to get their lands back. The reverend is not an external actor, but is part of the community itself, and is one of the components of the complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance. The role played by the reverend was that of enabling or *facilitating* self-organisation. Thus, self-organisation does not occur in a vacuum, but sometimes necessitates guidance from a particular actor or entity.

The help from other leaders or organisations was also part of the founding of the Min Lwin Region Environmental Conservation Committee, as local Karen CBOs helped the newly formed committee to write a report on the destructive impacts of the Min Lwin Cement Factory in Thaton District. A network of land rights activists helped the committee write a report documenting the negative impacts, while two Karen CBOs, including KHRG, helped with advocacy. All three supported the committee members through trainings and facilitating their participation in national level civil society forums (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.249). Additionally Naw Ohn Hla, a prominent ethnic Karen land rights activist, came to the village and gave a speech to motivate them. This demonstrates the importance of how villagers, even village committees, can be guided and given assistance by organisations that are not necessarily present in the village but form part of the broader ethnic Karen community and are thus components of the complex adaptive system of resistance. Furthermore, the Min Lwin Environmental Conservation Committee actually became a network of committees (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.550). The following explanation on how this network thrived on information sharing is from the secretary of the committee:

> When we collected data from village to village, we discussed these issues with the villagers and could see how people are becoming united again. We could see that the villagers from big villages such as Ed--- and other small villages started to stand up for their views. We also have regular phone communication with them. We get updates such as who came to their area, who is being threatened, and etc. Then we suggest to them ways they can respond to the situation in order to stand up for their rights. Later, we noticed that the Ed--- village leaders started to show respect to the small villages (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.250).

Such networks (which will be expanded on in the next sub-section), facilitated by a local organisation, builds a complex system. It is the interconnections, the spread of information, and interactions between villages, forming village-level committees that together created the overarching Min Lwin Region Environmental Conservation Committee, which was the vehicle for resistance. Through the committee villagers were more united against the threats that they faced. As the committee member said, "It's like a proverb, "*The tiger snatches the cow when it has separated from its herd [united we stand, divided we fall]"* (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.250). Ultimately, their resistance, which was catalysed by the committee, was successful, and in 2016, the KNU, which had initially given permission for the feasibility study, ordered the company to talk operations (BNI, 2016).

The committees documented in this section were self-organised, i.e. at a village-level, and their establishment increased after the 2012 ceasefire. However, this was a form of *facilitated self-organisation* in which local community or religious leaders, or local Karen organisations, aided their establishment at the village-level. Several interviewees stated that they were able to mobilise in this form due to the changing political conditions and in particular the greater freedom of movement, association and assembly. It was thus a form of *adaption.* Lastly, they did not face negative repercussions, such as threats, violence, or legal action because of the establishment of these committees. Thus, a *positive feedback* loop consisting of a proliferation of such committees occurred, particularly in Mergui-Tavoy District.

7.2 Building Networks

Related to the forming of village-level committees outlined above, is that by villagers mobilising and organising together they are forming networks where information is exchanged, solidarity built, and experiences of their resistance activities is shared between villages. Building networks is a widespread and an oft-used reaction to threats such as land confiscation, regionally, globally, and nationally within Myanmar. In their review of the database, Environmental Justice Atlas, and specifically cases on land acquisitions and subsequent mobilisation, Dell'Angelo et al (2021) find that in 47% of their sample, "one of the strategies of resistance and mobilization is explicitly developing a network for collective and coordinated action" (Dell'Angelo et al, 2021). Such networks are documented throughout

the land-grabbing literature (Hall et al, 2015, Rutten et al, 2017, Franco & Borras, 2013, Tafon & Saunders, 2018). For example, Rocheleau (2015) outlines a case of "networked dispersed, persistent resistance" (Rocheleau, 2015, p.698) to a case of green-grabbing in Chiapas, Mexico. What Rocheleau (2015) outlines in her research is that when faced with complex assemblages of power – in the Chiapas case a constellation of corporate, security and state actors grabbing land for extractive industries and large-scale ecotourism– this is then best responded to with an opposing assemblage of resistance. In this sense, just as the threats facing villagers in south-eastern Myanmar form a complex assemblage, conceptualised as 'ceasefire capitalism,' in Chapter Two, the dispersed resistance mode of network building is a complex assemblage that responds to such threats.

Dell'Angelo et al (2021) also make the important point regarding the emphasis of communities in this network building and this relates to the thickening of relations which is a mechanism for complexifying the system of resistance. It is the interactions between people, exemplified by a network, that produces emergent resistance. And while individual land rights or human rights defenders are often portrayed most vividly in the international media, such as in cases of extrajudicial killings or arbitrary arrests, the "key role of the collective dimension of land struggles against coercive measures is frequently overseen" (Dell'Angelo et al, 2015, p.11). For Rutten et al (2017) networks that are "rooted in place, land and territory, stand out as important potential bases for smallholder mobilization and the forging of effective bargaining units in land deals – despite great constraints and vulnerabilities" (Rutten et al, 2017 p.902). These are the types of networks that are discussed below, tied very much to their locality and the importance of their surrounding environment for cultural, environmental and livelihood reasons spurs action.

Such local networks can forge transnational alliances, recruiting international NGOs, human rights organisations, and even UN agencies to resist forms of structural violence (Borras & Franco, 2013, Tafon & Saunders, 2021, Podder, 2023). In Myanmar for example, local networks such as IFI-Watch Myanmar, which monitors projects of international financial institutions, and the Karen Environment Social Action Network, are members of the international social and environmental justice network – Namati (Namati, n.d.).

Local networks can be the forerunner for social movements that can orchestrate national campaigns for broader political change. For Borras and Franco, networks that are "able to

galvanise broad unity within and between affected communities, able to recruit and mobilise influential allies from within their communities and beyond (including international actors), within and outside the state, and able to generate sympathetic media attention are likely to succeed" (Borras & Franco, 2013, p.1728). An example of such a national land network in Myanmar – Land In Our Hands – shows how these networks can evolve into national campaigns for broader political change.

Land in Our Hands was established in February 2014 to "to promote, protect, respect & fulfill the land tenure rights of small-scale farmers, fishers, forest dwellers, rural women, rural youth, and nationalities" (Land In Our Hands, n,d.). It is composed of "individual land activists, farmer unions, civil society organizations, community-based groups and local NGOs" (Ra & Ju, 2021, p.501) and has over 60 members. Some of these groups are informal and voluntary while some rely on donor funding, and cut across various localities, from township to national level. They work on a number of issues including mining, agribusiness, dam construction, SEZs, and conservation projects. It was the "first multi-ethnic land movement initiative formed in the country" (Ra & Ju, 2021, p.501).

One of the main strategies of this national network was a campaign around the National Land Use Policy, making recommendations at government consultations based on LIOH's own series of localised consultations with its members in each local state and region (Ra & Ju, 2021). These recommendations were based on recognition and promotion of customary land rights, restitution of land for refugees and IDPs, and recognition of women's rights to land. The network also conducted extensive research on the impact and extent of land grabbing nationally, using the findings as advocacy tools and working together with an international organisation working on sustainable development – Transnational Institute, for technical expertise. LIOH also campaigned on legal amendments to problematic new land laws, outlined in Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism, that would disenfranchise particularly ethnic minority farmers. Up until the coup attempt of February 2021, LIOH continued to mobilise farmers and grassroots organisations, connecting people and groups from different parts of Myanmar by organising forums, assemblies, issuing joint statements, conducting joint research, and campaigning for better protection of land rights in national laws and policies.

One of the defining characteristics of LIOH is that, despite a level of central coordination, its membership was never formalised. Indeed, the only formal parts of the network were

secretariat and program teams whose main functions are "to support the highly autonomous regional groups when requested, and to try to bring them together at the national-level if the need arises, for e.g. the National Land Use Policy process" (Ju & Ra, 2021, p.510). Thus, similar to the dispersed resistance documented in this thesis, there is a level of self—organisation, although LIOH network is more coordinated than the loosely connected patterns of resistance in south-eastern Myanmar.

While the networks depicted in this section in south-eastern Myanmar did not evolve into such national social movements or networks as LIOH did, at a localised level, they display some similar dynamics. Firstly, the changing political context created an opportunity for mobilisation which LIOH, as with the networks presented below, adapted to. Secondly is how the connections between villagers and villages are important in catalysing the interactions needed for emergent resistance and thus complexifying the system. This is similar to the LIOH network in that it was the coming together of different organisations, groups and individual activists and farmers that resulted in the emergent resistance manifest in statements, campaigns, engagement with legal and policy processes, and research for advocacy. What is most important in both the national network and the local networks described below is the coming together, the thickening of relations that means more interaction. The more committees, and the more they are connected to each other, the denser the network. This in turn builds the system of dispersed resistance.

For example, in Mergui-Tavoy District, the lawyer who coordinated a network of legal aid talked of the functioning and importance of this network, which is quoted below at length:

> There was cooperation between the civilians, media outlets and civil society organisations. For example, when the company invited someone [to the meeting] to speak and negotiate with them, those villagers share the information with the network. They informed [the local community] that they were invited to the meeting. They asked for suggestions about whether or not they should go.
>
> If the villagers did not go to the meeting, the meeting would not happen. Because they did this, the company was not able to do anything. Later on, the government released an official letter that the project had to stop. Currently, the

> project was stopped and we can say that this was one step towards the success (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.75).

He later explains how:

> The villagers communicated with each other and shared relevant information. They collected data and submitted a complaint letter. When they received a response, the villagers cooperated with each other and civil society organisations to discuss further plans. They also selected the people who can represent the village and send representatives to trainings. After the training, those people came back and worked for their community (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.77).

He also stated that at the time of the interview, the project had been suspended, and the regional government realised that the resistance on the ground meant it was not a viable project. The network of villagers, with their complaint letters, protests, information sharing and committees, had successfully resisted the project. He also mentioned the strength of religious organisations in the area, whether Buddhist or Christian, that helped to facilitate the network of resistance, "Those religious leaders connect with each other, discuss and share information" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.79). Although not as extensive, the case outlined in the previous section regarding the committee founded to reclaim church land was also facilitated by the network of missionary groups and individuals in the area and chaired by a reverend.

Not that network building is easy and significant challenges remain. As the representative from a local women's organisation in Mergui-Tavoy District lamented, "I want to see the local villagers in their areas organising themselves and directing their communities to claim justice. But that is not the case in reality. The villagers just want to completely rely on us" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.255). She explained that the long-term, daily perseverance and motivation needed to resist the Dawei SEZ project - a huge megaproject that stopped and started throughout the 2012-2018 time period - was difficult to muster continuously. And while the coordinator of the lawyer's network was pleased with the progress made in the network of resistance, he also spoke of the challenges that remained, "At times, there are misunderstandings between different organisations, and some actions are

mistakenly done" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.76) while cooperation was also not strong in certain instances.

This networks of committees, local, village-level organisations, and community leaders in south-eastern Myanmar have also been documented by other NGOs and CBOs in the region. It is worth going into detail of one of the largest to demonstrate the importance of relations and assemblages of actors that form emergent patterns and a complex system of resistance. In Tavoy-Mergui District, a network was formed, the Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature (RKIPN). This was in response to facing "the threat of losing control and use of their customary territory and natural resources" due to a government-led conservation project – the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve Project (Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature & Tenasserim River and Indigenous People Network, 2016, p.8). The project was accelerated after the 2012 ceasefire and the forming of this network - RKIPN - in 2014 was a direct response to the threat. The RKIPN includes nearly 100 members from each of the 11 villages in the Kamoethway Valley, the area that is vulnerable to loss of land and livelihood due to the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve Project as well as the Dawei SEZ and mining – all activities that increased since the 2012 ceasefire (Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature & Tenasserim River and Indigenous People Network, 2016). The goal of RKIPN is to assert their indigenous rights to manage their own land in the face of logging, mining, conservation and large-scale industrial projects that is threatening their way of life.

This form of organisation is an *adaption* to the more peaceful conditions brought about by the ceasefire, but also the threats from development and conservation efforts that this tentative peace enabled. It is also an example of a network of people's organisations forming after being guided by a CBO that already existed. The first meeting in Kamoethway, in which it was decided that the villagers would form the RKIPN network, was facilitated by the Tenasserim River and Indigenous People's Network (TRIP-NET), "a community-based organization which supports and empowers communities across Tanintharyi Region to document and formalize their forest and natural resource management practices in order to claim their rights and influence policymakers" (Equator Initiative, n.d.). Thus, the RKIPN network that was formed by local villagers was facilitated by another network - TRIP-NET.

Furthermore, a well-known Thai-Karen environmental leader and expert on traditional farming practices, Chai Prasert, was invited to speak at this meeting to the villagers. Thus, the

sharing of information was done across borders, with the experiences of ethnic Karen in upland Thailand and their resistance to forced eviction from the forests they have been living in for generations providing essential ideas for the villagers in Myanmar (Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature & Tenasserim River and Indigenous People Network, 2016). The network, RKIPN was established with 77 volunteers just from this first, 2014 meeting and plans around structure and approach began immediately. Just one year later, there were 94 members with each of the 11 villages in Kamoethway represented (Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature & Tenasserim River and Indigenous People Network, 2016). There is a volunteer committee, coordinators for each village, and six working groups related to vegetables, wild animals, herbal medicine, handicrafts, forest, and rotational farming. Their resistance is one in which the network asserts their rights as indigenous peoples to manage their own resources and practice a grassroots-led model of development that is sustainable and based on indigenous and traditional relations with the land. One of the most interesting aspects of the guiding philosophy is that has been shaped by and is in relation to the state. As they state:

> Philosophy of RKIPN:
> In the past, the Myanmar central government allowed destructive logging and mining in forested areas around Kamoethway. Now, the government representatives say they are interested in conserving the environment in these same areas, but the villagers do not trust this based on their past experience. Instead, the philosophy of RKIPN asserts that it is up to the indigenous people themselves to take the lead on conservation of their lands that they control and manage. (Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature & Tenasserim River and Indigenous People Network, 2016, p.11).

Thus, echoing the Chiapas example mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the RKIPN network represents a complex assemblage of actors, dispersed throughout a particular part of south-eastern Myanmar, that resists the complex assemblage of state-business-armed actors which pose a threat to the land and environment of local communities. They are in relation to each other and it is the state assemblage that has shaped this resistance, but it is also made possible by the thickening of relations between villagers and community leaders in the Kamoethway Valley. Furthermore, it has a transnational element, with lessons learned and connections made with ethnic Karen over the border in Thailand. While it may not have

reached national network status, it represents one of the largest networks in south-eastern Myanmar. It started to make progress in terms of national recognition, with members of the network invited to Myanmar's capital, Naypyidaw, for a meeting regarding community conservation with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (Arnold, 2016).

In addition, RKIPN worked closely with Community Sustainable Livelihood Development (CSLD), another network that was formed in 2011 in response to the Dawei SEZ (Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature & Tenasserim River and Indigenous People Network, 2016). Their interactions and linkages are represented below, taken from a RKIPN report:

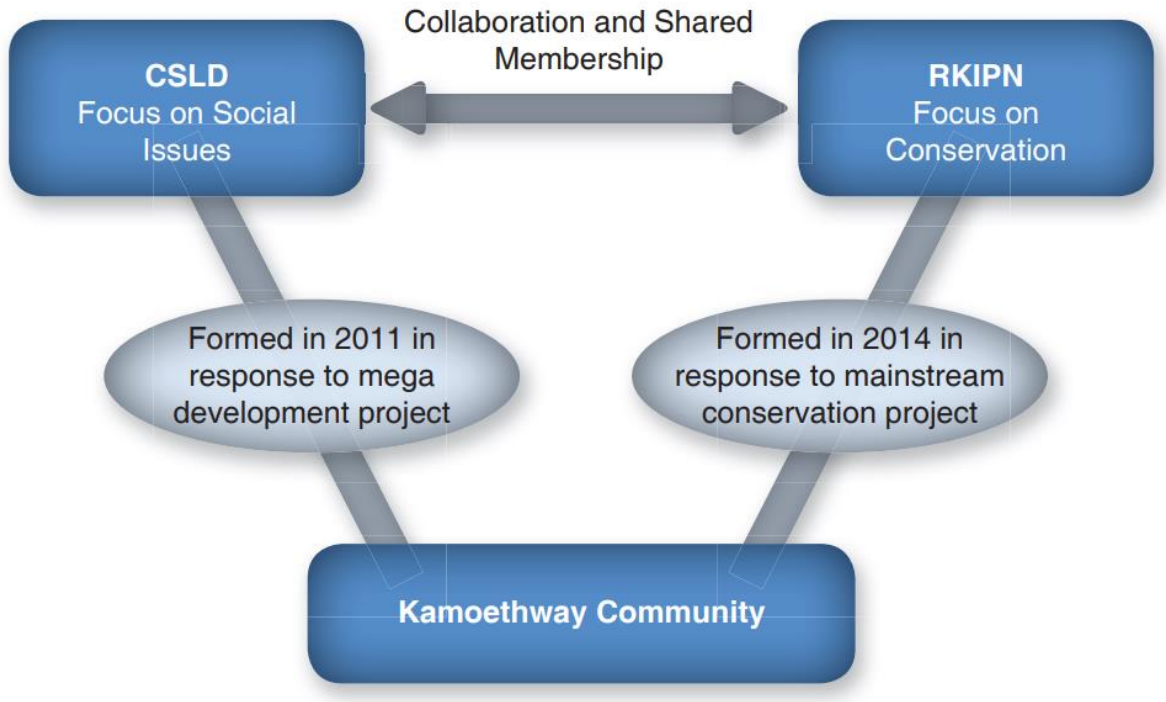


Figure 4: Network Building in Mergui-Tavoy District

(Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature & Tenasserim River and Indigenous People Network, 2016, p.10).

Added to this alliance with CSLD, RKIPN hosted indigenous villagers from Myeik District, whose land was also affected by the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve Project that RKIPN resists

(Arnold, 2016). One of the villagers who learned from RKIPN's experiences told the environment-focussed media outlet, *Mongabay*, "Hopefully after visiting Kamoethway we will feel empowered to use our indigenous knowledge to conserve our own territory" (Arnold, 2016).

This proliferation of networks in the Mergui-Tavoy District that centred around asserting people's rights in the face of destructive development projects is a clear example of a *positive feedback loop.* Prior to the beginning of this period of analysis - 2012 - the prevailing mood vis-à-vis authorities was fear. Yet the formation of one network facilitated mobilisation among villagers, thus creating stronger, more connected networks that share information, raise awareness of their rights, and empower villages to create more networks or committees. The more mobilisation there was – in the form of networks and people coming together - the more empowered villagers were to continue this type of resistance. This expansion and thickening of networks ultimately produced an alliance comprised of several networks throughout the region – The Conservation Alliance Tanawthari (CAT) – which included TRIP-NET, CSLD, Tarkawpaw Youth Group, Candle Light, Southern Youth, and KESAN (Conservation Alliance Tanawthari, 2018). In complexity terms this demonstrates *self-organised* resistance, guided by local community organisations mobilising villagers, *adapting* to the new threats of development projects, setting off a *positive feedback loop* in which this type of resistance – committee forming and villager mobilisation – creates an *emergent* pattern. Furthermore, it was a *thickening of relations* in the sense that more relations between people created more interactions and therefore more emergent patterns of resistance.

While the networks built up in Mergui-Tavoy District to facilitate community mobilisation were not the only place they existed, they represent the densest assemblage of committees and networks in the southeast. However, other networks and local organisations have facilitated resistance, and these will be detailed in the next chapter, Leveraging Local Organisations and Leaders.

7.3 Taking Collective Action

Several examples outlined in various sections of this thesis which present different types of

resistance actions taken by villagers are preceded by a form of coming together, collectively organising, and deciding which resistance action is best to take. The first step for villagers mobilising and organising collective action is typically a village meeting that would precede another resistance action. This can be more informal than forming a committee or a network. These are what Rutten et al (2017) call "horizontal relations" which for them are the relations between smallholders that stand in contrast to "'vertical alliances' of smallholders with state officials and members of elites" (Rutten et al, 2017, p.902). For Rutten et al (2017), "power in numbers is important in local collective actions (e.g. demonstrations and blockades), in negotiations and the formation of cooperatives, and in everyday forms of resistance" (Rutten et al, 2017, p.902). This is applicable to this thesis as the result of such cooperation can include submitting complaint letters, reporting to the authorities, conducting protests, or any other collective act. Thus, collectively working together, usually though meetings or consultations, is a type of resistance, often as a precursor to other actions.

As one interviewee from Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District stated, individual confrontations were not as effective. However, "the participation of many people is empowering. The voice of a single person and a large group of people is heard differently, and a large group of people is able to put more pressure on the government" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.149). This was echoed by another villager in Dooplaya District who also stated that it is better to resist as a group than as individuals. He used an example of:

> a villager named Kyaw Dk---reported a case without help from others and he faced difficulties because he was on his own. If we act together as a group, nobody dares to abuse us physically. If they [the companies or authorities] want to solve the case, they[…]meet village tract leaders but they do not violently abuse villagers like in the past anymore (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.155).

The villagers clearly see that working together to take action and resist destructive development projects is a more effective tactic than individual action. Furthermore, as the above quote shows, they felt stronger in the political and economic context of the time, i.e. after the ceasefire. Similarly, a villager interviewed in Mergui-Tavoy District reported that after the 2012 ceasefire, "the situation improved" so villagers could "exercise freedom of expression." They used this freedom to organise, they "cooperated as a group" and sent

multiple complaint letters to the government and the KNU (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.169). In another example in Hpapun District, villagers from a village tract cooperated and worked together to reject a gold mining project in the Meh Weh Kloh River. According to a situation update from October 2013 the villagers "organised themselves [to campaign against the project] and the village tract leaders completely prohibited [the project], stating that they could not allow gold mining" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.34). The village tract leaders then posted prohibition notices along the road and river to prevent outside companies engaging in the gold mine. The KHRG researcher who documented this resistance wrote that "they want the generations of their children and nephews to be able to sustain their livelihoods [without environmental damage]" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.34). In another example, where fear was still prevalent, villagers helped one particular landowner whose plot had been damaged by a Border Guard Force commander's stone mining activities in Hpa-an District in 2013. The stone was to be sold to build a road, but the villager did not feel comfortable going to the BGF commander to report the damage to her plot and to seek remedy. She thus asked the local villagers who said they would "gather together" and appeal for compensation (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.70).

In another case in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District, an interview with a member of the Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) shows how villagers cooperated to resist a gold mining project. Companies came to mine gold with permission from local authorities but local villagers were not permitted to engage in the mining themselves. The villagers worked together to send complaint letters and appeal to KNU district leaders. The result was that the villagers were allowed to mine in seven out of the 13 sites (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.63). This collective action, while still very much at a local and village level, was guided by and coordinated by KWO, a local organisation. It demonstrates that while resistance was self-organised, it was facilitated by another entity.

There were many other examples in the documentation that report how villagers came together to collectively plan what resistance action they would take. It is this coming together of villagers that gives them strength and confidence to resist. It is also important in terms of a complexity lens. Emergent outcomes are a result of interactions between agents within the system. Relations between agents not only produce emergence of a social phenomenon – in this case resistance – but they define the system itself, creating its boundaries. The dispersed resistance of the villagers in south-eastern Myanmar is not based in one particular institution,

entity, individual, or organisation. Rather, the villager becomes a resisting agent through their interaction with other villagers as well as the target of their resistance. It is thus a 'thicker relationality' because they are conditioned and transformed through time because of the relationship (Brigg, 2016). However, it is possible to go even further along the 'relationality' (Brigg, 2016) spectrum, and to say that it is only though their relationality, through their interactions, that resistance is produced. Without this interaction, there would be no resistance documented. The interactions at the village meetings, the coming together, the strategic planning, the joint actions, the committee forming, or the network building, all these are based on relations that result in emergence of resistance – hence thick relationality.

7.4 Conclusion

The above sections have outlined the various patterns of mobilisation as a form of resistance used by villagers to resist development and investment-related violence. These are: committee forming, network building, and collective action. Similarities between these categories remain, but all three show how villagers work together to resist, mobilising and engaging in local-level organisation. Particular attention was paid to the RKIPN network in Mergui-Tavoy District that was formed in response to a large conservation project, the Natural Conservation Committee that was formed to resist the stone mining at Rocky Mountain, and the national-level, Land in Our Hands network.

In response to the overarching question of how the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved amid new forms of structural violence and what explains this dynamic, some conclusions can be drawn from the patterns of mobilisation. First, as with other chapters, there was a sense of *adaption* to the new political context. Villagers felt more secure and confident to come together to form the networks, committees, or take the collective action outlined in the above examples. This is a reflection of the new political and civic space available. Less afraid of being charged under the Unlawful Associations Act, or being treated as an insurgent, the networks and committees and subsequent activities that result from their forming meant that people could engage in forms of public resistance, asserting their grievances. This is consistent with literature on responses to land grabbing, where changing political contexts provides opportunity to resist

(Barros & Franco, 2013). A final point about adaption is that in certain situations villagers began to look beyond the KNU as an actor that would support their resistance, and take it upon themselves to take action.

Second, more than other chapters, the role of *thickening relations*, of people coming together, interacting and therefore creating more resistance actions is important. The networks and committees are a reflection that villagers working together was more effective, and the catalyst for more resistance than individual actions. This local mobilisation was thus a vehicle for resistance. Furthermore, there was a sense of momentum when these networks and committees were formed, resulting in more resistance and more people coming together to take collective action.

Third while these networks and committees were *self-organised* i.e. led at a local-level and participated by people within the village, they were *facilitated* by CBOs and other 'strong agents.' This following chapter will analyse their role in more detail, but suffice to say that their role itself is an adaption to the new context, in which such local organisations have more freedom and space to operate, to extend their programmes, and make the connections between bigger, national NGOs and smaller, localised activities.

In terms of complexity, this chapter has also demonstrated and identified the essence of a complexity lens – that emergent outcomes (resistance) are the result of interactions between components of the system. The *thickening of relations* produces the complex system whose boundaries are the patterns of resistance themselves. The more relations that develop, the more patterns of resistance emerge, and hence the more complex the system is. Without this thick relationality, there is no dispersed resistance. It cannot be found in an individual or an institution, but in interactions that produce emergent outcomes. Hence why mobilisation and the various resistance actions within this category are so important. Mobilisation necessitates interaction which in turn produces emergent patterns of resistance.

The other two conceptual mechanisms which underpin the complex adaptive system were also identified in this chapter. The *positive feedback loops* in which committees or other forms of community mobilisation spread through the southeast after the 2012 ceasefire was because they were not faced with sanctions or threats, and hence multiplied. Villagers felt empowered by their strength in numbers, and thus the emergence of this mode of resistance

proliferated, especially in Mergui-Tavoy District. Furthermore, the positive feedback loops and the thick relationality were aided by community leaders and local community organisations. This is a form of *facilitated self-organisation,* in which particular components of the system (community organisations) were more active in connecting villagers and enabling the interactions that produce resistance. Thus, *self-organised* patterns of resistance *emerged* that *adapted* to the changing political context.

Chapter Eight: Leveraging Local Leaders and Organisations

The previous chapter, Mobilisation, introduced how self-organisation worked in practice – through villagers coming together, creating more nodes of interaction and therefore more emergent acts of resistance, i.e. thickening of relations. This chapter will further detail how resistance was *facilitated* through the help, support and capacity of existing organisations or networks. It will explore how villagers engaged with and *leveraged the capacity, resources, and power of three types of organisations* and leaders as part of their resistance actions - the Karen National Union (KNU), village heads, and Karen civil society (CSO) and community-based organisations (CBOs).

As explained in Section 4.2.3 in Chapter Four, agents – in this case villagers – are in a system of complex relations, and while they may be in a subordinate position, they still have the ability to influence their surrounding environment. Leveraging here then refers to the agency of villagers who are situated in an unfavourable position vis-à-vis more powerful and resourced actors, to nevertheless strategically utilise, access or place demands on such actors to resist the negative impacts of ceasefire capitalism. Sometimes villagers purposefully leveraged this support from powerful armed actors, such as by appealing to the KNU, thus leveraging the KNU's need for legitimacy from local Karen populations to act in their favour. Other times, villagers sought out advice or support from a CBO or CSO, and occasionally, they relied on local village leaders. The facilitation provided by CBOs and CSOs, who act as 'strong agents,' helped to thicken the relations between villagers, and thus catalysed the emergence of more resistance actions. This chapter, particularly with regards to CBOs and CSOs, thus shows how the mechanisms of *thickening relations* and *facilitation* renders the complexity concepts of *emergence* and *self-organisation* visible, which in turn allows us to narrate the complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance.

This chapter also demonstrates how underlying power relations, between armed actors, the government, the Myanmar military and the villagers themselves, remained defining factors in both threat and resistance. Yet, taking a relational approach, as fits a complexity lens, and finding that resistance lies not in specific entities but in these relations, highlights how these relations evolved to the new political and economic context. As these relations evolved, so did the forms of resistance. This chapter will thus demonstrate how appealing to the KNU to engage in a form of 'proxy resistance' on behalf of villagers, while still occurring, began to change, with more strident demands being placed on the KNU, or alternatively, villagers turning to CSOs or CBOs. These CSOs and CBOs – strong agents in the complex adaptive

system – helped to facilitate or guide resistance while also developing the system by thickening networks. It shows how patterns of resistance were able to adapt to new threats and opportunities.

This chapter will first outline how villagers would appeal to the KNU, or its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). It is important to recall that much of south-eastern Myanmar was under mixed administration during this time period, i.e. there existed, and still exist, competing political authorities. The KNU has extensive administrative capacities and delivers services to many communities. They are seen by many as the legitimate authority and are the obvious actor for whom people turn to, often referred to as "our leaders" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.108). Or as one rubber plantation worker in Dooplaya District stated in an interview related to problems around road construction, "they hope and believe that the KNU will help them to solve any problems [regarding the road construction] because the KNU is the representative of all the Karen people" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.389). This is not uniform, however, and in certain districts, and particularly in towns and cities, the Myanmar government is the main governance actor. In some areas, administration is mixed, while in others, it is an armed actor such as the Myanmar military proxy force – the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), or a smaller armed group, that is the main authority. It is these 'non-state' actors, particularly the KNU, whose power and authority villagers try and leverage when dealing with destructive development projects that damage their land and environment as part of a resistance tactic. This is because the KNU, as an armed actor, has the potential to pose threats of force or violence against companies in certain areas of south-eastern Myanmar (Rutten et al, 2017). However, given the changing political and economic situation, and more cooperation between the KNU and private sector investors, as well as the government of Myanmar, such appeals were met with mixed results.

The data thus finds that while villagers still attempted to leverage such political power, increasingly they also turned to local civilian leaders and CBOs and CSOs. Such CSOs or CBOs have the potential to provide knowledge, negotiating skills and legitimising discourses, to facilitate more effective modes of resistance such as protest, advocacy activities, as well as furthering connections with regional, national, and even transnational civil society networks (Rutten et al, 2017, p.968). This chapter will outline these dynamics in which such actors, through trainings, workshops, and as outlined in the previous section, network building, helped to enable the *self-organised resistance* of villagers. I refer to this as '*facilitation'* and

is one of the three mechanisms driving a complex adaptive system. These actors – community leaders and community organisations – which are part of the complex adaptive system itself, are a very important node in terms of interactions and relations that produce the emergent resistance. Some of these organisations have existed for many years operating from the Thailand border or in KNU strongholds, while others were established or formed during this period of less armed conflict and expanding civic space. These organisations helped to develop the complex adaptive system, facilitating the connections and thickening relations that in turn, produces emergent resistance. These actors have also adapted to the changing political and economic context and the greater civic space that this has afforded and expanded their presence and activities in the southeast.

8.1 Appealing to the Karen National Union

This section presents examples of how villagers turned to the KNU for help when faced with development projects that were having, or had potential to have, deleterious impacts on their livelihoods and local environment. The KNU are not, in this thesis, an agent of the complex system of dispersed resistance. They are an armed actor that has been in a state of armed conflict with the Myanmar military since 1949 and have a highly organised structure. There is an element of decentralisation in their operations, with each of the seven brigades of the armed wing, the KNLA, having substantive administrative and military control over their respective districts, but it is still mostly a centralised hierarchical outfit, with a Central Executive Committee making the most important political and military decisions (Joliffe, 2016). They are thus primarily a political and governmental organisation with an armed wing, the KNLA, that is comprised at least 5,000 active soldiers.[26] However, such organised armed resistance is not part of the system of resistance that this thesis analyses.

However, they are an important actor in the overall system of governance in south-eastern Myanmar, particularly in upland parts of Hpapun and Taungoo Districts (Brigades 5 and 2 respectively). As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, for many villagers, the KNU are their ‘leaders’ and are often the most trusted and perceived-as a legitimate governance actor. This is summed up by a plantation worker in Taungoo District, referencing the efforts made

[26] Numbers as of 2016 according to monitoring group, Myanmar Peace Monitor.

by the KNU to seek recompense for villagers who lost their land to the Asia World Company and the land damaged by the Htone Bo Dam, "I think if these three powerful groups [KNU, Burma/Myanmar government, companies] work together to solve the problem, the problem can be resolved easier" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.129). They are seen as a solution to the issues, but are also a major stakeholder in certain development projects in the area.

Literature on armed groups and smallholders' land claims shows that such specialists in violence can have the effect of strengthening the bargaining power of villagers who are otherwise in a subordinate position when faced with development-induced structural violence. Rutten et al (2017) outline an example in San Mariano in the Philippines, where a Philippine-Japanese-Taiwanese joint venture firm was seeking to acquire land to build a large bio-ethanol plant. While there were other factors that allowed the local smallholders leverage in their negotiations with the company, one that stood out was the presence of the armed group, the Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army, which "provided additional leverage to smallholders within the context of a democratic political regime" (Rutten et al, 2017, p.901). This leverage translated into pressure on the company and state authorities to address accusations of land-grabbing by the local villagers. Villagers were able to leverage the potential power resources of the armed group in the context of a democratic opening. This is similar to the situation studied in this thesis – there was a political opportunity, with discourse around democratic transition as well as principles and standards around responsible investment – yet the presence of an armed group served as a potential counterweight to the overwhelming power of the state and its partner companies.

On the other hand, as Peluso and Vandergeest (2011) have traced in various contexts in South East Asia, the presence of armed groups, particularly in forested areas or border areas, can catalyse counterinsurgency campaigns which are shaped by the need to territorialise so-called lawless or wild jungles (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2011). They show how in Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia during the cold war, ""Jungles" as theaters of insurgency were tamed through massive rearrangements of property rights, land use zones, vegetative cover, and human settlements" (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2011, p.602). Border areas become essential targets to defeat armed resistance organisations, and as outlined in Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism, the need to control territory and defeat insurgents is done in Myanmar through an assemblage of local elites, military actors, transnational capital and large companies. Hence

while in certain situations villagers can leverage the power and threat of force of armed groups to resist structural violence, in a broader sense, the need for Myanmar state actors to defeat or at least co-opt such armed groups can catalyse the structural violence in the first place.

In south-eastern Myanmar, the relationships that the KNU and KNLA have with villagers have developed over many years of interaction and reciprocity. The KNU provides governance and service functions while villagers provide support, acquiescence or resources in the form of taxes and conscripts for the KNLA (Jolliffe, 2016). And while the KNU does not have a completely harmonious relationship with every local community, as abuses have been documented over the years such as forced conscription and isolated incidences of human rights violations, it is regarded by many, if not all Karen people living in Karen-populated areas (Thawnghmaung, 2008, Jolliffe, 2016), as their government, or their leaders. Thus, in the past when faced with problems related to the Myanmar state, villagers would turn to the KNU as the institution that would help them mitigate the negative impacts of their interface with the Myanmar authorities – whether that be harassment by military soldiers, extortion or loss of land. This can be viewed as a kind of "proxy resistance" a resistance "motivated by solidarity" (Baaz et al, 2016, p.142) in which resistance is enacted "on behalf of subordinated people" (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019, p.184). Villagers thus appeal to the KNU as their leaders, leveraging the relative power of the KNU, and this has been a long-established, relatively stable pattern of relationships. This section will demonstrate that while such proxy resistance is still documented, reflecting the durability of these long-standing relationships and how they are utilised as strategies by villagers to mitigate human rights violations and violence, villagers have also adapted to a context in which the KNU is in a ceasefire relation with the Myanmar military rather than open conflict. They have adapted in terms of demanding more from the KNU, but also realising that they have other avenues for resistance. They can leverage and benefit from the capacity and resources of local CSOs and CBOs which facilitate more self-organised actions of resistance. Thus, rather than relying solely on proxy actions of the KNU, whose own relationship with the Myanmar government significantly shifted after the 2012 bilateral ceasefire, they are taking matters into their own hands.

An example of the historical reliance on the KNU was outlined by several villagers regarding the Shwegyin Dam built by the Myanmar government in Nyaunglebin District. A 73-year-old

male villager talked of the problems of the dam, stating that the local people whose land had been flooded by the project felt they could not go to the Myanmar government to report or request compensation, "If we reported, we are not sure whether we will die or go to jail" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.151). Therefore, they reported to the KNU, stating that "if we look at the help, the KNU side helps us, until the flat land area, with money" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.151). This particular man was a hill farmer and, evoking Scott's work on highland South East Asia (2009), lived in the more mountainous areas of south-eastern Myanmar that are less subject to central, Myanmar government control. Hence, the KNU were able to help him and his fellow villagers "until the flat land." Another villager, an elder male who was a farmer, also spoke of the KNU providing rice to the villagers to mitigate the impacts of this dam project (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.172). This was confirmed by a 40-year-old hill farmer, whose plantations were flooded due to the Shwegyin Dam construction (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.124). The fear that this man and others had in terms of resisting the project is rooted in the historical violence done to local communities by Myanmar military soldiers. This particular man had been shot twice in the arm five years prior to the interview (which took place in 2011) by Myanmar military soldiers who raided the village (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.124). Given this real threat of violence, it is no surprise then that he relied on the KNU, who did provide financial help. It is also a reminder of the importance of historical context shaping decisions of what is possible, with context and existing conditions in this example underpinned by violence and armed conflict.

These villagers and their interviews regarding the Shwegyin Dam, the flooding of farmer's lands, and the fear and perceived lack of utility in directly resisting the project is reflective and typical of a time before the ceasefire, when direct violence was a very real possibility. This is the period preceding the 2012 start period of this research but it is representative of a time when many villagers felt unable to resist or confront the central military government of the time and instead appealed to KNU authorities for help in the form of 'proxy resistance.' The KNU, while not having the power to stop a large dam project such as the Shwegyin Dam, could provide some kind of financial support to affected farmers whose land had been flooded.

The appeal to the KNU as a means to resist or at least mitigate destructive development projects continued throughout this period of research, indicating a long-standing durable

pattern of relations between the KNU and the local communities. As well as the fear and distrust of the Myanmar military and government, and the authority that people place in the KNU, there is also the fact that the KNU are a significant and powerful actor in south-eastern Myanmar, and leveraging that power can be beneficial for villagers. A similar example was documented in a situation update from October 2014 in Hpapun District. A local Myanmar military operations commander had encroached on villagers' land, fencing sixty more acres than he had actually bought. After reporting to the local KNU branch, some villagers were able to reclaim their land. However, one of the landowners had to pay the operations commander a fee of 2,500,000 Myanmar Kyat (approximately $2,500) to reclaim his land (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.291). Thus, while KNU involvement in land disputes can result in restitution, the debt that the villager had to pay demonstrates how uneven this can be. The confiscation of land in this area began to increase after the 2012 Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Law and the Farmland Law were promulgated, contributing to the increased threats to local landowners facilitated by liberalising laws and policy. However, villagers still relied on the KNU, leveraging the KNU's need to demonstrate governing legitimacy over local Karen populations, to in turn utilise their power, position and authority to negotiate for the return of villagers' land. This demonstrates that while this period was a more open era in terms of engaging with the Myanmar government, old patterns of power relations remained. Similar instances were documented in Dooplaya (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.218), Hpapun (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.37 & p.316), Hpa-an (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.52), and Mergui-Tavoy (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.168 & p.434) Districts.

Yet these patterns also began to evolve with the changing political situation. The KNU itself had new relations with the Myanmar government because of the 2012 ceasefire, with greater cooperation and tolerance of each other. The KNU also took the opportunity to assert and implement their own land policy. Furthermore, the villagers themselves were engaging, negotiating and confronting the Myanmar government more, as outlined in earlier chapters. The relationship villagers had with the KNU also began to evolve. In one documented example, two companies - Mi Zaing Taung Company and the Soe Naing Phyo Company - wanted to establish a cement factory in Thaton District in 2014. A monk sent an objection letter to the KNU/KNLA and a subsequent meeting was held in the village where the prospective factory would be built. Not only did the KNU attend the meeting, but so did company representatives, the Myanmar regional state minister and other government

officials. In the meeting the villages stated their objections to the factory and as a result the KNU refused to allow the project to go ahead (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.228). While this particular example involved the type of engagement through negotiation documented in Chapter Six: Engagement, it also shows that when engaging in such negotiation, leveraging the power of the KNU and enlisting their support for the villagers' concerns was an effective counterweight to the overwhelming power of the government. In an era of more cooperative bilateral relations between the KNU and the Myanmar government, villagers could harness this by making their own claims – in this case rejecting the construction of a cement factory.

Moreover, the KNU was far from a passive actor in the changing political and economic dynamics of the 2012-2018 period in south-eastern Myanmar. It sought to assert its own land tenure policies in the face of economic liberalisation and the individualisation of land ownership that the central government attempted to impose nationally. Thus, the KNU updated and published its own land use policy, applicable in KNU-administered areas, and based on aspects of customary land tenure. Seeing an opportunity in this new context, villagers adapted and tried to attain land registration, as documented in Taungoo District when villagers asked the KNU for related documents. It was a response to the new political climate, where President Thein Sein announced that land grab claims were to be investigated and land returned. Yet the villagers still appealed via letter form to the KNU for the return of the lands, not the government. The KNU's Agricultural Department, in turn, used GPS technology to mark out, measure, and make land grants for villagers in Htantabin Township, Taungoo District (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.130 & p.133).

An example of a female farmer in Taungoo District demonstrates the importance of power relations as well as how they were shifting in this time period. Her land was confiscated decades earlier, in 1988, by a local Myanmar military infantry battalion leader, who in turn collected, or extorted, leasing fees in the form of 15 baskets of rice, which would then allow her to continue working on the land. Each year she had to go and sign a contract with the Myanmar military which would promise a certain amount of baskets of rice to be given as 'leasing fees.' However, she reported how she did not want to do this anymore as she felt that the land was hers and wanted to pass it on to her family. She enlisted the help of a local KNLA commander, or an 'old man' as she referred to him. He in turn negotiated with the local Myanmar military, informing them that this land was hers. She had confidence to then

argue, or negotiate the next time the Myanmar military came to her land (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.248). Furthermore, she refused to sign the contract to provide parts of the annual rice paddy to the Myanmar military and referred to the local KNLA commander. As she outlines:

> They asked me to go and sign the contract but I did not go because the land is mine. I told them that I signed the contract in the past but I will not sign it anymore. Then they asked me where my evidence was to speak like this. I told them that I do not have evidence, and [that they could] go to the old man if they wanted to know the situation and solve the problem (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.249).

Thus, while old patterns remained in the form of reliance on a local KNU or KNLA official to negotiate on her behalf and to leverage their power in resisting the extortion, it also represents how this was an adaption to the new context. She had been paying the extortion fees for many years, since 1988, but it is in this period of dynamic change that she began to confront the extortion. The relation between this woman, the local KNLA commander, and the local Myanmar military remained a powerful and defining aspect of both threat and resistance, a continuation of power relations that have existed in this region for decades. However, these relations are dynamic, and evolve within a broader context, and in this instance was manifest in the farmer refusing to pay her extortion fees.

Yet the greater cooperation between the KNU and the Myanmar government did not necessarily always provide opportunities for villagers to leverage. In other aspects, this greater cooperation - the relationship that had adapted to the new context - posed new threats. As a male interviewee in Dooplaya District stated in 2017 regarding large new development projects in the area such as the Asia Highway and a mining project:

> Yes, there were no problems like this prior to the ceasefire. Villagers could rely on the KNU regarding their security. But after the ceasefire, the KNU is still reliable in some ways, but not fully. They are like this now because we understand that they have to look at two faces. They have to look at the Myanmar government's face and the civilians' face. They look at the civilians'

> face only as a barrier while they look at the Myanmar government with a sweet face (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.156).

Better relations between certain KNU brigades and brigade leaders with certain sections of the Myanmar military, as well as with new companies that entered the area, meant that either the KNU did not want to upset the applecart, or certain individuals within the KNU were profiting. This is not necessarily a brand new dynamic. There have always been individual KNU leaders that have enriched themselves in a conflict economy, managed to cooperate with a local Myanmar military commander, or on the other hand, felt that the risks of engaging in a form of proxy resistance on behalf of villagers were too great. Yet the new political and economic context exacerbated some of these underlying trends. For example, a situation update from November 2016 to January 2017 from Taungoo District reported how new development projects had come into the area since the ceasefire, specifically telecommunications towers, road construction and underground telecommunication lines (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.450). One of the underground communication lines was damaging local villagers' gardens and plantations that provided the cardamom, coffee and dogfruit trees that supported their livelihood. The village administrator reported to the higher-level township administrator who responded that as the project had already been approved by the government, they could not do anything. Dissatisfied, the villager administrator reported to the KNU. However, according to the situation update, "The KNU relevant personnel in Taungoo District responded that, as the state government already approved this [project], it might not seem pleasant of them to ban the project [they do not want to damage relationships with the state government]" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.451). Regarding solving the land issue, the KNU simply said it was not their responsibility. This example shows that, in a changing political and economic situation, while some patterns of power relations remain strong, these also adapt to the new context, and rather than create an issue with the Myanmar government regarding this particular issue, the KNU did not use their power or authority to advocate or work for the villagers.

In other instances, the KNU were part of the problem itself, cooperating with the government and private companies on projects. A man interviewed in 2017 in Hpapun District talked of the damage done by an influx of goldmining in 2013-2014. However, when asked how villagers responded to this damage done by the mining, including pollution of the river and landslides, he told the interviewer, "Local people did not dare to confront authorities due to

unsatisfactory compensation or the actions of the company. This is because the KNU authorities cooperate with the company" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.202).

Rutten et al (2017) have highlighted several cases in the broader South East Asia region where similar dynamics are at play. For example, after the ceasefire in Aceh, Indonesia, former militia and rebel groups leaders used "agribusiness expansion programs as key sources of patronage vis-à-vis local smallholders, attracting private and state capital to develop large-scale sugarcane, oil palm, coffee and other enterprises in order to tighten their control over people, territories and resources" (Rutten et al, 2017, p.907). With many villagers fleeing their land during the conflict years, they were reliant on such patrons to access or re-establish ownership and were in an unfavourable position in terms of land restitution, whether they were part of the patronage network or not. Similarly in Mindanao, Philippines, former rebel leaders became local power-brokers, negotiating the terms of large-scale investment in plantation agriculture (Rutten et al, 2017). In south-eastern Myanmar, as outlined in Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism, certain KNU leaders benefited economically through these new investments, while non-KNU armed groups, such as Myanmar military proxies and border guard forces, make no secret of their business deals. Indeed, as Rutten et al (2017) put it, "non-state militia forces are seldom known to act as allies of smallholders in land-deal conflicts. Instead, they figure as the quintessential goons and hired thugs of investors or their brokers in many Southeast Asian conflicts over land acquisitions" (Rutten et al, 2017, p.910).

This can be understood in terms of relations and interconnections. The system of resistance is underwritten by relations, not necessarily by institutions or entities. These relations, based on differing powers and inequalities forged over many decades of conflict, nonetheless evolve and adapt to the shifting economic, political and ceasefire dynamics. In this time period, as outlined above, entrenched patterns of relations, for example villagers appealing to the KNU for help to resist, or at least mitigate the worst effects of certain projects, remained. Yet because of the changing dynamics, sometimes these relations evolved, and this was manifest in villagers becoming more assertive in their demands to the KNU, or seeing the KNU as a threat rather than ally that would engage in a 'proxy resistance.' A complex system is able to adapt to its environment, and this is what has occurred here. These changes in relationships, between villagers and the government, between villagers and the KNU, and the KNU and the government, catalysed adaption in terms of how villagers responded to threats. One of the

biggest points of adaption is how the role of CSOs and CBOs, which villagers increasingly turned to, facilitated resistance, increased confidence and strengthened networks. Before I turn to this, I will outline one other form of proxy resistance – seeking help from village leaders.

8.2 Utilising Village Heads and Village Tract Leaders

Sometimes villagers would attempt to utilise the position of local village or village tract leaders to advocate for them. This kind of proxy resistance, reflecting the power relations of different areas, was done when it was perceived to be too dangerous for villagers themselves to confront or directly resist the armed actor, government or company behind the project. For example, when asked what villagers do if their plantation lands are damaged, a male interviewee in Nyaunglebin District said "If something happens unexpectedly, they go to claim their case by themselves. When they are unsuccessful, they ask for help from a village administrator, such as the village head, ten-household leader, etc. This is what they commonly do" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.218). Of course, it needed a sympathetic village leader whom the villagers could trust, and literature on such resistance argues that "the presence or absence of allies may be key to the kind of reaction that emerges 'from below'" (Hall et al, 2015, p.471). However, in some instances, the village leader or administrator was perceived to be a representative or at least collaborating with the government or the implementers of the development project. Others, however, were tasked with resisting for the villagers. This relates to the fact that states are not monolithic (Hall et al, 2015) and while village heads are the lowest placed position in the state hierarchy in terms of power, resources, and authority, they represent at least the first rung of officialdom with which to potentially employ as leverage.

A village head can be perceived as having more capacity and position and is thus better placed to resist or confront the companies. One villager noted now, after trying and failing to negotiate with the company regarding damage to his land due to mining activities, "The village head helped him and wrote a letter and reported to the Burmese military government two times" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.433). He did not, however, receive any response. Other times, even village or village tract leaders are too scared to negotiate or

confront the military. Referencing land confiscated by the Myanmar military in Hpapun District, a situation update from 2015 referred to how:

> Acquiring the recommendation letter from the village tract land management leader to work on paddy fields which have been confiscated [by the Tatmadaw] is very difficult. This is because the village tract leader is very afraid to ask the Tatmadaw [soldiers for permission] in order to write the recommendation for the farmers whose land was confiscated (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.292).

An interview with a village head in Mergui-Tavoy District explains some of the changing dynamics and how negotiation by village heads on behalf of the villagers has become easier. This particular man, interviewed in 2012, describes how he had been the village head for four years, after Myanmar military troops ordered his appointment to the position in 2008, despite his reluctance. Noting that the security situation had improved since 2012 (when the ceasefire was signed) he also explained that more companies had entered the area in the previous 12 months, firstly engaged in logging, clearing 700 acres of land before building a road and planning to plant palm oil plantations. However, after negotiating with the township leader (higher in the administrative hierarchy than village leader and more closely related to the government) he managed to extract promises of compensation for the villagers who lost their land (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.369).

In other examples, however, it was frustration with the KNU that meant that villagers looked to their own, local-level leaders to resist. For example, in response to wealthy businessmen increasingly mining gold in Nyaunglebin District, destroying people's lands, one villager remarked that:

> Instead of villagers confronting the actors directly, they feel like they do not have the power to do so. So, they approach the village tract leaders to solve the problem and also ask suggestions from him. Therefore, the village tract leader and the village tract secretary responded that they will submit the case to the authorities and they will talk about this (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.211).

This interview reflected frustration with the KNU, and their failure to stand up for the villagers. He stated that "all of this has happened because of KNU's permission to companies and wealthy individuals to implement their projects" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.215). While the villager stated that so far they had little success regarding the gold mining, relying on village leaders had success in other incidents where the village leader directly defied the KNU. In the same area, in response to a KNU official meeting with the village leader to discuss a dam project, the villager leader reportedly confronted the KNU regarding dam construction (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.213). Using an increasingly confrontational approach to the authorities - both the KNU and the Myanmar government - reflects an adaption to the threats and the changing relations between the KNU and the government and the KNU and the villagers. Importantly, it was a result of the mobilisation of the villagers at village meetings that resulted in this confrontation. As the same interviewee stated:

> Working alone will never be an effective strategy for villagers. When you are standing up alone and oppose the project alone, people laugh at you. So, landowners are talking to each other in order to take action to prevent [the destruction and confiscation of] their land. If a villager is going to do it alone, nobody will listen to him (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.215).

Thus, it was the thickening relations and interconnections manifest in village meetings and greater mobilisation, that resulted in the emergence of a proxy resistance enacted by the village head to confront the KNU and challenge them about a destructive dam project. The thickening relations preceded the resistance. While the project had not stopped completely yet, they had at least stalled and moved the dam site.

In the interviews referenced above regarding gold mining and dam projects, the reliance on village leaders did not confer any positive results for the villagers in terms of compensation, land restitution, or halting the project. However, when the villagers mobilised, and confronted the KNU as a group, rather than an individual leader, they were more successful. It was the interconnections, interactions, the thickening relations, complexifying the system of resistance, which was important in this particular township. However, given the small number of instances documented where village heads were leveraged, it is suffice to say that

less resistance was channelled through them vis-à-vis the KNU and certainly, community organisations, which I will outline next.

8.3 Catalysing Role of Civil Society and Community-based Organisations

One of the clearest examples of how villagers adapted to the ceasefire period is in relation to the more active, overt presence of civil society organisations or community organisations, locally based, and connected to villages throughout south-eastern Myanmar. This section will outline how these organisations were able to catalyse resistance, thicken relations, and act as strong agents in the complex adaptive system. The role of CSOs, CBOs, national NGOs, and international organisations has a widespread presence in the literature on resistance to destructive development, particularly land-grabbing, including in Myanmar. CSOs and networks of CSOs can provide legal aid, education in national and international laws and frameworks (Hall et al, 2015),) including raising awareness of their rights, the capacity to deal with institutions and legal processes, trainings on advocacy and collective action strategies, skills in for example, community mapping (Podder, 2023), as well as resources, information and instilling confidence (Rutten et al, 2017).

CSOs and NGOs also engage in advocacy politics, which involves "direct and concerted efforts to support, criticise, and oppose authorities, their policies and programs, or the entire way in which resources are produced and distributed within an organisation or a system of organisations" (Kerkvliet, 2009, p.232). Among others Touch and Neef (2015) outline the use of such advocacy politics, or advocacy resistance, in Kratie and Koh Kong provinces in Cambodia, which combined open confrontation and the more covert, Scottian everyday measures to resist large-scale economic land concessions. Such advocacy resistance included a press conference organised by Phnom Penh-based NGOs in which the communities could draw attention to their grievances (Touch & Neef, 2015). This type of advocacy resistance is widely researched and documented (Hall et al, 2015, Borras & Franco, 2017). Local NGOs can enlist already-established national and transnational actors, networks and institutions to support community-specific grievances surrounding structural violence (Tafon & Saunders, 2016).

However, Touch and Neef (2015) also note the forms of counter-resistance that such CSOs can face when working with local communities. In their research in Cambodia they show how both local and international NGOs, which were attempting to help affected villagers from one of the land grabs, faced "severe restrictions and pressure from companies and provincial authorities" (Touch & Neef, 2015, p.6). Eventually the provincial governor stopped an NGO network from operating as it was not formally registered with the required ministry (Touch & Neef, 2015, p.6). Such issues around registration of NGOs, CSOs, and CBOs also plagued the Myanmar civil society landscape during the years researched for this thesis, despite the adoption of an NGO registration law. Many organisations opted not to register with the government, citing trust issues and the need to disclose sensitive information regarding activities and funding. However, as with the Cambodia case above, this left them vulnerable to restrictions and legal pressure from authorities.

In fact, CSOs and CBOs have existed for many years in south-eastern Myanmar, some of whom have links to the KNU, as is essential in KNU-administered territory in order to operate (Jolliffe, 2016) without ever registering with the Myanmar central government. Organisations such as the Karen Women's Organisation, Karen Office for Relief and Development, Karen Youth Organization, Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, Tavoy Women's Union, and Tavoy Student and Youth Organisation, among others, operated for years from the border area in Thailand. They had networks inside the country and could implement activities and projects in KNU-controlled areas or covertly in Myanmar government areas. While they have always kept a measure of independence from the KNU, such groups needed to operate covertly as the Myanmar military has a history of accusing representatives CSOs and CBOs of being associated with the KNU. This in turn, left them vulnerable to charges of Section 17(1) of the Unlawful Association Law, a piece of colonial-era legislation which was a favourite tool of repression during the junta years. Under this law, any person deemed to be a member or associated with an 'Unlawful Association' can be charged with a prison term of up to three years (Burma Campaign, UK, n.d.). While initially a law aimed at anti-colonial activists during British rule, the Myanmar military has continued to use it, and deemed ethnic armed organisations such as the KNU 'unlawful.' There is a long history of using Section 17(1) law to arrest people in ethnic minority areas (Myint, 2013).

After 2012, the space for civil society across many, although not all, parts of Myanmar expanded, and this corresponded with many more funding opportunities from international

donors. Overall, Myanmar went from the world's 79th biggest recipient of aid in 2010 to the 7th in 2018 (Carr, 2018, p.1). Part of this aid was funding for human rights and democracy organisations, peace process support, gender equality, expanding civic space, and media development among other sectors and themes (Paung Sie Facility, 2018). Additionally, after the KNU signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement in 2015 (Democratic Voice of Burma, 2015), they were taken off the list of unlawful associations. While other laws were restrictive in terms of freedom of assembly and association, not having to face arrest under Section 17(1) gave CSOs more freedom to operate. Thus, the legal, political and international context catalysed an era of more open civil society work.

Important to this thesis are the smaller, dispersed instances of CSO and CBO-organised village-level meetings, trainings or provision of small but significant human resources to villagers throughout this region. This facilitated mobilisation and resistance acts, giving people confidence in their own capacity, and to make demands that their rights are respected. One of the most prominent examples of this in south-eastern Myanmar during the period of investigation is the organisation, Dawei Development Association, which will be highlighted in this chapter.

Having more of a presence of CSOs and CBOs meant that villagers felt that they had more support. A woman in Dooplaya District who was concerned about lack of compensation regarding a road widening project and the potential construction of a cement factory stated, "I feel like we have more support for villagers. I also feel happier because there are people who want to help us. It is like fighting a losing a battle but there are people who still stand with us" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.103). The ceasefire acted as a catalyst, not just for new companies coming in, but for more organisations who could help the villagers, as stated in an interview conducted in 2017 in Nyaunglebin District:

> No organisation was allowed to enter to rural ethnic areas prior to the 2012 preliminary ceasefire. After the preliminary ceasefire, there have been a lot of organisations and companies coming in as they thought that there were plenty of opportunities opening for them (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.157).

The presence of CBOs and CSOs meant that they were able to resist on behalf of the villagers, engaging in an advocacy resistance, and this was occurring more and more in this

period. One example comes from Mergui-Tavoy District and is related to a lead and gold mining company polluting the local river in their operations, with mercury being discharged into the local villagers' drinking water. The company had permission from the KNU to conduct the mining, and the villagers were getting sick as the polluted river was their only water source. Compounding this, they could not afford the medical bills from the diseases they were now getting. According to an interview with a local schoolteacher, local CBOs who had been meeting with the villagers and giving trainings went to the nearest city, Dawei, on behalf of the villagers, and confronted the head of the company about the poisoned water. They asked the company head if he would drink that water to which he replied he always does, although the interviewee stated that given his position, he has probably never once drunk river water. The CBOs that confronted him, however, produced a bottle of water, taken from the river, and compelled him to drink it (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.531). The CBO in this instance is an agent in the system of resistance, conveying the villagers' concerns, even confronting the company on behalf of the villagers who, according to the schoolteacher, are just "local villagers" who have "no knowledge" of how to engage in such actions (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.529). Thus, while it could be conceived that the CBO is enacting a kind of proxy resistance, instead it is more instructive to view these local organisations as a part of the complex system of resistance. They are "strong agents" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008) in the system. To recap, strong agents are those that have more specific goals and intentions, and are purposeful in attempting "to exert some degree of control over the environment in order to achieve these goals" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.44). In the context of south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018, these strong agents served to facilitate resistance actions and catalyse thickening relations between villagers.

Indeed, association or involvement with a CBO or CSO, was, as a young man in Nyaunglebin District who reported on government-backed projects proliferating after the ceasefire in his area leading to confiscated and damaged land, the difference between confrontation and "staying quiet" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.148). The involvement and participation of CBOs meant that some cases reached the local media, and these groups were able to advocate on behalf of the villagers (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.149). As he explains:

> After 2015, the ceasefire period, the situation has become more flexible and there is a more open relationship [between authorities and local people] as

> community-based organizations (CBOs) have entered local places and have promoted many grassroots leadership programs through workshops and trainings. The local people have developed their own mindset through these CBO workshops and trainings and have also become motivated to confront their past experiences with authorities. I recognize that there are different situations between the pre-ceasefire period and the post-ceasefire period (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.150).

This reflects several dynamics. First, the relations between people, the agents in this complex system, thickened. The CBOs were giving the workshops and trainings, bringing people together, and connecting them. The more interactions between CBOs and the villagers catalysed confidence to confront authorities. Second, the political and economic environment clearly shaped this thickening of relations among the nodes in the system. Without the ceasefire, or the period of greater political freedom and civic space, these types of workshop activities would be very difficult to enact. They *did* occur before the ceasefire, but these would happen either in the border areas or the limited territory where the KNU was the sole political authority. Otherwise, the dangers of arrest and being charged with unlawful association were too great. Lastly, these actors adapted to this context, showing their agency by organising and conducting these trainings, while the people who attended them had the confidence to a) attend them, and b) take more confrontational resistance actions.

In another interview with a man in Nyaunglebin District conducted in December 2017, he bemoaned the negative impact of gold mining destroying local people's lands, as well as the general trend of land loss in the area due to new investment. However, he also reported on how villagers responded to these impacts, and how trainings on their rights, given by local organisations, including Karen Human Rights Group themselves, were beneficial:

> Now, since after 2012 preliminary ceasefire, villagers have started to speak more about their rights and they also feel more secure than in the past. Their mind has also broadened gradually as many organisations come to their communities. So, we can say that there are changes within our community (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.218).

He also explains how in the past, villagers felt the only way to resist was to pick up a gun, i.e. to join the KNU. However, villagers have adapted to the new context and the new opportunities by appealing to CSOs/CBOs that are operating more extensively, freely, and openly, in order to resist.

The trainings mentioned by the above interviewee were referred to by many people interviewed in KHRG's dataset and are largely welcomed (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.216). These trainings typically contained information on both domestic and international law, and what the villagers' rights are under these frameworks. When such trainings were given, they served to increase confidence in the villagers' perceptions on what they could achieve, and thus catalyse resistance actions. As the lawyer from Mergui-Tavoy District, whose network was very active in the area resisting the land confiscation of palm oil plantation companies as outlined in Chapter Six: Engagement, explains:

> We give them legal trainings. With these trainings, we are able to improve their capacity. They develop an understanding of their land rights, how their rights can be violated, and how to respond to these violations. Thanks to our trainings, the civilians can be empowered to respond to the issues affecting them. The successes are not only our successes but also the success of their own efforts (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.75).

He documents the active resistance by the villagers to these companies' projects, how "the local community is starting to know about their rights and involving themselves fearlessly" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.75). Another villager from Dooplaya District reported how in areas where villagers had received trainings from a local organisation, they reacted to a planned cement factory project by writing complaint letters to the local authorities about the potential damage. Because of the trainings they knew "how to respond to development projects and how to approach the organisations that can help them" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.156). Thus, they documented and recorded the potential damages and enlisted the civil society organisation, KESAN, to help them. A situation update from 2013 in Thaton District explained how a head of a particular village was grateful to KHRG for giving a training on land rights issues as the local villagers were facing land confiscation by local businesspeople to plant rubber plantations (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.27). In another example given by this interviewee in the same area, a development organisation

(unspecified) came to the area to sell solar panels. The first time they came, the villagers just signed an agreement to buy the solar panels, because, according to the interviewee, they were "not educated." The second time the development organisation came, they asked the local villagers to sign another paper in which the price for the solar panels had doubled. Yet, because the villagers had since received a training on their rights from a local CBO/CSO, they asked a series of questions regarding the panels, and the development organisation subsequently abandoned their efforts (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.157).

A prime example of the emergence of a CSO that galvanised community resistance, facilitated self-organisation and thickened relations is related to the Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ). The Dawei SEZ in Tanintharyi Region (Mergui-Tavoy District) is a huge bilateral development project between Thailand and Myanmar to build a deep sea port, industrial zone, petrochemical plant, oil refinery and a steel mill. It also includes infrastructure to support its operations such as oil and gas pipelines and road links across the border to Thailand (Environmental Justice Atlas, 2019). One of the major companies investing and constructing the SEZ is ITD, a huge Thai conglomerate which was granted a concession in 2010. The project has been associated with "forced evictions, lack of meaningful compensation, inflated employment estimates, corruption, environmental destruction, land grabbing, pollution and blocking of rivers and fishing areas, livelihood loss, and the harassment of people opposing the project" (Environmental Justice Atlas, 2019). It is estimated to impact up to 43,000 people in 36 villages (Dawei Development Association, 2014). It is one of the biggest, if not the biggest development project in south-eastern Myanmar and indeed the whole country. To complicate matters, part of the project site is located in KNU territory, and in 2011 the KNU temporarily suspended the construction of the road that would go through its territory from the SEZ site to Thailand (Environmental Justice Atlas, 2019).

One of the main resistance vehicles to this project was an organisation called Dawei Development Association. DDA was formed after local peoples' land began to be damaged and encroached on in the first stages of the SEZ project. In December 2011 DDA announced its first major resistance action, conducting a press conference in Myanmar's main city, Yangon, to convey concerns of the tens of thousands of people who were to be affected. They called for environmental and social impact assessments, to prioritise the needs of local villagers, and to agree to sustainable development principles (Dawei Development

Association, 2014). Following this, DDA helped local villagers to organise a campaign to protest a proposed coal-fired power plant at nearby Maungmagan Beach. DDA released press statements criticising the SEZ project, including aiming their demands at the Thai government and Thai investors in the SEZ and in coordination with local villagers.

The resistance gained momentum. Research was conducted by DDA on the negative impacts of the project and was published in English and Myanmar languages (Dawei Development Association, 2014). In 2013, villagers walked out of a consultation meeting with the implementing company, ITD, and the Environmental Research Institution of Chulalongkorn University of Thailand which were ostensibly collecting data and conducting assessments. The villagers cited doubts over their sincerity, purpose and neutrality of their stated objectives. Protests, road blockades, letters to the Myanmar President, an awareness-raising cycle ride from Dawei to Yangon were also conducted in the following years (Dawei Development Association, 2014). Alliances were formed across the border with Thailand with Thai environmental justice and sustainable developments groups acting as allies, advocating with Thai actors. For example, in 2014, a meeting was organised with the Thai National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), where the findings of DDA's research were presented, resulting in the Thai NHRC acknowledging the human rights violations that had taken place. Press conferences were held in Thailand with allied academics and NGOs criticising the Thai government for pursuing investments that were linked to widespread human rights violations (Dawei Development Association, 2014). When the Japanese government was publicly courted for investment, DDA allied with a Japanese NGO that monitors overseas Japanese investment to send letters to President Abe and related investment bodies. DDA also worked closely with other local CBOs in the resistance against the SEZ. For example, a locally-based woman's CBO facilitated the participation of villagers on a Myanmar TV programme – DVB Debate – in which they were able to air their grievances to a much wider audience (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.256).

Of course, the work of such CBOs and CSOs is not without challenges, and the chair of a local women's organisation in Mergui-Tavoy District highlighted how difficult it was to organise and push villagers to keep up the momentum for resistance in the face of the huge Dawei SEZ project. She explains how in one meeting organised by the CBO to raise awareness of the potential dangers of the Dawei SEZ, some women left abruptly in the middle of the meeting because they had to go and cook dinner for the household. The

interviewee from the women's CBO reported how villagers had limited time to attend meetings, using the proverb "dig the well now and drink clear water now," meaning thinking of only the present. As she bemoaned, "This is impossible, how can we hold a meeting and a discussion on how we're going to fight for our rights?" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.256). She also reported the various threats from powerful actors that they have faced, and the government's attempts to divide the community and slander the organisation, telling people that the organisation is only working to advance their own interests, and people should not join them (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.256).

The example of these CBOs and CSOs, particularly DDA, shows how they act as facilitators of mobilisation and resistance. They are the ones thickening the relationships, catalysing interactions, and providing the support for the villagers' mobilisation. I use the word facilitation here rather than organised because the villagers themselves are the ones doing the resisting and organising themselves. They are being helped along by these CSOs. As one interviewee states, "through regular local meetings, people speak about the problems in the area and solve it together" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.79). DDA made the connections between villagers, villages, national CSOs as well as making transnational links with allies in regional countries. It is important to note, however, that the founders of DDA and its members were local people, activists and community leaders from the affected areas (Dawei Development Association, 2014). The actions taken, including protests, cycle rides, meetings with company and state officials, and presentations at press conferences were done by local villagers, but facilitated by DDA members. In this sense, DDA is a prime example of a 'strong agent.' It is a central node in the system of dispersed resistance in Mergui-Tavoy District that brought people together and facilitated the interactions. These interactions in turn produced the emergent resistance that formed one of the most public and prolonged oppositions to development-induced structural violence in Myanmar. It is a form of self-organised resistance. Furthermore, the initial actions set off a positive feedback loop, which produced momentum for even more resistance. Thus, in this example of a strong agent – DDA – we see the three mechanisms of the framework acting to complexify the system of dispersed resistance – thickening relations, facilitation, and positive feedback loops.

8.4 Conclusion

The above sections have outlined the various patterns of leveraging local actors as a form of resistance used by villagers to resist development and investment-related violence. The actors that villagers turned to and leveraged their social or political resources are the KNU and KNLA, village heads, and local CBOs and CSOs. It has also demonstrated how the mechanisms of facilitation by strong agents, thickening of relations, and feedback loops complexify the system, allowing the identification of the three core complexity concepts of adaption, self-organisation and emergence. It focused on the actions of a particular CSO, DDA, which was a vehicle for long-running resistance to the Dawei SEZ.

In response to the overarching question of how the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved amid new forms of structural violence and what explains this dynamic, some conclusions can be drawn. First, as the KNU entered into an era of new relations with the government and the Myanmar military, villagers used this to their advantage. Whereas in previous eras, the KNU would be relied upon exclusively, being seen as their 'leaders,' villagers have begun to demand more from them in terms of addressing their grievances. Thus, while relations between villagers, the KNU and the Myanmar government still underwrote and shaped violence, threat and resistance, as the context changed and relations evolved, new threats to villagers as well as new acts of resistance to cope with these threats emerged. Furthermore, no longer the only actor with sufficient capital to oppose the Myanmar authorities, increasingly, villagers have turned to other actors. Specifically, CBOs and CSOs were increasingly leveraged for their resources, information and capacity to organise in order to resist destructive development projects or land confiscations.

Second, this chapter shows the importance of CBOs and CSOs in *facilitating resistance,* including facilitating some of the mobilisation seen in the previous chapter. These CBOs and CSOs are not the leaders of the committees, but they are the ones who can help to facilitate their establishment and provide assistance in terms of capacity or information. Their role in bringing people together, through workshops, meetings or exchanges was a vital part of the above patterns of resistance. This was seen in particular through the example of DDA. Again, this is an *adaption* to the new context, in which such local organisations have more freedom

and space to operate, to extend their programmes, and make the connections between bigger, national NGOs and smaller, localised activities. The village level committees and networks and the CBOs are thus part of the complex system. These 'strong agents' have the "ability to take action, both in changing their social and natural environments and in interacting with other agents" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.56). They are proactive, not just merely reacting, but actively working to facilitate resistance, shaping self-organisation practices by providing the resources and communication to establish networks and provide trainings and capacity building, thus *thickening relations* among villagers. These CSOs and CBOs have the capacity, cognition and intention to affect purposeful change. They are still an actor as part of this complex system of dispersed resistance, being based in the communities of the area, with members and representatives spread throughout these villages. However, this is not a social movement or a large organisation directing resistance. Rather, there are several CBOs and CSOs, each working in different areas on different issues and sometimes overlapping or cooperating.

Furthermore, this chapter demonstrates how the emergent effects of actions of resistance then further develop the *self-organisation* practices of villagers, as *positive feedback loops* result in even more mobilisation, confrontation, reporting to authorities, or other forms of resistance. This downward causation (Williams, 2020), in which emergent effects then work back downward to further affect the resistance actions is a positive feedback loop building momentum as patterns of resistance evolve, increase, and spread. In the data corpus, it is relevant that the instances and reporting of networks and CSO/CBO involvement is much more present in the later dataset, published in 2018, than the earlier ones published in 2013 and 2015. While the data corpus does not document every single occurrence of engagement with organisations that facilitate resistance and thicken relations, there is substantially more documented cases in the latter data. This represents a dynamic of momentum, of resistance building, becoming more complex and a positive feedback loop setting in a path of resistance through the mobilisation and network-building. The feedback loops, thickening relations and facilitation act as mechanisms to catalyse more self-organisation, adaption and ultimately, produce an emergent phenomenon that is more than the sum of its parts – dispersed resistance.

Chapter Nine: Confrontation

This chapter will present examples of resistance actions that were undertaken by individuals and groups to *confront* threats to their land, livelihood and environment, including land confiscation, destructive development projects, and damaging of local natural resources in the time period under investigation – 2012 to 2018. There are five sub-categories of confrontation – verbal confrontation, physical confrontation, refusal, protest, and fencing and ploughing land (a practice of erecting fences around community or individual's land in order to stop developers gaining access). Confrontational resistance by villagers, smallholders, farmers, and rural people generally in a position of subordination has been researched and analysed across the region and beyond including Cambodia (Touch & Neef, 2015), Sierra Leone, (Podder, 2023), Cameroon, (Tafon & Saunders, 2021) and China (Kerkvliet, 2009). Dell'Angelo et al (2021), for example, note that protest is found in over half of the cases sampled in their analysis of opposition against agribusiness-related land grabbing, while other forms of confrontation including strikes, occupation of public spaces, boycotts – both of products or official procedures, and land occupation are also common (Dell'Angelo et al, 2021). Kerkvliet (2009) demonstrates how confrontational actions develop from more covert everyday practices. Using rural China in the 1990s as an example, he shows how "angry villagers….demanded face-to-face meetings with officials, protested in front of local government offices, marched long distances to petition higher government authorities, blocked roads, occupied and even destroyed government buildings, and took officials hostage" (Kerkvliet, 2009, p.234). Indeed in Myanmar, forms of confrontation have been documented by local NGOs and regional networks (Kapoor, 2018, Land In Our Hands, 2015).

However, as with many other forms of resistance documented in this thesis, as well as in these other examples from the region and worldwide, a political opportunity arises where villagers feel more confident, or empowered, to attempt such actions. These actions could also result in retaliation or threat from authorities, armed actors, or companies. Furthermore, the confrontation, particularly protests, are often facilitated by organisations, networks or other 'strong actors.'

Referring to the analytical framework, this chapter will also demonstrate the mechanisms by which *adaption* and *self-organisation* occurred – two of the core concepts of complexity thinking - and from this, patterns of confrontational resistance emerged. For example, some confrontational actions such as physically resisting were not repeated, often facing stymieing effects, or in complexity language, *negative feedback loops*. Yet one confrontational action that gained momentum was that of protest. The protests were a result of villagers working together to mobilise, often facilitated by civil society leaders or local organisations, and reflected a *thickening of relations* between villagers that the new economic and political context created opportunity for. By viewing the emergence of patterns of confrontational resistance, particularly protest, through the ideas of positive feedback loops, facilitation, and thickening of relations, it is thus possible to narrate this complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance.

This chapter will first present instances of *verbal* confrontation and how it was often met with a response that stopped the continuation of such resistance, or at least discouraged it such as being sued or ignored – a negative feedback loop. However, the data does show that this dynamic adapts over time, and how a changing political and economic context that included a discourse around better business practices, resulted in changing relations with the government and thus more confidence for villagers to, in certain contexts, verbally confront companies or local authorities. This is in contrast to the second section of this chapter, which outlines how *physically* confronting companies was met with threats or being sued. This section shows a clear example of a negative feedback loop, and how patterns of this particular form of resistance – physical confrontation - *does not* develop. The third section outlines how individual instances of purposeful *refusal* to cooperate or sign documents became more widespread than the verbal or physical confrontations, again reflecting, mostly, a lack of a negative feedback loop, and thus an adaption to a context in which villagers had more confidence to refuse. However, this section shows that where such individual acts occurred, they do not result in a widespread emergent and strong resistance pattern, precisely because they were individual acts. This lack of a strong pattern of resistance is because the positive feedback loops were not particularly strong, there was no facilitation of such actions, and because they were individual acts, there was no thickening of relations – the three mechanisms outlined in the framework which catalyse a complex adaptive system. In contrast, the fourth section of this chapter, of local self-organised protest, demonstrates the mechanisms of *thickening relations* and *facilitation* resulting in a dynamic resistance action

that became more common as the time period went on - a clear incidence of *adaption*. The fifth section will briefly outline a resistance action related to protest – fencing and ploughing of land - before concluding with a short review of what this means for the complexity framework presented in Chapter Four.

9.1 Verbally Confronting

There were multiple incidences documented of villagers verbally confronting the company management and daily workers of the company who came to work on their land, as well as the Karen National Union (KNU). Such verbal confrontation by villagers was met by companies and the government with threats, being ignored, and being sued. Rarely, this escalated into the threat of physical violence, as outlined in the next section.

In the case of the Kaung Myanmar Aung Company (KMAC), the high profile case of land confiscation for plantations in Taungoo District outlined in Chapter Six: Engagement, such verbal confrontation occurred several times. When KMAC workers came to assess the land of a farmer, asking her how many people lived in her house, and taking photos of her land, she confronted them. She asked them, "it is not your business how many people sleep in the house, why are you asking me? Will you come and kill me?'" before stating "We do not steal the land and we are not thieves, we just built a house on our own land" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.23). This woman was among several villagers who were sued by KMAC under trespass laws. As she explains:

> Because they [Kaung Myanmar Aung Company workers] cut the trees that the villagers planted, they long for it back so they had an argument with them. But when they had the argument, as in a women's nature [when they get angry], we did not only speak about the problem but also we swore at them. Because they [villagers] were over-emotional while having the argument with [Kaung Myanmar Aung Company workers] they were summoned to the court. So five of them were sued and they had to go to the court (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.24).

Notwithstanding the internalised gender stereotypes that this woman displays, the verbal confrontation with the company obviously had negative repercussions. This court case was actually won by the villagers in the first instance, but KMAC appealed to higher courts, and dragged the case over a long time which was costly for the villagers. In fact, this villager continued to verbally confront the company workers, and threatened to sue the company itself if company workers entered her land again. She notes that they did continue to enter her land in secret and cut down her trees (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.28).

It is not just companies that villagers verbally confront. In Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, villagers were unhappy about the KNU allowing companies to come and mine gold, polluting the river and impacting the livelihoods of the local community. In a meeting held in June 2012, a villager confronted the KNU, asking why the Karen leaders were not doing anything, stating, "Now, there are only the rights for the companies and there are no rights for the villagers" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.283). At a meeting a few days later in a nearby village tract, several villagers shouted at the KNU leaders, angry that they were going to permit companies to come and mine gold (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.284).

In another example, a proposed dam project on the Bawgata River in Nyaunglebin District with a pre-feasibility study conducted by a Norwegian agency was opposed by villagers, despite the claims of those associated with the dam project (South, 2014). At village meetings with the local KNU official, the village head of one of the villages that would be affected by the dam stated to the KNU official:

> The project can potentially destroy the water life, river, forest and the beauty of natural environment. Every time you come, you just talk about the dam construction. I think you should stop talking about the dam and this should be the last time. If you continue to talk about the dam construction, we will not attend the meetings. If you continue to implement the project, do not blame us [stating] that we create problems and conflicts (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.213).

A KHRG situation update from the area also reflected that "villagers are against the dam and expressed their desires and opinions clearly" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.290). The villager interviewed above believed that the success of the villagers' actions was at

"70%" because although the project had not been completely halted, it was still a successful effort on the part of the community. However, he believed that villagers standing up for their rights together, and confronting actors involved in the project (in this case the KNU was part of the assemblage of actors attempting to move ahead with the dam) was an effective resistance tactic.

The above example of verbal confrontation as a manifestation of resistance against the dam occurred at a community meeting, and such events provide a platform for villagers to voice their concerns, and potentially confront companies, government, or other armed actors regarding development projects. This can also include holding protest signs, for example the 'No Dam' signboards (see photo below) held during a consultation meeting in February 2017 organised by GMS Power Company regarding a hydropower dam in the Tanintharyi River in Mergui-Tavoy District. This verbal confrontation evolved into a protest (see Section 9.4 below), demonstrating that the various resistance actions are not discrete categories, but are sometimes complementary, occur concurrently or consecutively, or share certain elements.

Photograph 4: Villagers holding 'No Dam' signs at GMS consultation meeting

(Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.457)

Verbal confrontation, however could lead to threats of violence from the Myanmar military. When a village head in Dooplaya District confronted Myanmar military soldiers about their fishing practices, after they had banned the villagers from fishing, he was met with a threat. The soldiers told him:

> Do not say anything! It is not your concern. If you dare to say [anything], then say it. [But] if the Tatmadaw and KNU [Karen National Union] fight against each other again in the future, you will see [what I will do to you] (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.188).

However, sometimes desperation takes hold. A woman in Hpa-an District reported in July 2012 about how the land that they had worked on for many years, but paid tax to local Infantry Battalions 547, 548, and 549, was now fully claimed by the Myanmar military. They were told they could not work on it anymore and were asked to buy different land nearby. But the villagers did not have the financial resources to do so and did not feel like they should have to buy new land after being kicked out of their existing farms (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.288). She spoke of a series of verbal confrontations she had with the local administrator of the village, whom she believes told the Myanmar military that the villagers were offered land as compensation but refused to take it when actually he sold the land to others. Referring to the administrator, she argued with the local battalion commander, accusing him of cheating the villagers. She spoke more of her confrontations with the Myanmar military:

> I have argued with them every year. I always argue with them. I'm not afraid of them. One of the commanders asked me "You are good at speaking, do you dare to die?" I told him "I dare to die," I showed out my chest and told him "Kill me. If you dare to kill me kill me now." He fell silent for a while and asked me "A'Moe, what reason makes you dare to die?" I told him "I lost my farm and my land. I dare to die if people kill me." He said that is true. I showed out my chest. I dare to do that. I told him I'm not afraid of anyone (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, pp.592-593).

This type of brash confrontation was rare in the documentation, and did not lead to any kind of restitution or compensation for her or the villagers' lost land. It appears that the woman had lost any hope of keeping her land, and had reached a point where she had lost her fear of the soldiers, hence the verbal confrontation. There was just one other instance of this very overt verbal confrontation that was documented, in Dooplaya District, where a couple interviewed talked of local villagers' land being confiscated and their plantations destroyed

by the Myanmar military. They reported of a woman whose well had been destroyed, becoming drunk and confronting the company who was ploughing her land (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.162).

Verbal confrontation occurred several times over the reporting period, coinciding with the creation of platforms for villagers to confront companies and local authorities, such as village meetings or consultation meetings. This reflects the changing political but also economic dynamics within the southeast of Myanmar at this time. As the villager who reported the verbal confrontation with the KNU regarding the dam project in Nyaunglebin stated:

> One notable thing is that the leaders [KNU/Myanmar government] become quieter when villagers start speaking up on the issue a lot. I think villagers will have more opportunities if they are more educated and are able to raise their voice more. If villagers are able to do this then there will be more successes (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.212).

Transnational corporations, international financial institutions, and other types of investment entities that include the language of consent and consultation in their project design was a major part of the development narrative during this period. Free prior and informed consent (FPIC), corporate social responsibility, conflict sensitivity and local participation are buzzwords for these private and private-public sector actors as they seek to legitimise their investments. The effectiveness of such procedures are debated elsewhere, but at least the creation of space for villagers to verbally confront and contest development projects that have negative impacts on their lives was sometimes utilised.

9.2 Physically Confronting

Physical confrontation is one of the least used forms of resistance in the data corpus. Despite this, there were occasions where violence, or some kind of physical confrontation, was either threatened or became manifest. As one of the interviewees stated when noting about the KMAC case, villagers attempt to use the law (official processes) because they "learned that the situation does not change" when they use "violent forms of agency" (Karen Human

Rights Group, 2018, pp.134-135). The violent forms of agency that this interviewee refers to are documented in other interviews regarding the KMAC case. For example, in the KMAC case, despite the sentiments of the above interviewee, threats of physical harm against company workers were documented. In a November 2017 interview with an employee of KMAC, he, along with other employees of KMAC, were ordered by the manager of the company to cut down the banana trees of a local plantation owner. The plantation owner started to fire her slingshot at the workers. According to the worker, when they ran away, the other villagers were waiting for them at the other side of the plantation and threatened them whilst holding knives. Twice the workers were ordered back by KMAC management to chop down the trees, but both times the villagers were waiting again with slingshots (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, pp.495-498). The worker reported another incident where a villager cut down 300 teak trees planted by KMAC in retaliation for planting on his own land. In another interview with a villager whose fruit trees had been cut down by KMAC, she describes confronting workers of the company who had taken photos of her house and land whilst holding a machete. This is the same incident reported in the section above on verbal confrontation, when the woman demanded to know why the workers were taking photos of her land (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.23). The workers subsequently ran away. This physical, confrontational resistance, either threatening company workers, chasing them away, or destroying the company's teak trees, reflects the anger and desperation of the local villagers. These were desperate, last-ditch attempts to protect their land, yet, as outlined in another section, some of those who verbally confronted KMAC were sued. Such direct confrontation, given the serious consequences, was thus rare, and did not become a sustained resistance tactic.

In another example, a villager interviewed in Dooplaya District spoke of the destruction of villagers' plantations due to the construction of the Asia Highway. The Asia Highway is a huge infrastructure project completed in 2015. The road passes through the mountains separating the town of Kawkareik and the town of Myawaddy on the border with Thailand, reducing the drive time from minimum 2.5 hours to 50 minutes and creating a substantially wider road. It involved the Asian Development Bank, Thailand's Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Agency, and the Myanmar Ministry of Construction. Local organisations have documented how "the project forcibly dispossessed villagers of their land and property without proper consultation or adequate compensation" (Karen Human Rights Group et al, 2016, p.5). The interviewee spoke of the lands lost and plantations damaged, and

how, “Some villagers tried to stop the trucks that constructed the road because the trucks destroyed some of their houses. When villagers could not stop them, they [villagers] aggressively responded by stating that they would light the trucks on fire” (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.154). However, the local battalion leader of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) ordered the arrest of the villagers, and warned them not to continue their action. They subsequently stopped such actions. This demonstrates that the KNU and the KNLA can act, not only as an ally or useful actor in the villagers’ resistance, but as a complicit partner in some of the infrastructure projects and their negative impacts.

According to a representative of a women’s community-based organisation (CBO) in Mergui-Tavoy District, villagers also attempted to disrupt work on a government project which had confiscated land from local people, “when they [Myanmar government] brought their trucks that were full of soil in order to cover the land, villagers interrupted their work. They did not want their lands to be covered with soil” (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.258). However, these villagers were subsequently sued by the Myanmar government. Another case of villagers using physical resistance, only to be sued, occurred in Taungoo District, where villagers pulled an official from the Ministry of Industry off his motorbike after he refused to meet with villagers. They were also subsequently sued (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.175).

The few cases of physical resistance documented above demonstrate that it was not a particularly effective mode of action, and typically villagers would face consequences such as warnings, threats of violence, or being sued. This is a clear example of a negative feedback loop, where physical resistance was met with consequences that stymie further actions such as being sued. The scarcity of documented physical resistance in the data shows that while such actions fit the definition of resistance for this thesis, they are not part of a complex adaptive system of resistance. They are too rare, not able to spread throughout the geographical area and become one of the dynamic patterns that make up a complex system. However, it is a useful example to demonstrate how patterns *do not* develop due to a concept that complexity thinking elucidates – negative feedback loops.

9.3 Refusing to Comply

Another confrontational resistance tactic used by villagers was a refusal to comply with companies or the government in their development projects. This involved not giving consent, refusing to sign documents regarding projects, not agreeing to compensation offered for land, not turning up for meetings, or ignoring company orders by continuing to till their land. This directly challenges and confronts the power of the company or government, and although small-scale, became a pattern throughout south-eastern Myanmar. However, as with other cases in Myanmar, as well as regionally, this refusal can lead to negative retaliation, potentially causing a negative feedback loop. For example, Touch and Neef's (2015) case study of resistance to land grabbing and displacement in Cambodia documents how community members remained in their villages, refusing to accept compensation for their land which was to be turned into a commercial development site and tourist zone (Touch & Neef, 2015). Some of these villagers had their houses destroyed by company representatives backed by soldiers. In a comparative example in Myanmar, one of Land in Our Hands network's members in Dawei refused to move from her home for an urban development project, while also rejecting government offers of compensation. Her and two other people's houses became the "only remnants from the previously occupying farming community, surrounded now by new concrete buildings" (Ju & Ra, 2021, p. 511). Other farmers who resisted this project were sued. This corresponds with the retaliation that refusal provoked in south-eastern Myanmar documented in this period, and because of this, fear is still common.

For example, in an incident of refusing to sign over land documented in Hpa-an District in March 2013, despite threats of arrest, the farmer put succinctly, "If we sign, we lose everything. We don't sign" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.560). This fear is well-grounded, and one particular incident of refusal by a monk to let a KNU/KNLA Peace Council[27] company commander engage in logging near the monastery documented in a November 2014 interview in Hpa-an District shows this. The monk wanted to keep the trees so that villages could use the leaves to build their thatched roofs. However, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council Company Commander arrested and beat the monk until he was killed. While the villagers submitted a complaint, they did not know if anything would come of it (Karen Human Rights Group, 2015b, p.301). In another incident of the government selling a locally

[27] Small, militia group that broke away from the KNU in 2007. See Figure 1.

used forest to a logging company in Thaton District, villagers confronted the district chairperson, who responded by offering compensation. However, some villagers refused, and their names were put on a list by authorities (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.380).

Yet despite these incidences of retaliation, instances of refusal were documented across several districts and across the time period under investigation, even if refusal does not always work. The reason that the refusal does not always work is the overwhelming power of the companies and state actors. For example, information from a situation update from Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District from January to October 2016 reported how a cement company came to the area to test stone for mining. Yet the villagers refused to accept them. However, after getting permission from the district governor, they came back to conduct their assessments. According to the update:

> Although the villagers have protected the township and village's natural beauty, [they feel that] wealthy individuals who are rich and powerful have used many different tactics to seize what they want…while…local people have been left behind, their lands and gardens lost, and their lives full of intimidation (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.422).

This sentiment was similar in the case of the Anawa Soe Moe Company, which confiscated land in Mergui-Tavoy District for a palm oil project. Villagers tried to refuse when the company organised a meeting to persuade the villagers to sell their land, but they felt like they could not refuse to sell. As the situation update puts it, "In fact, villagers did not allow the company to do business on their lands, but the company has military [both Tatmadaw and KNLA] on their side so some affected villagers have had to relocate their homes" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.554). A similar incident occurred in Dooplaya District in September and October 2011. It was reported that villagers were concerned that the Myanmar military and the Border Guard Force (BGF), would confiscate 500 acres of betelnut, rice paddy, and rubber plantations from local villagers to build a BGF camp. The village head had told them that they would be compensated for their land losses, but when a meeting was called the villagers refused to go. They acknowledged that their land would be taken from them regardless of whether they agreed to give up their land or accept the compensation. They were worried that if they accepted the compensation, they would be blamed if armed conflict broke out in the area in the future. One villager stated, regarding the meeting:

> We haven't gone. If we go, I know we'll have to sign, and we've made a decision that we won't go. If they want to take [our land], they can… They've ordered us to go to see him [the operations commander]… [The villagers will have to sign] so that's why we don't go (Karen Human Rights Group, 2013a, p.277).

There were also several examples regarding the land confiscation for the KMAC teak plantation where villagers refused to cooperate with the company or their workers. Another villager stated that they would refuse to have their land measured by the company. This would be in order to attain Land Form 7 (Outlined in the Section 6.1 on Testing the 'Rule of Law' in Chapter Six: Engagement), but the villagers stated that they would measure and apply for the land form themselves, and not let the company do it for them due to very understandable distrust (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.28). Another plantation owner, who had 500 trees cut down and, later, a further 102 cut down by the company, spoke of his refusal to accept compensation. As he explains:

> Even though they wanted to pay me money, I don't want to take it. I just want to get my land back. We cannot do anything with money. The money that they pay me is not worth as much as my fruit [banana]. If we take their money, my whole life will be in trouble. If I have land, not only myself but also my family can depend on it (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.16).

Another farmer in the same township reported how the KMAC company security staff told her many times that she could not work on her land as the KMAC owned it. However, she continued to plant her banana trees, citing that she had refused to sign over her lands for compensation. The security guard then tried to coerce her into signing a letter agreeing to stop working on their land, which she refused to do. Ultimately, however, after repeated pressure, she agreed to leave the banana plantation after the next harvest (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, pp.319-320).

The effect of the interaction between the implementers of projects and villagers documented in this section was an emergent resistance pattern of refusal. It was more common than physical resistance, occurring throughout the geographical area and time period under

investigation, and was still confrontational in that these acts of refusal directly challenged the companies involved. Refusing to accept compensation, attend meetings, or sign documents may not have resulted in land restitution, but were acts of defiance when faced with threats, such as the unfortunate ending of the monk in Hpa-an District. Furthermore, these instances of refusal, like other types of confrontation, were an adaption to a context in which there was more confidence to refuse. However, while there is a pattern, it does not become as widespread or as impactful as other resistance actions because such acts of refusal did not achieve substantial results in terms of stopping development projects. This is because of the power inequalities of villagers vis-à-vis companies and armed actors, especially the Myanmar military. These unequal power relations remained robust enough to weather individual acts of defiance because they were not a threat to projects. Because they were individual acts, they were not powerful enough to alter long-established power relations. Point blank refusal, while an overt display of resistance, was a brave and ultimately fruitless tactic unless combined with other resistance actions. The next section will show that confrontations that are a result of thickening relations among villagers emerged as a more defiant and dynamic resistance action. Furthermore, as with comparative examples in other parts of Myanmar and around the world, refusal is sometimes met with retaliation. This retaliation is dependent on the power and presence of the state in the project areas and the support that state actors, including the Myanmar military and its proxies, give to the implementing companies (Moreda, 2015).

9.4 Directly Protesting

> In order to regain our land, I am going to act [protest] resolutely until we get back our land. I am going to try to regain my land even if I am punished or put in jail, as the land is very important for us and we rely on our land for our livelihood. (35-year old farmer in Nyaunglebin District, 2016, in Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.276).

One of the most overt and confrontational modes of resistance that villagers employed during this period was that of protest. Such protests directed against the Myanmar state and/or companies working with a government or military entity mark a very different type of action that was largely not possible before the 2012 ceasefire. In fact protests proliferated

throughout Myanmar after 2012, especially in ceasefire areas or central Myanmar. For example, joint research by Namati, the global grassroots justice network, with the Delhi-based think tank, Centre for Policy Research, found in their study of 75 cases of disputes surrounding development projects in Myanmar during the democratic transition period that protest was the most common strategy of resistance. Specifically, they found that a ploughing protest, which is "a form of demonstration whereby farmers plough the disputed land to symbolise their ownership of it" was often used (Kapoor, 2018, p.39). The Land in Our Hands network, which was outlined in Chapter Seven: Mobilisation, also found in their research that protests were a common response to land grabbing, (Land In Our Hands, 2015) including ploughing, which is outlined in the next section.

The protests described below were very much locally directed, were self-organised and dispersed throughout several districts in the southeast. These public manifestations of resistance were an emergent mode of action that was an adaption to the new circumstances. Furthermore, they involved a deepening of relations between villagers, rather than isolated acts of confrontation or refusal outlined above. They became more dynamic and frequent as the time period went on.

According to an interview in 2017 with a farmer in Luh Mer Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, the Thai-owned Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Power Public Company arranged a meeting with villagers regarding the construction of a large dam on the Tanintharyi River. The proposed dam would flood an area of 540 square kilometres which included 250 square kilometres of plantations (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.454). At least 14 and up to 18 villages would be affected according to initial estimates. Later assessments predicted that the dam would actually flood up to 32 villages. A previous company, ITD, had already been to the area to survey the land in 2012 and GMS Power Public Company, who took over the project, came back in February 2017 to hold a village meeting along with representatives from the Ministry of Electricity. They explained the benefits of the project in terms of electricity generation and economic benefits (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.474) yet the villager interviewed stated that the local community overwhelmingly did not want the dam project to go ahead due to the flooding of people's lands and plantations. The proposed support that GMS stated they would provide was also not clear (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.454). Therefore, the villagers held a demonstration at the meeting. They cited the lack of information around the planning, the

lack of concrete proposals for compensation, and the negative impacts of the dam.

Villagers continued to hold protests, and, facilitated by a leader of a local CBO, 200 villagers held a demonstration in April 2017, with placards calling for the protection of the Tanintharyi River and with 'No Dam' slogans.

Photograph 5: Environmental event in April 2017, attended by 200 people from 10 different villages in Mergui-Tavoy District.

(Photo by 'Southern Youth', in Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.458)

In 2018, villagers continued to mobilise, holding protests on International Day of Action for Rivers in March, and held another protest in September of the same year. As of 2019, no further action had been taken on the dam project (Candle Light et al, 2019).

Photograph 6: Community members holding a ceremony in March 2018 for International Day of Rivers.

(Candlelight et al, 2019, p.16)

This case illuminates several aspects of resistance. First, as is outlined in Chapter Eight: Leveraging Leaders and Organisations, local CBOs facilitated the protests. At the initial

protest at the February 2017 consultation meeting, the GMS Company had invited local organisations who in turn had brought villagers to the protest. The above photos of the protests, while small in scale, were helped in their organisation by local indigenous environmental leaders and civil society organisations (CSOs). These are groups that are embedded in the communities, working on indigenous knowledge preservation and sustainable development projects with participation from local villagers. The continuing protests through to the following year also indicates that with no severe repercussions, and in an environment where there was greater freedom of assembly, villagers felt the confidence to continue their resistance in the mode of protest. This is despite the fact that in the initial interview with a villager from the local area from KHRG's documentation, the interviewee felt that the community was powerless, stating "Yes, they do not want the dam project. If the dam project happens, they cannot do anything because they do not know what they have to do [to stop the project]. We are afraid [of the authorities]" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.474). Despite this fear, the facilitation by local CBOs and the thickening of relations, i.e. people coming together, resulted in the emergent resistant actions of protests, highlighting the importance of these mechanisms as drivers of a complex adaptive system of resistance.

In other cases documented, the villagers asked for or enlisted the help of the KNU, who become a counterweight to balance the overwhelming power of the Myanmar state or its crony businesses. However in the case described above regarding dam construction, added to villagers' worries was that in December 2016 the KNU signed an MoU with three companies for an industrial estate project, small port construction, a road, as well as two new dams to be implemented on the Tanintharyi River (Myanmar Civil Society Organisations, 2016). The two new dam projects were dropped in 2018, but the involvement of the KNU, at least in other industrial and hydropower projects around the river suggests that they were not a reliable partner in the villagers' resistance. Hence the initial feelings of helplessness articulated by the villager above.

Similarly, in another case in Nyaunglebin District, 400 villagers also held a demonstration in March 2012, *after* the completion of the Kyauk N'Ga Dam on the Shwegyin River as seen in the photo below.

Photograph 7: Villagers from five villages protest against the Kyauk N'Ga Dam on the Shwegyin River.

(Karen Human Rights Group, 2013c, p.47)

As part of their demonstration they used three slogans: 'end dam construction,' 'compensation for lost lands', and 'let the water flow naturally.' The government did not respond to their demands. It is telling that despite the dam construction starting in 2004 and actually finishing in 2011, the first demonstration occurred *after* the signing of the ceasefire of 2012. While the resistance did not result in land restitution, the opportunity to engage in such a form of protest is a novelty for an area – northern Karen State – that saw a huge amount of armed conflict between 2006 and 2008 when the Myanmar military launched its 'northern offensive' against the KNU (MacLean, 2018).

Regarding the KMAC case, in which villagers tried all manner of resistance actions, at least three protests were held in late 2015 and early 2016. This was after the villagers had exhausted other options, including complaint letters. The first demonstration was held on a road between two of the affected villages in Htantabin Township, Taungoo District on 5th of December, 2015. Around 80 people participated in the protest with one villager noting that numbers were few because of the fear of the police and soldiers who accompanied the demonstration and because of the connections that the KMAC CEO had with the Myanmar government (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.277). Another villager noted how they were indeed closely monitored by soldiers.

Photograph 8: First protest regarding the KMAC plantation project, 5th December, 2015.

(Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.314)

Photograph 9: Second protest regarding the KMAC plantation project, 12th January, 2016.

(Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.315)

The second protest on 12th of January was held in in Taungoo Town and attracted more people, around 200. The villagers had four slogans: for KMAC to leave; for land to be returned; for the issues to be solved through the law; and a rejection of the Farmers' Development Party.[28]

While the new political environment and ostensibly freer atmosphere for freedom of assembly gave confidence to villagers to conduct their protests, this freedom contained restrictions that the KMAC case reflects. With the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, passed in 2011 as part of the new dawn of 'reforms' in Myanmar, people became, on the surface, permitted to demonstrate. The law states that citizens can "systematically exercise their basic right to peaceful assembly and peaceful procession and to provide them with legal protection" for the first time in several decades (Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, Section 3(b)). However, onerous conditions, including the stipulation that permission is needed from local authorities means that in practice the law was still very restrictive. The law states:

> The citizens or organizations that want to exercise the right to peaceful

[28] The Myanmar Farmers Development Party, a political party, acted as a broker between KMAC and the villagers. However, according to interviews, villagers perceived the party as being complicit with the KMAC, and held a high level of distrust for them.

> assembly and peaceful procession and express themselves must apply for the permission at least five days in advance by using the form, including the following information, to the Chief of the Township Police Force (Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, Section 4).

The information needed to be provided included the date, time, place, objective, route, content of slogans and chants, and biographies of the leaders of the assembly. In the KMAC protest case, the villagers applied several times to the local township police but were repeatedly denied and only after negotiating the content of the slogans on their signboards were they allowed to go ahead (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.277). On the other hand, villagers reported that counter protests were organised by KMAC every time the villagers held their own protest. According to one villager interviewed regarding these protests, "Some people from the KMAC side did not know the reason they protested for. They said that they would be paid 3000/5000 [$2.22/3.69 US] kyats if they joined the protest" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.132). Furthermore, it seems that the counter-protesters did not have the same problems gaining permission for their assembly, and were allowed to protest for three full days after the villagers own protest was restricted to just one morning (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.132).

These protests, however, brought KMAC to the negotiating table. One villager reported that after the first demonstration that was held in the town of Taungoo, KMAC came and offered them compensation (300,000 kyats [US $256.63] per acre of land). However the villagers were "united in confrontation" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.50) and rejected the compensation offer, wishing to just have their lands returned (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.314).

One other aspect is that the protests were helped by local organisations, including with transportation to Taungoo and food (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.133). The mobilisation that involved the protest then, while locally organised, was guided by CBOs. This was expanded on Chapter Eight, Leveraging Local Leaders and Organisations.

The above incidences of protest, almost unthinkable before 2011, shows that villagers adapted to the changing political and indeed, legal environment, to resist destructive development projects. Legislation passed in 2011 ostensibly made assembly lawful, although

with onerous restrictions, including the need to apply for permission to protest. In fact, in the KMAC case, one of the demonstrators faced charges of violating this law as he had brought and used a loudspeaker, which was not specified in the application to conduct the demonstration (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.281). Yet faced with such restrictions, they still protested three times in the KMAC case, while the continued series of small protests in Mergui-Tavoy District around a planned dam project on the Tanintharyi River also reflects how villagers capitalised on the newly afforded political and civic space. Thus, with help from local CBOs, villagers adapted to the opportunities of freedom of association and assembly by confronting, in a public and assertive manner, the companies that were behind the land confiscation and damaging development projects.

9.5 Fencing

One particular type of localised resistance action was that of fencing land, or in Burmese, *tun tone taik pwe* – a culturally-inflected protest action of erecting fencing around land and ploughing it to assert ownership. Such culturally specific confrontation actions occur in other cases of land-grabbing. For example Martiniello (2015) outlines a case-study in Uganda, where 100 women stripped naked in front of surveyors and local authorities to protest the eviction from their land for a sugarcane estate. They confronted the authorities and the company through the "mobilization of cultural symbolism" (Martiniello, 2015, p.662) sending the message that "if you bring sugar here, our breasts will have no milk to feed ourselves" (Martiniello, 2015, p.662).

While the culturally symbolic protests that villagers sometimes employed in south-eastern Myanmar were not as dramatic, the fencing and subsequent ploughing represents the villagers' ancestral ownership and connection to their lands. This fencing/ploughing protest was a relatively common form of resistance throughout Myanmar (Land In Our Hands, 2015, Kapoor, 2018) and beyond. Indeed occupying and cultivating land that had been allocated to outside investors has been researched and mapped out as a pattern of resistance in Ethiopia, where indigenous communities continued to plant on their ancestral land (Moreda, 2015). In response the company largely left them alone, not wanting to further aggravate the situation

and catalyse more confrontation, especially as these lands were in remote areas where the state was less able to exert its' authority (Moreda, 2015).

Fencing was used in the KMAC case as part of a local, organised event, where villagers came together and erected bamboo fences around their land in order to protect them and to assert their ownership, or conducted as individuals. Several villagers described this action in regard to resisting KMAC's land confiscation occurring regularly throughout 2017 (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.176) although it began in 2015. One villager noted that they resorted to this strategy due to the lack of remedy after reporting to the authorities about their land being confiscated (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.181). The same villager also reported how company workers would destroy the fences that had been erected.

In one instance, in July, 2015, 200 villagers gathered in one village to conduct the fencing land protest. However, the local police pressured the villagers to sign an agreement not to do their fencing strategy again (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.271). In response the villagers wrote a complaint letter to KMAC stating that:

> We, 259 landowners, would like to inform you all that we are going to take our land back. We will fence, farm and work on our land peacefully because this land is most vital and essential to our lives. We need them to secure our families' business, education, health, social needs and livelihoods (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.271).

Five of those villagers were subsequently sued by KMAC for trespassing as outlined in earlier chapters. Despite this, the fencing of lands continued. One villager noted that "They worked together to fence their land instead of protesting on the streets because they have limited human resources and do not have someone to lead them" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.134).

The fencing and ploughing protest is a localised activity, assertive and confrontational, and is an action that can be done individually or as part of a village-level group event. It is very much self-organised in that, as the above villager notes, it is not necessary to have any external leader or organisation. Furthermore, the confrontational action of fencing and ploughing was in response to the changing political context. As this villager said, "Now, we

clean our land. We fight for our land. And, we fence to get back our land. As now is the period of transparency [peace period], we are not afraid of anything. We do it bravely" (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.181). Yet, unlike the example outlined in Moreda's (2015) research in Ethiopia outlined above, the state's authority, manifest in the jurisdiction of the court, meant that the KMAC company contested this fencing resistance by suing them. The Myanmar state's ability to govern and extend its authority meant that the resistance was curtailed.

Photograph 10: The red flag in this photo is a sign of retaking and asserting their land claims as part of a fencing protest. (Karen Human Rights Group, 2018, p.445)

9.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the various confrontational practices of resistance enacted by villagers during this time period. These practices of verbal and physical confrontation, refusal, protests, and fencing land were not as strong as other patterns documented in other chapters, yet they do reveal some aspects of the complex adaptive system. In response to the overarching question of how the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endured, adapted, and evolved amid new forms of structural violence and what explains this dynamic, some conclusions can be drawn from the patterns of confrontation as resistance. First of all, much of these actions would have been nearly impossible before the time period due to the extremely oppressive political environment. Thus, while these patterns were not *as* strong as others, they did reveal an *adaption* to a context in which it was more possible to confront destructive development projects. This

demonstrates *positive feedback loops* in the sense that villagers did not face the same blocking or stymieing effects that a previous, pre-ceasefire time period would produce. Thus these confrontations were repeated. An exception to this was the physical resistance, which faced a negative feedback loop of being sued or warned. Thus dispersed resistance adapted and became more confrontational, although not to the extent that physical resistance was possible.

Second, these types of actions were *self-organised* in that they were not coordinated in a centralised fashion. However, the protests actions were *facilitated* by CBOs, who themselves are actors in the system. They were able to provide some resources, capacity and direction to the villagers who wished to protest. These protests garnered attention, raising the issue of natural resources and land to the regional, national and even international stage. Thus, the patterns of resistance developed due to the catalysing role of CSOs and CBOs.

Third, these protests were collective confrontations, in contrast to the other emergent patterns of confrontational resistance such as verbal confrontation and refusal. They were collective because of the *thickening relations* between villagers, *facilitated* by community organisations, and this resulted in the dynamic *emergence* of protests. Thus, a focus on the dynamic but resilient relations between villagers, the KNU, the Myanmar military and government and private business, shows the thickening relations between villagers, feedback loops and facilitation that are the engines of dynamism that in turn drive the adaption, self-organisation and emergence – the core concepts of a complex adaptive system. What this means is that the more interaction and more relations there are between villagers, which are often facilitated by CBOs and CSOs, the more patterns of resistance emerge and the system becomes more complex. It speaks to the importance of this facilitation. As the previous chapter on leveraging local organisations shows, however, it is a two-way street. These are not outside organisations coming in to the context and directing resistance. Rather, these organisations are actors within the system, and they are utilised and leveraged by villagers for their own resistance aims. The resistance would still occur without CBOs – or ‘strong agents’ – but there is a more connected, complex system, with more emergent patterns of resistance, when they are present.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

I will conclude this thesis by examining the empirical findings and conceptual implications of applying a complexity lens to dispersed resistance to answer the question: How did the non-armed resistance of villagers in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 endure, adapt, and evolve amid new forms of structural violence and what explains this dynamic? To summarise, I believe that narrating dispersed resistance through the lens of complexity allows us to explain how resistance adapts, evolves, and endures during periods of new threat and opportunity. Specifically in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018 there are three key conclusions:

A) That the new political and economic context, while catalysing new threats to villagers, also offered opportunities for new modes and dynamic forms of resistance, such as protest, forming networks and committees, and sending complaint letters.
B) Resistance increased when people were able to connect and interact with each other. The ceasefire afforded greater freedom of movement and association, and this meant that connections between people were more possible and therefore more forms of dispersed resistance emerged.
C) The role of civil society and community-based organisations in facilitating these connections was vital. This was an adaption to the new political and economic context, in which there was greater civic space.

This conclusion will also reflect on some gaps in this research project, as well as discussing some areas of possible future application of complexity to resistance.

10.1 Three Key Takeaways

10.1.1 Resistance is Dynamic

The new political and economic context certainly offered opportunities for new, dynamic and overt forms of resistance, and this was reflected in the patterns that this thesis mapped out in the previous four chapters. This was related to Proposition One:

Emergence – *Patterns of resistance emerge that confront, challenge and negotiate state power from a position of subordination.*

The patterns identified were organised into four categories – Engagement, Mobilisation, Leveraging Local Leaders and Organisations, and Confrontation. These categories sometimes overlapped and were not necessarily neatly separated. For example, the community-based organisations (CBOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) that facilitated self-organisation and mobilisation resulted in the confrontation manifest in protests(s). Thus, while it was possible to categorise different types of resistance actions, there were limitations in trying to maintain discrete boundaries between the categories. Rather, these categories overlapped, and were co-constitutive of each other, feeding into each other as villagers used their agency to manage different situations and, where possible, resisting. Despite this overlap, the categories remained distinct *enough* to categorise. The repeated documentation of these modes of resistance throughout the time period and throughout the geographic region meant they formed an identifiable pattern.

This relates to the first conclusion that this thesis draws regarding the specifics of resistance in Myanmar in the southeast between 2012 and 2018 - that these new patterns emerged as a dynamic response to the changing political and economic environment. There are several examples of villagers reacting to political or legislative changes, in particular the 2012 ceasefire, thus catalysing confidence. For example, in Chapter Six: Engagement, adaption was evident in how villagers tested the new legislation such as registering land, reporting to new democratic institutions such as the offices of MPs or even the President, and sending complaint letters to the government or companies. Such actions were certainly a response to the changing context. Legislation, particularly the 2012 Farmland Law and the 2012 Vacant, Fallow, And Virgin Land Law, brought new threats to villagers as a neoliberal land tenure regime sought to encourage industrial agriculture at the expense of smallholder farmers and those practicing customary land tenure. However, they also presented new opportunities for villagers to register their land and contest unfair land grabs. Similarly, elected Members of Parliament and representatives of a quasi-civilian government, many of whom bought into the idea of a democratic transition, became points of engagement, and villagers began to engage with the offices of these actors to resist the destructive development projects coming to their areas.

There were also several examples of villagers trying one resistance action, it not working, and thus trying another, and there is a sense of dynamism and momentum, with villagers gaining confidence as time went on. Seen through the lens of the complexity concept of feedback loops, the reactions or response by authorities, armed actors or companies either stymied further resistance or encouraged its momentum. There were some instances of resistance documented that were tried once, faced threat of violence, court action, being ignored or other kinds of obstacles. This, generally, stopped the emergence of a strong pattern of that particular form of resistance. However in other modes of resistance such as protests, committee forming and networks, these patterns became stronger because of a lack of a negative feedback loop. People were emboldened, especially during these collective actions, and felt it was possible to directly confront companies or the authorities. This also extended to more confrontational modes of resistance. This meant that these committees proliferated, protests were continued, or networks were built. This is an example of a positive feedback loop and this galvanised patterns of resistance. It also reflects a confidence that people had to test these new democratic freedoms, however limited they may have been.

There was a dynamism and a momentum to these patterns, and this was only possible because of the political dynamics of ceasefire and liberalisation that contextualises this resistance. Would some of these modes of resistance, such as complaint letters, protests, or network forming be possible in the previous period of military regime? Before the time period under question - 2012-2018 - Myanmar was a repressive military regime in which such avenues of democratic participation were simply not in existence, nor feasible. Research has shown that resistance during the preceding period is less confrontational and less overt (Malseed, 2009). This confirms Proposition Two – Adaption – *These resistance patterns adapt and are in response to changing political, economic and conflict dynamics*.

10.1.2 Resistance Relies on Connections

A second key conclusion is that the greater ability for people to connect and interact with each other meant that resistance increased. Again, changes in the political context meant that there was more freedom to engage in political and civic life without fear of retaliation. People adapted to the greater freedom to organise and mobilise, confirming again Proposition Two.

An important example of this is Section 17(1) of the Unlawful Associations Act – in which association with an organisation deemed to be unlawful can result in a prison term. Many ethnic armed organisations, including the KNU, were on this list, and after the 2015 nationwide ceasefire agreement, they were taken off this. This reduced the threat of arrest for people coming together to mobilise. In the past, this kind of activity was seen by the Myanmar military as suspicious and potentially a collaboration with the KNU. However, it was not just this piece of legislation that meant great political and civic space. The 2011 Law Relating to the Right to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession, amended in 2014 and again in 2016, legalised peaceful assembly for the first time in decades. Many aspects of the law were criticised by human rights groups, including onerous conditions and hoops to jump through in order to exercise the right to freedom of assembly (Progressive Voice, 2018). This perhaps represents the reality of the transition, it looked good on paper, but the substance was still potentially repressive. However, despite the problems of this law, it was certainly a step forward, and the amount of protest and gatherings of people in demonstrations, strikes (legalised in the 2011 Labor Organisation Law), and public workshops and conferences increased. Conflict-affected border areas were always more repressive and dangerous for this type of activity, yet even here, as documented in the Chapter Seven: Mobilisation - villagers began to come together, interact, and participate in small protests.

Therefore, in a context in which mobilisation and coming together became more possible, the thicker relations and more interactions between villagers resulted in more emergent forms of resistance, as per Proposition One. Again, the space to come together is an adaption to a new political context, as per Proposition Two, but this form of resistance also gained momentum, escalating into networks of networks, or networks of committees, bringing people together and asserting their grievances against destructive development projects. In short, more connections meant more resistance and therefore a more complex system.

10.1.3 Resistance is Facilitated by Community-based and Civil Society Organisations

A third major conclusion of what explains the dynamics of resistance during this period is the key role played by community-based and civil society organisations in facilitating interaction and catalysing resistance. This facilitation catalysed the emergence of resistance by bringing people together, connecting villages, sharing information, or providing capacity or resources.

A note should be made here on power relations. This thesis has concentrated on power inequalities, particularly between villagers in rural south-eastern Myanmar and their resistance to the Myanmar military, private businesses, and the assemblage outlined in Chapter Two: Ceasefire Capitalism. However, I do not want to romanticise the role of CBOs and CSOs as actors within the system. There are power relations and power dynamics present in the relationship between CSOs and CBOs and the villagers that they train, mobilise, or represent. This is perhaps most obvious when villagers in interviews in this data corpus refer to themselves as 'uneducated' and look to CSOs and CBOs as providers of knowledge and capacity. And while the CBOs and CSOs may well have good intentions, their role as a central node in this system in which they have many more connections than a typical villager means that this is not a flat network of actors. These strong agents (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.56) are above villagers in a hierarchy of power. They have access to funds, resources, other networks and the media which they use to channel the grievances of villagers. Even within complex adaptive systems, where there is no central organised structure, total equality among actors does not exist, and hierarchy can still be present (Williams, 2020, p.82).

Yet because these CSOs and CBOs are local, i.e. ethnic Karen-led and staffed, with members coming from communities within south-eastern Myanmar, this thesis views them as actors within a complex system, not external to it. Referring back to the framework, these can be seen as "strong agents" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008, p.45), who have intentions and beliefs, and were not simply reacting to threat but proactively doing something about it. However, they were not leading or organising, but *facilitating* the resistance. These organisations already existed, some of which had long been established. However, before 2012, many ethnic Karen organisations could only operate in KNU-controlled areas, while other organisations could only operate in Myanmar government-controlled areas. The greater civic space meant these organisations could operate freely, conducting workshops, giving trainings, connecting activists and villages, and engaging in advocacy around policy or legal issues. Some villagers took advantage of this new found space, joining organisations, participating in workshops or meetings, and engaging in advocacy.

This relates to Proposition Three, Self-organisation - *The patterns of resistance acts have no central organisation or coordination mechanism, are spread throughout the areas, and begin at the village level.*

This proposition holds true but this is qualified. The resistance actions were taken at a village level, by villagers, with no overarching organising body. There were several organising committees or networks for example, but these committees were at a village or village-tract level, rather than an overarching 'Karen Network' coordinating the resistance. The patterns of resistance were distributed throughout the region, not centralised in particular townships or regions. It was thus decentralised. The targets of resistance were largely local i.e. the particular company present in that area, or the township-level or region-level government authorities. There were some instances of appealing to the President's Office, or engagement with ministers, but these were related to localised issues. For example, there were instances of resistance against mining projects in Hpapun District, but this was not resistance against gold mining nationally. A counter example would be the nationwide civil society campaign against the Myitsone Dam project in Kachin State in 2011. The Myitsone Dam was suspended by President Thein Sein in late 2011, but the resistance to this was organised, national, coordinated and targeted at national policy (Chan, 2017). On the other hand, the resistance documented in this thesis is very much organised at the village-level.

Where this level of self-organisation becomes qualified is because of the presence and facilitation role of local leaders, community-based and civil society organisations. As outlined above, the political and civic space for such organisations allowed them to operate more freely and widely in south-eastern Myanmar between 2012 and 2018. They played a role in organisation, as they could connect villages, provide expertise and information regarding land rights or government policy, share information and generally encourage villagers to act. However, the role that these organisations played was that of facilitating or catalysing resistance, not organising. The actions documented in the empirical chapters above are not those carried out by one specific long-established Karen CBO, but by villagers and village-level committees or collectives. They were not *coordinated* by Karen CBOs such as Karen Human Rights Group, Karen Environmental Social Action Network, or Karen Youth Organisation, but were helped along by these groups. Hence, there is no central organising body, or external coordinating actor. Facilitation then, not organisation, was therefore a key motor in complexifying the system of resistance.

A complex system is defined by the interactions, the *relations* between actors, and the more interactions and relations there are between components of a system (villagers) the more emergent outcomes there are – in this case resistance. Hence the facilitation by community

organisations outlined above is so important because it thickens relations, complexifying the system, and therefore catalysing more resistance. If the villagers in one village were not able to connect to other villages that faced similar threats of structural violence, they could not work together. This working together can be seen in the form of protests, networks, joint complaint letters and other modes of resistance presented in the previous four empirical chapters.

10.1.4 A Complex Adaptive System of Dispersed Resistance

To summarise, the dynamism that a complex adaptive system of dispersed resistance has that would enable it to evolve and sustain during turbulent or changing circumstances can be narrated using the complexity concepts of self-organisation, adaption and emergence. This is because the patterns of relations that produce the resistance are capable of evolving and adapting over time to react to the changing context around them. If they do not, then resistance halts becoming an emergent effect of the interactions between villagers. It is because of the system's capacity for *adaption* that means resistance can still be identified in 2018. Furthermore, because of the three mechanisms – feedback loops, facilitation, and thickening of relations - that increase the capacity for self-organisation and adaption, the emergent patterns of resistance have become stronger over the time period. Looking at the resistance through this complexity lens allows us to understand and narrate the dynamics of resistance through a period of political and economic change.

10.2 Limitations

There were limitations to this study, this is mainly reflected in doing a PhD during the COVID-19 pandemic and also during a period in which violence in Myanmar was - and still is at the time of writing - on a scale it has not seen since the 1940s. The reliance on already-produced documentation, while critically addressed in Chapter Five: Methodology, still limited the data available. In an ideal world, more in-depth, ethnographic research would have been conducted in village(s) in south-eastern Myanmar. This would have allowed me to go further in detail on certain issues, and in particular, to ask - where safe and appropriate – the motivations and specifics behind resistance actions. Rather than patterns of resistance,

broadly categorised, this would have allowed me to follow-up on particular resistance actions, their sequence, and explore in detail the intricate details of what was done, how, what the effects were, and how relations changed over time in a particular location.

Another gap in this research is that it has not adequately addressed how gender plays a role in resistance. For example, are there differences between what kind of resistance actions men and women take, and what cultural, socio-economic, and political dynamics structure this? There has been scholarly research undertaken in rural areas of Myanmar related to this. Park (2021), for example, has shown that women are often excluded from activism around environmental justice in Tanintharyi Region, southern Myanmar, while perceptions around traditional gender roles, for example speaking out at village meetings, also constrained their role (Park, 2021). Others, such as Hedström (2015), have gone into detail on the role of gender in more active armed conflict settings, such as Kachin State in the north of Myanmar. This thesis has not done this, largely due to the limited documentation specifically related to gender in the data corpus. Rather than trying to undertake an incomplete, partial analysis of the role of gender in resistance, I have left it largely unaddressed and is thus a gap for further research. However, it is not just gender, but other axes of power, domination and discrimination could be addressed with more in-depth, field research. For example, issues related to age, ethnic and religious minorities within Karen communities, or LGBTIQ communities.

Despite these gaps, the broad overview of resistance that the data corpus provided was sufficient to map the categories of resistance, the patterns these formed and the overall sense of what dispersed resistance looks like in south-eastern Myanmar. This is a credit to the data corpus itself and the work put in by KHRG to document the human rights situation during this time period.

10.3 Conceptual Implications

10.3.1 What can Complexity tell us about Resistance?

Little has been written that applies a complexity lens to resistance studies. However, there are several points of complementarity between them, and this thesis can hopefully provide some contributions to the literature on resistance. I believe that complexity can add to resistance scholarship in three ways. First it provides an analytic lens to map out resistance by focussing on relations. Second, it demonstrates a mechanism for how resistance can be facilitated – i.e. strong agents facilitating more interactions. Third, it shows how resistance can adapt to new threats and opportunities.

In their book-length exploration of how to conceptualise everyday resistance, Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) argue that:

> Resistance is as per definition relational, since it will always be in a relation to power, and therefore in a relation to those subjects that engage in power techniques. Thus, the logic and practice of everyday resistance will depend on what others do, and what others do depends on the relationships that permeate the situation in which resistance acts are played out (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020, p.164).

As resistance is per definition, relational, so is complexity. These relationships, that "permeate the situation," are the relationships that form a complex adaptive system of resistance. By mapping out these relationships, we can map out the interactions between actors that produce the emergence of resistance. Furthermore, a complexity frame does not tie us to the *subject* of resistance. Rather, resistance emerges out of interaction. This is also a complement to resistance. As Vinthagen and Johansson state, "Resistance does not "originate" within the subject, but is something that arises in the combination of subjectivity, context and interaction" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p.36). By "arises," we can read, in complexity terms, emergence. As per the relational approach of complexity then, resistance studies compels us to bring our analysis to relations rather than entities as this is how resistance comes into being. We do not find resistance in one person. We find resistance in that person's interactions with others.

Second, and building on the above point, if resistance is found in the interactions, not in the entities, then complexity tells us that the more you can facilitate interactions and thicken relations, the more resistance there is. Thus, the more facilitation of resistance, not to

coordinate it or organise it from a central standpoint, but to bring people together, create networks, mobilise, and catalyse interactions, the more complex the system of resistance is. This can be played by a facilitating organisation, or a "strong agent" (Ramalingham & Jones, 2008), showing that complexity can be catalysed without being centrally organised.

Third, complexity tells us that resistance is a dynamic phenomenon that can adapt and react to changing circumstances. A complex system of dispersed resistance is one that will adjust to such changing political contexts that provide both threat and opportunity. A complex adaptive system has the capacity to evolve and this is done through the agency of the people involved.

10.3.2 What can Resistance tell us about Complexity?

This thesis has focused on the social phenomenon of resistance, specifically dispersed resistance, and narrated this through a complexity lens. However, if there is a system of dispersed resistance, there is also a system of domination. Little has been written in complexity literature about complex systems of domination. Power and politics is often omitted from complexity applications in the social sciences. Furthermore, the instrumentalisation of complexity, for example in peacebuilding and intervention settings, has been viewed as a tool to extend neoliberal governmentality that depoliticises essentially political situations (Chandler, 2014).

One notable exception is Millar's work on transcalar complex global conflict systems (Millar, 2020). He links complex systems of neoliberal capitalism, global armed conflict, and peacebuilding interventions. While it may be obvious, these are connections that have not been widely made in the complexity literature. The patterns of dispersed resistance that I have presented in this thesis are localised in a particular part of Myanmar – the southeast, in a particular time period – 2012 to 2018. However, what I have tried to demonstrate is how these patterns of resistance have adapted, endured, and evolved to a new political context. This political context – 'ceasefire capitalism' – is linked to national, regional, and global systems of natural resource exploitation, markets, arms purchases, geopolitics and the ordering of the world system of states, and other dynamic systems. One example is the neoliberal land tenure that was pushed by the Myanmar government that threatened the land ownership of so many Karen farmers. This was part of Myanmar's integration into world

markets, and was aided by technical assistance from international financial institutions. Another example is the electricity that would be produced by hydropower dam construction on Karen State's rivers to feed the energy needs of Myanmar's neighbours, which in turn would provide foreign revenue for the Myanmar military. The military would then use this revenue to purchase military hardware from arms exporters such as China, Israel, Russia, India, and, before 2022, Ukraine (Asra, 2017).

Therefore, the dispersed resistance in south-eastern Myanmar is just one system among a global, interconnected web of systems that has produced inequality, precarity and conflict. According to Millar, it is a "a global system of multiple and extreme inequalities giving structure to a complex assemblage of interactions characterized by domination and manipulation" (Millar, 2020, p.269). Thus, when areas such as south-eastern Myanmar, where the 2012 ceasefire was fragile and is characterised by "fragility, inequality, and endemic violence," (Millar, 2020, p. 269) are opened up to penetration by neoliberal market forces, such precarious communities are exposed to more forms of structural violence.

The point here is that complexity is not apolitical. As I outlined in the introduction, I am not trying to instrumentalise complexity to find new solutions in which linear approaches have previously failed. Rather, I have narrated dispersed resistance through a complexity lens. However, resistance is always in relation to power and domination, and complexity is not a technical approach to solving the problems inherent in south-eastern Myanmar or indeed any other context where everyday people are resisting or mitigating the worst effects of precarity, violence and inequality. Complex, trans-scalar systems of power, violence, and indeed resistance are interconnected, and mutually constitutive. Addressing the complexity of a situation such as resistance means linking this resistance to the systems of domination that create the conditions for resistance.

As outlined in the definition of resistance section, resistance is shaped by state domination. However, the state domination in south-eastern Myanmar, as I have also outlined, is an assemblage of dynamics, linking transnational investors, military commanders, international markets and natural resource extraction. These are not discrete components, but are linked in complex systems of global governance and relations that have frequently produced emergent effects of conflict, inequality, and indeed, resistance.

Thus, in order for complexity to adequately address power and inequality, which complexity scholars have rarely done, it must link to these transcalar systems "of global order" (Millar, 2020, p.270) of which structural violence is one effect, and which resistance, armed, everyday, dispersed or otherwise, is a reaction to. This leads me to the following section, on future applications of complexity to resistance.

10.4 Future Applications?

As outlined above, future applications of complexity to resistance would do well to link the localised complex adaptive systems of resistance to global systems of, for example, markets, energy production, arms trade, and geopolitical relations. How these systems interact and shape each other would be part of a grand project that would address power relations and complexity. How these global complex systems impact very localised settings such as south-eastern Myanmar are instructive, not just for our broader understanding of global dynamics, but on revealing the very real effects on some of the most precarious communities in the world.

A relevant application to the Myanmar context would be to the events of today (writing in late 2022/early 2023). The 2021 coup attempt by the Myanmar military rolled back any reforms that the previous decade had seen. Mass protests against this attempted takeover, depressingly and unsurprisingly, led to violent crackdowns, indiscriminate killings of peaceful protesters, arbitrary arrest of thousands of young people, restrictions on media and the internet, and the persecution of democratically elected individuals by the military. The crackdowns, rather than stymieing the movement against the junta, served to galvanise a response. Thousands of 'Generation Z' youth fled to the jungle, to receive arms and training from ethnic armed organisations such as the KNU, and have formed dozens, if not hundreds, of small, guerrilla outfits to resist the Myanmar military junta (Ye Myo Hein, 2022). This is not the dispersed, largely non-violent resistance explained in this thesis, but a violent revolution. The have largely succeeded in preventing the military from controlling Myanmar, with many rural areas under the administration or partial control of either the newly formed resistance groups – often named People's Defence Forces – or EAOs who have expanded

their territory as ceasefires have broken down (Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, 2022).

What is interesting about this revolution, named the Spring Revolution, from a complexity approach is that it is self-organised – i.e. there are very localised armed groups acting with an overall goal of defeating the junta, but without central organisation or external coordination (Ye Myo Hein, 2022). This is despite the efforts of the NUG – the National Unity Government – an exiled government made up of ousted lawmakers and some ethnic and civil society leaders that is making attempts at 'commanding' the PDFs. The revolution is thus decentralised throughout the country, and each group adapts to local conditions, cooperating where expedient, with varying emergent effects. Applying a complexity lens to this revolution, mapping the emerging forms of violence, resistance and other modes of opposition could potentially help understand a situation where linear cause and effect thinking gets lost in the maelstrom of a messy, drawn-out revolution.

Furthermore, linking this to the above dynamic about broader complex global systems, how does this revolution link to finance, arms, and geopolitics? How do these groups sustain themselves financially? Are they linked to trade routes, diaspora funding, international backing? How are they procuring arms? Is it from neighbouring countries or are they developing the technology to produce them, and if so, where do they acquire the raw materials to do so? What role has information technology played in connecting ideas, slogans, and previously mutually suspicious ethnic groups that are now uniting against a violent military junta? The role of facilitation in thickening relations, in this thesis, was played by civil society and community based organisations. What played this role here? Was it online platforms, or national strike committees, prominent activists, or other organisations? A complexity lens and its associated concepts would, I believe, provide a way to narrate and understand Myanmar's Spring Revolution. Myanmar has been highlighted here but this could be applied to protest movements around the world, whether Hong Kong, Iran, Sri Lanka the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, or any other examples of decentralised, civilian resistance.

A complexity approach to resistance studies offers a way of narrating and understanding a world which is increasingly connected, uncertain, and nonlinear, unpredicted outcomes are the norm. However, it must do more to connect the violence, conflict, and inequalities that

people face with complex systems of markets, geopolitics, natural resource exploitation and distribution, and arms production. This would allow us to move towards a 'critical complexity' – one that seeks to address power relations, injustice and inequality - which is still very much in its infancy. The resistance outlined in this thesis is a reaction to some of these trans-scalar systems of structural violence and can be seen as a starting point to making these connections. Lastly, this thesis has shown that non-violent, complex adaptive systems of dispersed resistance, where individuals use their agency, no matter how constrained that may be due to uneven power relations, can challenge and negotiate state-led structural violence.

Appendix A: Types of Documentation

Losing Ground: Land conflicts and collective action in Eastern Myanmar.

Interviews	35
Situation updates	31
Incident reports	10
Complaint letters	5
Photosets (with accompanying notes)	11

'With Only Our Voices, What Can We Do'?: Land confiscation and local response in Southeast Myanmar.

Interviews	13
Situation updates	50
Incident reports	9
Photosets (with accompanying notes)	40
Land confiscation forms	13

Development Without Us: Village agency and land confiscations in Southeast Myanmar.

Interviews	40
Situation updates	27
Incident reports	1
Complaint letters	4
Photosets (with accompanying notes)	11
Land confiscation forms	2
Miscellaneous	5

Total

Interviews	88
Situation updates	108
Incident reports	20
Complaint letters	9
Photosets (with accompanying notes)	62
Land confiscation forms	15
Miscellaneous	5
Total	307

Appendix B: Codes and Categories of Dispersed Resistance

Categories	Codes
Engagement	• Testing the 'Rule of Law' - Trialling a 'Reformed Judiciary' - Preparatory Registering of Land • Reporting to State Authorities - Reporting to Local Government - Appealing to New Democratic Entities • Negotiating with Armed Actors • Negotiating with Companies • Submitting Complaint Letters
Mobilisation	• Forming Committees • Building Networks • Taking Collective Action
Leveraging Local Leaders and Organisations	• Appealing to the Karen National Union • Utilising Village Heads and Village Tract Leaders • Catalysing Role of Civil Society and Community-based Organisations
Confrontation	• Verbally Confronting • Physically Confronting • Refusing to Comply • Directly Protesting • Fencing

Reference List

Abu-Lughod, L. (1990). The romance of resistance: Tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women. *American Ethnologist, 17*(1), 41–55. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1990.17.1.02a00030

Adapt Peacebuilding. (n.d.) *Peacebuilding Programs.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from https://adaptpeacebuilding.org/peacebuilding-programs

Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung. (2008). *The Karen revolution in Burma: Diverse voices, uncertain ends*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies; East-West Center.

Arnold, Katy, (2016, September 23). 'We are revolutionaries:' Villagers fight to protect Myanmar's forests. *Mongabay.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from https://news.mongabay.com/2016/09/we-are-revolutionaries-villagers-fight-to-protect-myanmars-forests/

Asra, S. (2017, September 16). Who is selling weapons to Myanmar? *Al Jazeera.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/9/16/who-is-selling-weapons-to-myanmar

Aung, Win Zar Ni & Win, Ye Htut. (2019, March 11). Tanintharyi villagers keep up fight against tin Mine. *Frontier.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/tanintharyi-villagers-keep-up-fight-against-tin-mine/

Baaz, M., Lilja, M., Schulz, M., & Vinthagen, S. (2016). Defining and analyzing "resistance": Possible entrances to the study of subversive practices. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political, 41*(3), 137–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/0304375417700170

Bächtold, S., Bastide, J., & Lundsgaard-Hansen, L. (2020). Assembling drones, activists and oil palms: Implications of a multi-stakeholder land platform for state formation in

Myanmar. *The European Journal of Development Research*, *32*(2), 359–378. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00267-y

Bayat, A. (2000). From `dangerous classes' to `quiet rebels': Politics of the urban subaltern in the global south. *International Sociology*, *15*(3), 533–557. https://doi.org/10.1177/026858000015003005

Betik, B. (2020). Subaltern Studies. *Postcolonial Studies@Emory* (blog) https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2020/02/17/subaltern-studies/

BNI. (2016, May 2). KNU suspends Min Lwin Mountain cement factory. *Mizzima.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from https://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/knu-suspends-min-lwin-mountain-cement-factory-project

Borras, S. M., & Franco, J. C. (2013). Global land grabbing and political reactions 'from below'. *Third World Quarterly*, *34*(9), 1723–1747. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.843845

Bousquet, A., & Curtis, S. (2011). Beyond models and metaphors: Complexity theory, systems thinking and international relations. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *24*(1), 43–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2011.558054

Boutry, M., Allaverdian, C., Mellac, M., Huard, S., San Thein, Tin Myo Win, & Khin Pyae Sone. (2017*). Land tenure in rural lowland Myanmar: From historical perspectives to contemporary realities in the Dry zone and the Delta*. (Of lives of land Myanmar research series). Gret: Yangon. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-02372225/file/GRET_2017_LandTenure_MYANMAR.pdf

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brenner, D. (2019). *Rebel politics: A political sociology of armed struggle in Myanmar's borderlands*. Southeast Asia Program Publications, an imprint of Cornell University Press.

Brigg, M. (2013). Relational Sensibility in Peacebuilding: Emancipation, Tyranny, or Transformation? In W. Chadwick, T. Debiel, & F. Gadinger (Eds.), *Relational Sensibility and the "Turn to the Local": Prospects for the Future of Peacebuilding*. (pp.12–18). Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21). http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:324372.

Brigg, M. (2016). Relational Peacebuilding: Promise beyond crisis. In T. Debiel, T. Held, & U. Schneckener (Eds.), *Peacebuilding in Crisis: Rethinking paradigms and Practices of Transnational Cooperation.* (pp. 56-69). Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315717852

Brigg, M. (2018). Relational and essential: Theorizing difference for peacebuilding. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, *12*(3), 352–366. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2018.1482078

Brown, I. (2013). *Burma's economy in the twentieth century* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Brown, M. F. (1996). On resisting resistance. *American Anthropologist*, *98*(4), 729–735. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1996.98.4.02a00030

Bruun, O. (2013). Social movements, competing rationalities and trigger events: The complexity of Chinese popular mobilizations. *Anthropological Theory*, *13*(3), 240–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499613496734

Buchanan, J., Kramer, T & Woods, K. (2013). *Developing disparity – regional investment in Burma's borderlands.* Transnational Institute. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.tni.org/en/publication/developing-disparity

Buchanan, J. (2016). *Militias in Myanmar.* The Asia Foundation. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Militias-in-Myanmar.pdf

Burma Campaign UK. (n.d.). *Unlawful Associations Act.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://burmacampaign.org.uk/take-action/free-political-prisoners/unlawful-associations-act/

Burma Environmental Working Group (2017). *Resource federalism: A roadmap for decentralised governance of Burma's natural heritage.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from *https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ResourceFederalismWEB.pdf*

Burma Government Signs Ceasefire with Karen Rebels. (2012, January 12). *BBC.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16523691

Burma News International (2019). *Deciphering Myanmar's peace process: A reference guide 2017-2018.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.jointpeacefund.org/sites/jointpeacefund.org/files/uploads/peace_reference_book_2017-2018_english_versio_1.pdf

Byrne, D. (1998). *Complexity Theory and the Social Sciences: An Introduction*. Routledge.

Byrne, D. (2005). Complexity, configurations and cases. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *22*(5), 95–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276405057194

Callahan, M. P. (2005). *Making enemies: War and state building in Burma* (1. print. Cornell paperback). Cornell University Press.

Callahan, M. P. (2007). *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation and Coexistence.* Institute of Southeast Asian Studies: East-West Center Washington.

Campbell, C. (2012, September 14). Folly of tickling the Tatmadaw's belly. *The Irrawaddy*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/folly-of-tickling-the-tatmadaws-belly.html

Candle Light, Southern Youth, & Takarpaw Group. (2019) *Blocking a Bloodline: Indigenous Communities along the Tanintharyi River Fear the Impacts of Large Scale Dams.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Blocking-a-Bloodline-Layout-Final_V4-_-Arial-1.pdf

Carr, T. (2018). *Supporting the Transition: Understanding Aid to Myanmar Since 2011.* The Asia Foundation. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Supporting-the-Transition-Understanding-Aid-to-Myanmar-since-2011_ENG.pdf

Cetina, K. K. (2005). Complex global microstructures: The new terrorist societies. *Theory, Culture & Society, 22*(5), 213–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276405057200

Chadwick, W., Debiel, T. & Gadinger, F. (2013). The (Liberal) Emperor's new clothes? Relational sensibility and the future of peacebuilding. In W. Chadwick, T. Debiel, & F. Gadinger (Eds.), *Relational Sensibility and the 'Turn to the Local': Prospects for the Future of Peacebuilding* (Global Dialogues 2). (pp.6-11). Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research. http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:324372.

Chan, D. S. W. (2017). Asymmetric bargaining between Myanmar and China in the Myitsone Dam controversy: Social opposition akin to David's stone against Goliath. *The Pacific Review*, *30*(5), 674–691. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1293714

Chandler, D. (2014). Beyond neoliberalism: Resilience, the new art of governing complexity. *Resilience*, *2*(1), 47–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.878544

Chandler, D., & Reid, J. (2019). *Becoming indigenous: Governing Imaginaries in the Anthropocene*. Rowman & Littlefield International.

Chandra, U. (2015). Rethinking subaltern resistance. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *45*(4), 563–573. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2015.1048415

Charney, M. W. (2009). *A history of modern Burma* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107051034

Chatterjee, P. (2004). *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World.* Columbia University Press.

Chatterjee, P. (2011). *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy*. Columbia University Press.

Cheesman, N. (2002). Seeing 'Karen' in the union of Myanmar. *Asian Ethnicity*, *3*(2), 199–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631360220132736.

Chin, C. B. N., & Mittelman, J. H. (1997). Conceptualising resistance to globalisation. *New Political Economy*, *2*(1), 25–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563469708406282

Chronology of the Kachin Conflict (2014, November 20) *The Irrawaddy.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/military/chronology-kachin-conflict.html

Cilliers, P. (2001). Boundaries, hierarchies and networks in complex systems. *International Journal of Innovation Management*, *05*(02), 135–147. https://doi.org/10.1142/S1363919601000312

Cilliers, P. (2016). What can we learn from a theory of complexity? In P. Cilliers, *Critical Complexity* (pp. 67–76). De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501502590-007

Clarke, R., Chadwick, K, & Williams, P. (2017). Critical social research as a 'site of resistance': Reflections on relationships, power and positionality. *Justice, Power and Resistance*, 1(2). pp. 261-282.

Comaroff, J. & J. Comaroff. (2009). *Ethnicity, Inc.* University of Chicago Press.

Conservation Alliance Tanawtharwi (2018, July 16) *Global Environment Facility conservation project in Myanmar violates indigenous rights* [Press Release]. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CAT-GEF-Press-Release-English.pdf

Conservation Alliance of Tanawtharyi. (2020). *Tanawthari Landscape of Life: A Grassroots Alternative to Top-Down Conservation in Tanartharyi Region.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Landscape-of-life-JJH-final2.pdf

Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. (2008). Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.myanmar-law-library.org/law-library/laws-and-regulations/constitutions/2008-constitution.html

Courpasson, D., & Vallas, S. (2016). *The Sage handbook of resistance*. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957947

Dapiran, A. (2019, August 1) "Be Water!": seven tactics that are winning Hong Kong's democracy revolution. *The New Statesmen.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2019/08/be-water-seven-tactics-that-are-winning-hong-kongs-democracy-revolution-2

Dawei Development Association. (2014) *Voices from the Ground: Concerns over the Dawei Special Economic Zone and Related Projects.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from https://earthrights.org/wp-content/uploads/voice_from_the_ground_eng_online.compressed.pdf [accessed 13 September, 2023].

Day, A. (2022). *States of Disorder, Ecosystems of Governance: Complexity Theory Applied to UN Statebuilding in the DRC and South Sudan*. Oxford University Press.

De Coning, C. (2016). From peacebuilding to sustaining peace: Implications of complexity for resilience and sustainability. *Resilience*, *4*(3), 166–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2016.1153773

De Coning, C. (2020). Adaptive peace operations: Navigating the complexity of influencing societal change without causing harm. *International Peacekeeping*, *27*(5), 836–858. https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2020.1797500

De Heredia, M.A. (2017) *Everyday resistance, peacebuilding and state-making: Insights from 'Africa's world war.* Manchester University Press.

Décobert, A. (2020). 'The struggle isn't over': Shifting aid paradigms and redefining 'development' in eastern Myanmar. *World Development*, *127*, 104768. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104768

Dell'Angelo, J., Navas, G., Witteman, M., D'Alisa, G., Scheidel, A., & Temper, L. (2021). Commons grabbing and agribusiness: Violence, resistance and social mobilization. *Ecological Economics*, *184*, 107004. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2021.107004

Della Porta, D. (2013). Repertoires of Contention. In D.A. Snow, D. Della Porta, B. Klandermans & D. McAdam (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. (pp.1-3). Blackwell Publishing.

Democratic Voice of Burma. (2015, October 14). *5 more Militias De-listed as Unlawful Groups.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/5-more-militias-de-listed-unlawful-groups

Department of Population. (2014). *Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census.* Ministry of Labour, Immigration, and Population.

Duffield, M. (2001). *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security.* Zed Books.

Duit, A., Galaz, V., Eckerberg, K., & Ebbesson, J. (2010). Governance, complexity, and resilience. *Global Environmental Change*, *20*(3), 363–368. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2010.04.006

Emirbayer, M. (1997). Manifesto for a relational Sociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(2), 281–317. https://doi.org/10.1086/231209

England, K. V. L. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research∗. *The Professional Geographer*, *46*(1), 80–89. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-0124.1994.00080.x

Environmental Justice Atlas. (2018). *Heinda tin mine, Dawei, Myanmar.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from https://ejatlas.org/conflict/heinda-tin-mine-dawei-region-myanmar

Environmental Justice Atlas. (2019). *Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and Deep Sea port, Tanintharyi, Myanmar.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from https://ejatlas.org/conflict/dawei-sez-tanintharyi-region-myanmar

Equator Initiative (n.d.) *Tenasserim River and Indigenous People Network.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.equatorinitiative.org/2020/04/24/solution11442/

Fawthrop T. (2019, March 11). Myanmar's Myitsone Dam Dilemma. *The Diplomat.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/myanmars-myitsone-dam-dilemma/

Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *5*(1), 80–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107

Ferguson, J. M. (2014). The scramble for the Waste Lands: Tracking colonial legacies, counterinsurgency and international investment through the lens of land laws in

Burma/Myanmar: Burma/Myanmar Waste Lands. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, *35*(3), 295–311. https://doi.org/10.1111/sjtg.12078

Filc, D. (2021). Is resistance always counter-hegemonic? *Journal of Political Ideologies*, *26*(1), 23–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2020.1825281

Fink, C. (2001). Introduction. In *Burma and the Karens.* San C. Po. Bangkok: White Lotus Press.

Fuller, T. (2013, July 8). Lo Hsing Han, Myanmar Drug Kingpin, Dies at 80. *The New York Times.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/09/world/asia/lo-hsing-han-wealthy-trafficker-from-myanmar-dies-at-80.html

Gallo, G. (2013). Conflict theory, complexity and systems approach. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, *30*(2), 156–175. https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2132

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, *6*(3), 167–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301

Garbagni, G., & Walton, M. J. (2020). Imagining Kawthoolei: Strategies of petitioning for Karen statehood in Burma in the first half of the 20th century. *Nations and Nationalism*, *26*(3), 759–774. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12613

Gear, C., Eppel, E., & Koziol-Mclain, J. (2018). Advancing complexity theory as a qualitative research methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*(1), 160940691878255. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918782557

Geller, A. (2011). The use of complexity-based models in international relations: A technical overview and discussion of prospects and challenges. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *24*(1), 63–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2011.559191

Geyer, R., & Pickering, S. (2011). Applying the tools of complexity to the international realm: From fitness landscapes to complexity cascades. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *24*(1), 5–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2011.558053

Gleeson, S. (2015, October 30). No Response, No Accountability for Tenasserim Coal Damage. *The Irrawaddy*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/no-response-no-accountability-for-tenasserim-coal-mine-damage.html

Global Witness. (2015). Jade: Myanmar's "Big State Secret." Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/oil-gas-and-mining/myanmarjade/

Goodwin, G. (2018). Rethinking the double movement: Expanding the frontiers of Polanyian analysis in the Global South. *Development and Change*, *49*(5), 1268–1290. https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12419

Gravers, M. (1996). The Karen making of a nation. In S. Tønnesson & H. Antlöv (Eds.), *Asian Forms of the Nation.* (pp.237-269). Curzon Press.

Gravers, M. (2007). Conversion and identity: religion and the formation of Karen ethnic identity in Burma." In M. Gravers (ed.). *Ethnic Diversity in Burma.* (pp. 227-258). NIAS Press.

Gray, S., & Burns, D. (2021). Local agency, adaptation, and vertical integration of bottom-up peacebuilding: Reflecting on systemic action research in Myanmar. *Peacebuilding*, *9*(1), 15–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2020.1795341

Hall, R., Edelman, M., Borras Jr, S.M., Scoones, I., White, B., & Wolford, W. (2015). Resistance, acquiescence, or incorporation? An introduction to land grabbing and political reactions 'from below.' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *42*(3-4), 467-488. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2015.1036746

Harrisson, A. P., & Kyed, M.H. (2019). Ceasefire state-making and justice provision by ethnic armed groups in southeast Myanmar. *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, *34*(2), 290–326. https://doi.org/10.1355/sj34-2c

Hart, G. (1991). Engendering everyday resistance: Gender, patronage and production politics in rural Malaysia. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *19*(1), 93–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066159108438472

Hedström J. (2015). Gender and Myanmar's Kachin Conflict. *The New Mandala.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.newmandala.org/gender-and-myanmars-kachin-conflict/

Henley, G. (2014). *Case Study on Land in Burma.* Evidence on Demand. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from Case study on land in Burma - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Hetherington, L. (2013). Complexity thinking and methodology: The potential of 'complex case study' for educational research. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, *10*(1/2). https://doi.org/10.29173/cmplct20401

Hodal, K. (2014, November 13). Obama: Burma's democratisation process real but incomplete. *The Guardian.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/nov/13/barack-obama-optimistic-burma-change-slowdown-concern

Hollander, J. A., & Einwohner, R. L. (2004). Conceptualizing resistance. *Sociological Forum*, *19*(4), 533–554. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11206-004-0694-5

Hong, E. (2017). Scaling struggles over land and law: Autonomy, investment, and interlegality in Myanmar's borderlands. *Geoforum*, *82*, 225–236. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.01.017

Htoo, S.A. & Scott, F. (2019). *How the Myanmar Government's repressive land laws are catalyzing conflict and insecurity: An analysis of the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Management Law.* (LRAN Briefing Paper Series No.4.) Focus on the Global South.

Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://lioh.org/an-analysis-of-the-vfv-land-management-law/

Human Rights Watch. (2016). "*The Farmer Becomes the Criminal": Human Rights and Land Confiscation in Karen State.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/11/03/farmer-becomes-criminal/human-rights-and-land-confiscation-karen-state

Ikeda, K. (2012). Two Versions of Buddhist Karen History of the Late British Colonial Period in Burma: *Kayin Chronicle* (1929) and *Kuyin Great Chronicle* (1931). *Southeast Asian Studies. 1*(3), 431-460.

International Commission of Jurists. (2014). *Myanmar: Independence and impartiality; Judicial integrity and accountability.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.icj.org/cijlcountryprofiles/myanmar-introduction/judges/independence-and-impartiality-judicial-integrity-and-accountability/

International Crisis Group (2013, November 26). *In Pursuit of Peace Award Dinner: Peace, Prosperity and the Presidency.* [Media Release]. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.crisisgroup.org/who-we-are/crisis-group-updates/pursuit-peace-award-dinner-peace-prosperity-and-presidency

Jackson, R. (2015). How Resistance can Save Peace Studies. *Journal of Resistance Studies*, *1*(1), 18-49.

Jervis, R. (1997). Complexity and the analysis of political and social life. *Political Science Quarterly*, *112*(4), 569–593. https://doi.org/10.2307/2657692

Johansson, A., & Vinthagen, S. (2015). Dimensions of everyday resistance: The Palestinian *Sumūd*. *Journal of Political Power*, *8*(1), 109–139. https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2015.1010803

Johansson, A., & Vinthagen, S. (2016). Dimensions of everyday resistance: An analytical framework. *Critical Sociology*, *42*(3), 417–435. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514524604

Johansson, A. & Vinthagen, S. (2020). *Conceptualizing 'everyday resistance': A transdisciplinary approach.* Routledge.

Jolliffe, K. (2014). *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Regions.* The Asia Foundation. https://asiafoundation.org/2014/09/02/ethnic-conflict-and-social-services-in-myanmars-contested-regions/

Jolliffe, K. (2016). *Ceasefires, Governance and Development: The Karen National Union in Times of Change.* The Asia Foundation. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/ethnic-conflict-and-social-services-myanmar-s-contested-regions

Jones, L. (2014a). Explaining Myanmar's regime transition: The periphery is central. *Democratization*, *21*(5), 780–802. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.863878

Jones, L. (2014b). The political economy of Myanmar's transition. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *44*(1), 144–170. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.764143

Joseph, J. (2018). Beyond relationalism in peacebuilding. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, *12*(3), 425–434. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2018.1515608

Kachin Development Networking Group. (2012). *Lessons from the Kachin 'development' experience.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://kdng.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/LessonsfromKachindevelopmentexperience-92012-English.pdf

Kapoor, M., Soe, N. N., & Viswanathan, V. (2018). *Midcourse Manoeuvres: Community strategies and remedies for natural resource conflicts in Myanmar*. New Delhi Centre for Policy Research (CPR) and Namati. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from

https://grassrootsjusticenetwork.org/resources/midcourse-manoeuvres-community-strategies-remedies-natural-resource-conflicts-myanmar/

Kappler, S. (2013). Coping with research: Local tactics of resistance against (Mis)representation in academia. *Peacebuilding*, *1*(1), 125–140. https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2013.756279

Karen Human Rights Group, Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, & Thwee Community Development Network. (2016) *Beautiful words, ugly actions: The Asian Highway in Karen State*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://burmacampaign.org.uk/reports/beautiful-words-ugly-actions/

Karen Human Rights Group. (n.d). *About Us.* Retrieved 12 July, 2023. https://www.khrg.org/about-us#:~:text=KHRG%20is%20an%20independent%20community,strategies%20to%20claim%20human%20rights.

Karen Human Rights Group. (2012). *Photo Set: More than 100 household displaced from Toh Boh dam construction site in Taungoo.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://khrg.org/2012/08/khrg12b71/photo-set-more-100-households-displaced-toh-boh-dam-construction-site-toungoo

Karen Human Rights Group. (2013a). Appendix I in *Losing ground: Land conflicts and collective action in Eastern Myanmar.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.khrg.org/sites/khrg.org/files/losinggroundkhrgmarch2013-appendix1-rawdatatestimony.pdf

Karen Human Rights Group. (2013b). *Taungoo Field Report: January to December 2013.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://khrg.org/2014/08/14-1-f1/toungoo-field-report-january-december-2013

Karen Human Rights Group (2013c). *Losing ground: Land conflicts and collective action in Eastern Myanmar.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.khrg.org/sites/khrg.org/files/losinggroundkhrg-march2013-fulltext.pdf

Karen Human Rights Group. (2014a). *Human rights violations by BGF Cantonment Area Commander Kya Aye in Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District, February 2013 to July 2014.* (news bulletin). Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://khrg.org/2014/06/14-2-nb1/villagers-report-negative-impacts-stone-mining-their-livelihoods-kyaik-ma-yaw

Karen Human Rights Group. (2014b). *Villagers report negative impacts of stone mining on their livelihoods in Kyaik Ma Yaw Township, 2011 to 2014*. (news bulletin). Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.khrg.org/2014/09/14-8-nb1/human-rights-violations-bgf-cantonment-area-commander-kya-aye-paingkyon-township

Karen Human Rights Group. (2014c). *Compensation for land flooded by Toh Boh Dam operations in Taungoo District, August 2013.* (news bulletin). Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.khrg.org/2014/07/13-18-nb1/compensation-land-flooded-toh-boh-dam-operations-toungoo-district-august-2013

Karen Human Rights Group (2014d). *Truce or transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.khrg.org/sites/khrg.org/files/khrg_-_truce_or_transition_-_english_briefer.pdf

Karen Human Rights Group. (2015a). *With only our voices, what can we do?': Land confiscation and local response in Southeast Myanmar*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://khrg.org/2015/06/with-only-our-voices-what-can-we-do-land-confiscation-and-local-response

Karen Human Rights Group. (2015b) Appendix I and II of *'With only our voices, what can we do?': Land confiscation and local response in Southeast Myanmar*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.khrg.org/sites/khrg.org/files/appendices_1_2.pdf

Karen Human Rights Group. (2018). Appendix of *Development without us: Village agency and land confiscations in Southeast Myanmar*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from

https://www.khrg.org/sites/khrg.org/files/development_without_us_-_appendix_august_2018.pdf

Karen Human Rights Group (2022). *Denied and Deprived: Local communities confronting the humanitarian crisis and protection challenges in Southeast Burma.* Retrieved 12 July, 2023. https://www.khrg.org/denied-and-deprived-local-communities-confronting-humanitarian-crisis-and-protection-challenges#:~:text=KHRG's%20latest%20report%20presents%20the,since%20the%202021%20military%20coup.

Karen National Union Headquarters. (2015). *Karen National Union Land Policy*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.tni.org/files/article-downloads/knu_land_policy_eng.pdf

Karen National Union Headquarters (2018, October 29). *Statement on the leaking of the official letter to the social media.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2018/10/29/statement-on-the-leaking-of-the-official-letter-to-the-social-media/

Karen Peace Support Network (2014). *Critique of Japan International Cooperation Agency's Blueprint for Development in Southeastern Burma/Myanmar.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/docs25/2016-12-01-blueprint_myanmar_full_report-eng-red.pdf

Karen Peace Support Network. (2018a). *Burma's dead-end peace negotiation process: A case study of the land sector.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Eng-Burmas-Dead-End-Peace-Negotiation-Process-KPSN-report-web.pdf

Karen Peace Support Network. (2018b). *The nightmare returns: Karen hopes for peace and stability dashed by Burma Army's actions.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2018/04/26/the-nightmare-returns-karen-hopes-for-peace-and-stability-dashed-by-burma-armys-actions-2/

Karen Peace Support Network. (2019). *World Bank's planned $250 million Eastern Burma project will fuel conflict* [press release]. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/KPSN-Statement-on-WBs-PPCP-Project-_English.pdf

Karen Rivers Watch. (2016). *Karen State 2016 conflict: The real motivations behind civil war*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Landscape-of-life-JJH-final2.pdf

Kavalski, E. (2007). The fifth debate and the emergence of complex international relations theory: Notes on the application of complexity theory to the study of international life. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *20*(3), 435–454. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570701574154

Kelly, G. (2020). Researching over-researched societies. In R. Mac Ginty, R. Brett, & B. Vogel. (Eds.), *The companion to peace and conflict fieldwork*. (pp.47-63). Palgrave Macmillan imprint publ. by Springer Nature.

Kenney-Lazar, M. (2015). Authoritarian resource governance and emerging peasant resistance in the context of Sino-Vietnamese tree plantations, Southeastern Laos *BRICS Initiative for Critical Agrarian Studies (Working Paper No. 1).* The Hague: The International Institute for International Studies. DOI:10.13140/RG.2.1.3361.4965

Kenney-Lazar, M., & Mark, S. (2021). Variegated transitions: Emerging forms of land and resource capitalism in Laos and Myanmar. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *53*(2), 296–314. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X20948524

Kent, J. (2012, November, 9). Myanmar, the Last Frontier? *Forbes Asia.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/connorconnect/2012/11/09/myanmar-the-last-frontier/?sh=e3c02065dce0

Kerkvliet, B. J. (2009). Everyday politics in peasant societies (And ours). *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *36*(1), 227–243. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820487

Klo Kwe Moo Kham. (2021). *The quest for peace in Kawthoolei: The strategies, outcomes, and Sustainability of peacebuilding in Southeastern Myanmar, 2012-2020*. [Master's Thesis, University of Oslo] https://www.prio.org/publications/13124

KNU questions role of Govt's business linked 'peace talk' advisors. (2012, May 10). *Karen News.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://karennews.org/2012/05/knu-questions-role-of-govts-business-linked-peace-talk-advisors/

Kramer, T. (2021). 'Neither war nor peace': Failed ceasefires and dispossession in Myanmar's ethnic borderlands. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *48*(3), 476–496. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1834386

Kyaw Kha. (2019, November 25). KNU sticks to NCA to advance Myanmar peace process. *The Irrawaddy.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/knu-sticks-nca-advance-myanmar-peace-process.html

Kyed, H. M. (2022). Frontier governance: Contested and plural authorities in a Karen village after the ceasefire. *Modern Asian Studies*, *56*(2), 603–638. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X20000360

Land In Our Hands (n.d.). *Timeline.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from https://lioh.org/timeline/

Land In Our Hands (2015). *Destroying People's Lives: The Impact of Land Grabbing on Communities in Myanmar.* Retrieved September 13, 2023, from https://www.tni.org/files/article-downloads/lioh_research_report_eng_0.pdf

Leonardsson, H., & Rudd, G. (2015). The 'local turn' in peacebuilding: A literature review of effective and emancipatory local peacebuilding. *Third World Quarterly*, *36*(5), 825–839. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1029905

Lilja, M., & Vinthagen, S. (2018). Dispersed resistance: Unpacking the spectrum and properties of glaring and everyday resistance. *Journal of Political Power*, *11*(2), 211–229. https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2018.1478642

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Lintner, B. (2012, January 12). Myanmar and Burma mean the exact same thing. [Letter to the editor]. *The Financial Times.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.ft.com/content/e3185d24-3ad3-11e1-be4b-00144feabdc0

Mac Ginty, R. (2011). *International peacebuilding and local resistance*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230307032

Mac Ginty, R. (2012). Between resistance and compliance: Non-participation and the liberal peace. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, *6*(2), 167–187. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2012.655601

MacLean, K. (2008). Sovereignty after the entrepreneurial turn: Mosaics of control, commodified spaces, and regulated violence in contemporary Burma. In N. Peluso & J. Nevins (Eds.), *Taking Southeast Asia to market: Commodities, nature and people in a neoliberal age.* (pp.140-157). Cornell University Press.

MacLean, K. (2018) *Famine crimes: Military operations, forced migration, and chronic hunger in Eastern Burma/Myanmar (2006-2008).* https://www.clarku.edu/schools/idce/wp-content/blogs.dir/6/files/sites/12/2018/10/MacLean-Famine-Crimes-Report-2018.pdf

MacLean, K. (2022). *Crimes in archival form: Human rights, fact production, and Myanmar*. University of California Press.

Malseed, K. (2009). Networks of noncompliance: Grassroots resistance and sovereignty in militarised Burma. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *36*(2), 365–391. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902928348

Martiniello, G. (2015). Social struggles in Uganda's Acholiland: Understanding responses and resistance to Amuru sugar works. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *42*(3–4), 653–669. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2015.1032269

Matelski, M., Dijkstra, R., & McGonigle Leyh, B. (2022). Multi-layered civil society documentation of human rights violations in Myanmar: The potential for accountability and truth-telling. *Journal of Human Rights Practice, 14*(3), 794-818. https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huac031

Mark, S. (2022). The forging of legitimate authority in the ceasefire mixed-control Karen areas of Myanmar. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *52*(2), 226–246. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2021.1887321

Martín de Almagro, M. (2018). Hybrid clubs: A feminist approach to peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, *12*(3), 319–334. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2018.1482125

Maykut, P. S., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide*. Falmer Press.

McAllum, K., Fox, S., Simpson, M., & Unson, C. (2019). A comparative tale of two methods: How thematic and narrative analyses author the data story differently. *Communication Research and Practice*, *5*(4), 358–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2019.1677068

McCartan, B. (2009, August 26). On the march to do business in Myanmar. *The Asia Times.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://web.archive.org/web/20090929061423/http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/KH26Ae01.html

McCarthy, G., & Farrelly, N. (2020). Peri-conflict peace: Brokerage, development and illiberal ceasefires in Myanmar's borderlands. *Conflict, Security & Development*, *20*(1), 141–163. https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2019.1705072

McCourt, D. M. (2016). Practice theory and relationalism as the new constructivism. *International Studies Quarterly*, *60*(3), 475–485. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqw036

McDonald, D. & Weir, G.R.S. (2006, 28-31 May). *Developing a conceptual model for exploring emergence* [Conference paper]. International Conference on Complex Systems, Reading, United Kingdom. https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/2786/1/strathprints002786.pdf

Médicins Sans Frontières. (2021, 30 December). *Responding to COVID-19 during political crisis in Myanmar*. Retrieved 12 July, 2023, from https://www.msf.org/responding-covid-19-myanmar-during-political-crisis

Middleton, C., Scott, A. & Lamb, V. (2019). Hydropower politics and conflict on the Salween River. in C. Middleton, & V. Lamb (Eds.), *Knowing the Salween River: The resource politics of a contested transboundary river*. (pp. 27-48). Open: Springer.

Migdal, J. (1974). *Peasants, politics, and revolution: Pressures toward political and social change in the Third World.* Princeton University Press.

Millar, G. (2016). Respecting complexity: Compound friction and unpredictability in peacebuilding. In A. Björkdahl, K. Höglund, G. Millar, J. van der Lijn, & W. Verkoren (Eds.), *Peacebuilding and friction: Global and local encounters in post conflict-societies.* (pp.32-47). Routledge.

Millar, G. (2020). Toward a trans-scalar peace system: Challenging complex global conflict systems. *Peacebuilding*, *8*(3), 261–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2019.1634866

Mitchell, T. (1990). Everyday metaphors of power. *Theory and Society*, *19*(5), 545–577. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00147026

Moe, L.W. (2013) Relationality and Pragmatism in Peacebuilding: Reflections on Somaliland. In W. Chadwick, T. Debiel, & F. Gadinger (Eds.), *Relational Sensibility and the 'Turn to the Local': Prospects for the Future of Peacebuilding* (Global Dialogues 2.) (pp. 44–53). Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research. http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:324372.

Moe, L. W. (2016). The strange wars of liberal peace: Hybridity, complexity and the governing rationalities of counterinsurgency in Somalia. *Peacebuilding*, *4*(1), 99–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2015.1094907

More Process Than Peace (2015, February 19). *The Economist.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.economist.com/asia/2015/02/19/more-process-than-peace

Moreda, T. (2015). Listening to their silence? The political reaction of affected communities to large-scale land acquisitions: insights from Ethiopia. *The Journal of Peasant Studies, 42*(3-4), 517-539. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.993621

Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum*, *30*(4), 337–350. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185(99)00025-1

Myanmar Civil Society Organisations. (2016, December 14). *Tanintharyi development projects must not proceed without transparency and accountability.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2016/12/14/tanintharyi-development-projects-must-not-proceed-without-transparency-and-accountability/

Myanmar funeral services overwhelmed as COVID toll mounts. (2021, July 15). *Reuters.* Retrieved 23 July, 2023, from https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-funeral-services-overwhelmed-covid-toll-mounts-2021-07-15/

Myanmar Peace Monitor. (n.d.) *KNU/KNLA PC (KPC).* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/1568/kpc/

Myanmar Peace Monitor. (2016). *Armed Ethnic Groups.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/1426/armed-ethnic-groups/

Myint, Shwe Yee Saw. (2013, March 23). Amendments to Unlawful Associations Act proposed. Retrieved September 13, 2023, from *The Myanmar Times* https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/5695-amendments-to-unlawful-associations-act-proposed.html

Naing Zaw, H. (2018, February 7). Farmers lose lengthy court battle against Thai, Govt mine. *The Irrawaddy.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/farmers-lose-lengthy-court-battle-thai-govt-mine.html#:~:text=NAYPYITAW%20%E2%80%94%20Nine%20farmers%20from%20Tenasserim,kyats%20(%24227%2C000)%20in%20damages

Namati. (n.d.) *Members.* Retrieved June 10, 2023, from https://www.namati.org/network/members

Nationwide Ceasefire Organization – Signatory, Ethnic Armed Organizations. (n.d.) *NCA-S EAO Signatories.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.ncaseao.org/nca_members?page=2

Nexon, D. H. (2010). Relationalism and new systems theory. In M. Albert, L.E. Cederman, & A. Wendt (Eds.), *New Systems Theories of World Politics* (pp. 99–126). Palgrave.

O'Brien, K. J. (1996). Rightful resistance. *World Politics*, *49*(1), 31–55. https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.1996.0022

O'Brien, K. J., & Li, L. (2006). *Rightful resistance in rural China*. Cambridge University Press.

Oh, S.A. (2013). *Competing forms of sovereignty in the Karen state of Myanmar.* (ISEAS Working Paper #1) Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Ortner, S. B. (1995). Resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *37*(1), 173–193. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500019587

Paige, J.M. (1975). *Agrarian revolution: Social movements and export agriculture in the underdeveloped world.* Free Press.

Park, C. M. Y. (2021). Gender and generation in rural politics in Myanmar: A missed space for (re)negotiation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *48*(3), 560–585. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1837778

Paung Sie Facility. (2018). *Unlocking civil society contributions to peace in Myanmar: Opportunities, obstacles, and undercurrents.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/unlocking-civil-society-and-peace-myanmar-opportunities-obstacles-and-undercurrents

Peluso, N.L., & Lund, C. (2011). New Frontiers of Land Control: Introduction. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *38*(4), 667-681. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2011.607692

Peluso, N. L., & Vandergeest, P. (2011). Political ecologies of war and forests: Counterinsurgencies and the making of national natures. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *101*(3), 587–608. https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2011.560064

Pierce, C., Hurtle, L., & Bainbridge, J. (2018). Gendered experiences of land confiscation in Myanmar. *Saferworld*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1175-gendered-experiences-of-land-confiscation-in-myanmar-insights-from-eastern-bago-region-and-kayin-state

Physicians for Human Rights. (2021, December 2021). *Violence against or obstruction of health care in Myanmar. February-November 2021*. Retrieved 12 July, 2023, from https://phr.org/our-work/resources/violence-against-health-care-in-myanmar/

Polanyi, K. (1957). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time.* Beacon Press.

Podder, S. (2022). *Peacebuilding legacy: Programming for change and young people's attitudes to peace*. Oxford University Press.

Podder, S. (2023). 'Land back to the people or not?': The variable pathways of civic mobilisation against land grabs in rural Sierra Leone. *The Journal of Modern African Studies. 61*(2), 281-301. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X22000489

President Obama 'optimistic' of political change in Myanmar. (2013, 13 November). *BBC.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-30046339

Progressive Voice. (2018). *Time to Hear Our Voices: Freedom of Assembly and the Youth Peace Movement in Myanmar.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/PV_Briefing_Final_Web.pdf

Ra, D., & Ju, K. K. (2021). 'Nothing about us, without us': Reflections on the challenges of building Land in Our Hands, a national land network in Myanmar/Burma. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *48*(3), 497–516. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1867847

Ra, D., Kham, S. S., Barbesgaard, M., Franco, J. C., & Vervest, P. (2021). The politics of Myanmar's agrarian transformation. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *48*(3), 463–475. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2021.1901689

Ramalingam, B. & Jones, H. et al., (2008). *Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts.* (Working Paper 285). Overseas Development Institute. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://gsdrc.org/document-library/exploring-the-science-of-complexity-ideas-and-implications-for-development-and-humanitarian-efforts/

Randazzo, E., & Torrent, I. (2021). Reframing agency in complexity-sensitive peacebuilding. *Security Dialogue*, *52*(1), 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010620904306

Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature & Tensasserim River and Indigenous People Network (2016). *We will manage our own natural resources*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/We_Will_Manage_Our_Own_Natural_Resources_-_English.pdf

Reforms Make Little Difference in Rural Burma, Says KHRG in Speech to UN Security Council. (2012, July 12). *Karen News.* Retrieved 12 July, 2023, from https://web.archive.org/web/20170510132137/http:/karennews.org/2012/07/reforms-make-little-difference-in-rural-burma-says-khrg-in-speech-to-un-security-council.html/

Rieffel, M. (2019). *Peace and War in Myanmar*. The Brookings Institute. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/12/06/peace-and-war-in-myanmar/

Right to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act. The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Law No. 15/2011. (2011). (Myanmar). Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://freeexpressionmyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Peaceful-Assembly-and-Peaceful-Procession-Law-EN.pdf

Rocheleau, D. E. (2015). Networked, rooted and territorial: Green grabbing and resistance in Chiapas. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *42*(3–4), 695–723. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.993622

Routley, L. & Wright, K.A.M. (2020). Being Indian Jones in IR: The Pressure to do 'Real' Fieldwork. In R. Mac Ginty, R. Brett, & B. Vogel (Eds.), *The companion to peace and conflict fieldwork*. (pp.85-100). Palgrave Macmillan imprint publ. by Springer Nature.

Rutten, R., Bakker, L., Alano, M.L., Salerno, T., Savitri, L.A., & Shohibuddin, M. (2017). Smallholder bargaining power in large-scale land deals: A relational perspective. *The Journal of Peasant Studies. 44*(4), 891-917. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1277991

Saferworld & Karen Peace Support Network. 2019. *Security, justice and governance in South East Myanmar*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1194-security-justice-and-governance-in-south-east-myanmar-a-knowledge-attitudes-and-practices-survey-in-karen-ceasefire-areas

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. (2nd ed). SAGE.

San Thein, Pyae Sone and Diepart, J.-C. (2017). *Transparency under scrutiny. Information disclosure by the Parliamentary Land Investigation Commission in Myanmar*. (MRLG Case Study Series #1). Mekong Region Land Governance. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.mrlg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Transparency-Under-Scrutiny-Information-Disclosure-by-the-Parliamentary-Land-Investigation-Commission-in-Myanmar.pdf

Sawyer, R. K. (2005). *Social emergence: Societies as complex systems* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Schoenberger, L. (2017). Struggling against excuses: Winning back land in Cambodia. *The Journal of Peasant Studies. 44*(4). https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1327850

Scott, J.C. (1985). *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press.

Scott, J. C. (1989). Everyday forms of resistance. *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, *4*, 33. https://doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v4i1.1765

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts.* Yale University Press.

Scott, J. C. (1995). State simplifications: Nature, space and people. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *3*(3), 191–233. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.1995.tb00035.x

Scott, J. C. (2009). *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia.* Yale University Press.

Sekine, Y. (2021). Emerging 'agrarian climate justice' struggles in Myanmar. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *48*(3), 517–540. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1839054

Shukla N., Wilson., E, & Boddy, J. (2014). *Combining thematic and narrative analysis of qualitative interviews to understand children's spatialities in Andhra Pradesh, India.* (Working Paper). National Center for Research Methods. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/49124/.

Sivaramakrishnan, K. (2005). Some intellectual genealogies for the concept of everyday resistance. *American Anthropologist*, *107*(3), 346–355. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2005.107.3.346

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books ; University of Otago Press.

Smith, M. (1999). *Burma: Insurgency and the politics of ethnicity* (2. (updated) ed). Univ. Press [u.a.].

Söderström, J., Åkebo, M., & Jarstad, A. K. (2021). Friends, fellows, and foes: A new framework for studying relational peace. *International Studies Review*, *23*(3), 484–508. https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaa033

South, A. (2014, October 21). Norwegian support for hydropower: Peacebuilding through best practice. *Democratic Voice of Burma.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/Ashley%20South%20DVB%2021-10-14.pdf

Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (2022). *Effective Control in Myanmar*. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/SAC-M-Briefing-Paper-Effective-Control-in-Myanmar-ENGLISH-1.pdf

Stauffer, M. (2018). *An Introduction to Complexity Science for the Social Sciences*. Effective Altruism Geneva. Retrieved July 13, 2023, from https://eageneva.org/blog/2018/10/18/an-introduction-to-complexity-science-for-social-sciences

Stokke, K., Moo Kham, K. K., Nge, N. K. L., & Kvanvik, S. H. (2022). Illiberal peacebuilding in a hybrid regime. Authoritarian strategies for conflict containment in Myanmar. *Political Geography*, *93*, 102551. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102551

Tafon, R., & Saunders, F. (2019). The politics of land grabbing: State and corporate power and the (Trans)nationalization of resistance in Cameroon. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, *19*(1), 41–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12264

Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (n.d.). *Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award.* Retrieved 12 July, 2023, from https://www.tfd.org.tw/en/flagship/adhra

Talbott, K., Akimoto, Y. & Cuskelly, K. (2016). Myanmar's ceasefire regime: Two decades of unaccountable natural resource exploitation. In C. Bruch, C. Muffett, & S. S. Nichols (Eds.), *Governance, Natural Resources, and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding.* (pp.327-361). Earthscan.

Tarakapaw, Tenasserim River and Indigenous People Networks, Southern Youth, Candle Light, Khang Myae Thitsar, Myeik Lawyer Network, and Dawei Development Association. (2016). *Green Desert: Communities in Tanintharyi renounce the MSPP oil palm concession.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Green-Book-English-Final-10-1-2017.pdf

The Border Consortium. (2002). *Internally displaced people and relocation sites in Eastern Burma.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c723ed62.html

The Border Consortium (2014). *Protection and security concerns in Southeast Burma/Myanmar.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/protection-and-security-concerns-south-east-burma-myanmar-2014-enmy

The Border Consortium, (2018). Retrieved October 26, 2023, from *Human security in South Eastern Myanmar.* https://www.theborderconsortium.org/media/TBC-Human-Security-in-South-Eastern-Myanmar-2018.pdf

The Global Justice Center. (2017). Vulnerable land, vulnerable women: Gender dimensions of land grabbing in Myanmar. *Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Vulnerable-Land-Vulnerable-Women_FordPattnaikBarron_2.pdf

The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Ethnic Armed Organizations, October 15th, 2015. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/MM_151510_NCAAgreement.pdf

Theodossopoulos, D. (2014). On de-pathologizing resistance. *History and Anthropology*, *25*(4), 415–430. https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2014.933101

Tilly, C. (1986). *The Contentious French*. Harvard University Press.

Touch, S. & Neef, A. (2015, June 5-6). *Resistance to Land Grabbing and Displacement in Rural Cambodia* [conference paper]. Land grabbing, conflict and agrarian-environmental transformations: perspectives from East and Southeast Asia. Chiang

Mai University, Thailand. Retrieved September 13, 2023, from http://mekonglandforum.org/node/2260

Transnational Institute. (2013). *Access denied: land rights and ethnic conflict in Burma.* (Burma Policy Briefing Nr 11). Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.tni.org/files/download/accesdenied-briefing11.pdf

Transnational Institute (2019). *"Not about us without us": Legitimate national land law making by design.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.tni.org/en/article/not-about-us-without-us-legitimate-national-land-law-making-by-design

Urry, J. (2005). The complexity turn. *Theory, Culture & Society, 22*(5), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276405057188

Vinthagen S. & Johansson, A. (2013). 'Everyday resistance': Exploration of a concept & its theories." *Resistance Studies Magazine,* Issue 1: pp.1-46.

Walton, M. J. (2015). Monks in politics, monks in the world: Buddhist activism in contemporary Myanmar. *Social Research, 82*(2), 507–530. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44282114

Wilcock, C.A. (2021). From hybridity to networked relationality: Actors, ideologies and the legacies of Sudan's comprehensive peace agreement. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, *15*(2), 221–243. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2020.1822619

Williams, A. (2020) *Political hegemony and social complexity: Mechanisms of power after Gramsci.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Wolf, E. R. (1969). *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century.* Harper and Row.

Woods, K. (2011). Ceasefire capitalism: Military–private partnerships, resource concessions and military–state building in the Burma–China borderlands. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *38*(4), 747–770. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2011.607699

Woods, K. M., & Naimark, J. (2020). Conservation as counterinsurgency: A case of ceasefire in a rebel forest in southeast Myanmar. *Political Geography*, *83*, 102251. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102251

World Bank. (2019). *Myanmar – Peaceful and Prosperous Communities Project: Social Assessment.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/588511569836274915/myanmar-peaceful-and-prosperous-communities-project-social-assessment

Yan Naing, S. (2016, February 23). KNU criticized after signing MoU on hydropower dam. *The Irrawaddy.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/knu-criticized-after-signing-mou-on-hydropower-dam.html

Ye Myo Hein. (2022). One year on: The momentum of Myanmar's armed rebellion. *The Tagaung Institute* & *the Wilson Center.* Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/ASIA_220519_1YearOn-BRIEF_V1r2.pdf

Zimmerman B., Lindberg, C., & Plsek, P. (2009). *A complexity science primer: What is complexity science and why should I learn about it?* NAPCGR Resources. 1-44. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.napcrg.org/media/1278/beginner-complexity-science-module.pdf