Regressive Democracy

Explaining distributive politics in Myanmar's political transition

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Abstract

Classic theories of distributive politics contend that democracy encourages politicians to improve the economic standing of the 'median voter' through state-led redistribution. This dissertation explains how regressive distribution endures a transition from authoritarian to partial democratic rule. Existing research on regressive democracy largely focuses on formal constitutions and laws passed during earlier regimes which privilege the interests of economic elites and constrain state-led redistribution. Drawing from literature on the path dependency of private social welfare provision this mixed-methods interpretive study shows that informal institutions can pose separate but equally pernicious impediments to the redistributive possibilities of democracy. Using the case of Myanmar, the dissertation traces ideals and practices of private, non-state welfare and redistribution—informal institutions—from their origins in the post-socialist period to their entrenchment as democratic amid political transition.

The thesis charts how an elite consensus in favour of a low-taxing yet redistributive state generated during colonial rule has shaped Myanmar's post-independence political trajectory. Informed by oral histories and archival work, it uncovers how junta officials in government-controlled areas outsourced state redistributive functions to commercial and community actors during the post-socialist period, often in exchange for business licences and tax remissions. This system, which I term 'authoritarian welfare capitalism', entrenched precarity and delivered the worst social outcomes in the region. Yet the ideals and practices of private redistribution generated during this period have been reinforced by political and economic elites amid the transition to partial civilian rule since 2011. Drawing on in-depth fieldwork in provincial Myanmar, it demonstrates that informal redistributive practices have practical and normative appeal to contemporary democratic elites. Social and political activists echo official National League for Democracy (NLD) rhetoric in describing private redistribution as an efficient and morally admirable means of achieving social outcomes. The ideal of charitable donations (*dana*) and 'work for others' (*parahita*) achieving social equity is then enlisted by government officials to justify withholding state aid from communities said to lack commitment to the 'democratic' virtue of 'self-reliance'. 'Rights' become contingent upon competition for worthiness with other poor communities, creating a zero-sum game that

exacerbates inequality and encourages the exclusion of minorities. Meanwhile, powerful tycoons are able to legitimise their past and ongoing expropriation of land and other assets and evade proper taxation by engaging in philanthropy, especially of public goods. The endurance of informal redistributive institutions generated in the post-socialist period thus entrenches the insecurity of ordinary people while depriving the state of the taxation revenue necessary to deliver more equitable welfare outcomes. Separate to the formal constraints of constitutions and laws, the endurance of informal redistributive institutions generated during earlier regimes can impose limits on the reforms imagined and desired by democratic-era elites, entrenching economic and social inequity at the heart of democratic practice.

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Dedication and Acknowledgments

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PART ONE: LOCATING THE STUDY

Chapter One: Informal Institutions and Regressive Distribution

In the early hours of 13 February 2014 a devastating fire broke out inside the downtown market of Taungoo, Bago Region in central Myanmar. One of the primary trading hubs for the surrounding region, the market housed more than one thousand shops and informal sellers. The under-resourced local fire-brigade were unable to contain the blaze and, by dawn, the entire market had been reduced to ashes. All that remained was a pile of rubble the size of a football field, surrounded by scorched brick walls; a visual and economic wound in the heart of the town.

The destruction of the market loomed large throughout my fieldwork in 2015 and 2016. Some of my interlocutors ran shops in or near the market. Others worked for the municipal government on whose land the market had stood. Several were closely linked to companies seeking permission to rebuild the essential trading hub, and served as representatives on committees set up by various interests to plan the replacement complex. The shop-keepers, wealthy investors and municipal government could not reach consensus about the market's reconstruction and the impasse had already endured for a year when I arrived. Many shop-keepers supported the reconstruction of the original single-story structure, including large open-air areas for sale of fresh food and produce. They hoped it would be completed within six months of commencement. Others, especially those affiliated in various ways to locally and nationally-prominent businessmen seeking to invest in the market, advocated for a multi-story shopping mall, cinema and condominium complex which could take years to build. These contending visions for the future of the market and of the town more broadly were not easy to reconcile for the municipal government. In discussions throughout my research many people expressed hope that the victory of the NLD at the November 2015 election would see the government resolve the conflict and deliver a trading-space which satisfied the needs of shop-keepers and the town as a whole.

In early 2016, soon after the NLD took charge of the national and regional government, the newly appointed Chief Minister of Bago Region, U Win Thein, made his move. Alongside

local legislators, in May 2016 he called a town-hall meeting in Taungoo to try and reach a consensus on a plan for the reconstruction of the market. The gathering provided a vivid insight into the centrality of private, non-state welfare provision to the ideal and practice of capitalist democracy in contemporary Myanmar.

Hundreds of shop-keepers, along with dozens of businesspeople and representatives of various local welfare groups, were packed into the municipal hall overlooking Taungoo's historical moat.[1] The Chief Minister opened the event by urging 'unity' in order for the reconstruction to be successful. He then introduced Dr. Kyaw Tu*,[2] a protégé of a nationally-prominent tycoon and one of Taungoo's most prominent businessmen and hoteliers. Though he did not previously own a shop in the market he had become deeply involved in the tangled negotiations about what to do with the site.

Dr. Kyaw Tu stepped to the microphone, his hands shaking nervously. Unveiling a large vinyl poster, he began to explain in pain-staking detail the specifications for an eight story shopping centre, cinema and condominium complex he hoped to build on the government land where the market once stood. He described the 'visionary' committee he had formed to plan the project and emphasised how 10 percent of the members were 'representatives from welfare groups': "We are the image of the town because we include all people like engineers, social workers, shopkeepers and citizens", he claimed. He also promised to provide 'free' shops for all former shop-keepers on the ground floor, adding that as a supporter of the NLD he was committed to making sacrifices to proceed with the project:

> I don't care what the cost to me is, or the accusations and attacks. If our people can get benefits, I am ready to serve for them. The [NLD] government says it is time for change, so if they approve the new market I will build it!

He then made a veiled threat that "if the shop keepers continue to fight each other… 'crony companies' will come and take advantage of the people."

[1] The section that follows draws from author fieldnotes, 20 May 2016.
[2] Throughout the thesis, the use of * after a name indicates a pseudonym used to protect the identity of interlocutors or organisations.

The speech fell flat with the group of shop-keepers assembled on the opposite side of the hall. Immediately after Dr Kyaw Tu sat down, one of the market traders stepped up to the microphone and denounced what he called the "ridiculous vision" of a modern, multi-level shopping complex. He claimed it would delay reconstruction, and that all the town needed was a simple, single-story market. Upset at how long discussions like these had delayed the rebuilding of the market, he described the impacts on people's livelihoods of the market's destruction and temporary relocation to a field outside the core of the city. Another shop-keeper, the chair of a shop-keeper committee, interjected from the floor to challenge the legitimacy of the committee formed by the businessman:

> Even though the government is different now [after the November 2015 election], that market committee includes the same men from the old regime. They are all the big bosses and elites. If Myanmar is democratic we need a more representative committee!

Attendees traded similar accusations for the next ninety minutes as they debated the proposed shopping centre, the appropriate use of public land and their anger at receiving no compensation from a defunct government-run insurance scheme to which they felt they should be entitled.

Once the debate had begun to peter out, the Chief Minister returned to the microphone. He blamed all parties for the discord and urged everyone to "stop fighting and start coordinating". "We should think not just of the shopkeepers but also the customers. We need to view this from both sides", he urged. He then made his own view clear, speaking fondly of seeing shopping centres in Bangkok in his international travels and his aspiration for the region's development. "I want Taungoo to have a big shopping centre like Junction Centre and City Mart in Yangon… There should be parking for motorbikes *and* cars!" he declared enthusiastically. If the shopkeepers and businessmen could not come to an agreement, however, he would make what he called "difficult choices":

> In Buddhism the government has always been one of the five enemies of the people. We are trying not to be [the enemy], but if you continue to fight I will invite a Japanese company to come and build the market, and you will not afford to have shops here at all!

The debates that night about the market, the promise of wealthy businesspeople acting in the interests of 'the people' as well as the looming threat of exploitation by 'cronies' and foreign businesspeople exposed a particular configuration of market logics and public goods that has found its way into the heart of Myanmar's contemporary democratic practice. The notion of 'democracy' evoked by the Chief Minister did not envision the state as chiefly responsible for rendering aid to the misfortunate and destitute, from market fires or otherwise. Rather, the democratic ideal exposed at the town-hall meeting, and enacted on a daily basis by many of the welfare and political activists assembled that night, envisaged private, non-state providers as shouldering the bulk of responsibility for delivering social welfare and essential public goods.

Beyond the provincial context of central-east Myanmar, the tensions exposed in the town-hall meeting that night shed light on a key puzzle in comparative studies of democracy and inequality. Key theories of political transition and redistribution assume that critical junctures which produce more democratic and representative forms of government drive social policy towards the preferences of the 'median voter' and thus result in increased use of the power of the state to achieve redistributive outcomes (Meltzer and Richard 1981, Boix 2003, Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). As will be shown, this redistributive model of democracy has come under increasing empirical and theoretical critique in recent years, especially given the endurance of extreme inequality in democracies across the globe. However, key questions still remain with regard to how ideals and practices of private, non-state distribution which tend to benefit the rich far more than the poor endure and are entrenched during political transition.

The way these dynamics have unfolded in Myanmar offer a useful prism into theoretical debates about distributive politics and political transition. Despite social, economic and political reforms since 2011 that culminated in the transfer of power in March 2016 to a government led by democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, substantive elite or popular demands for state-led economic redistribution or expansion of state-mediated social assistance have been rare during Myanmar's transition from military rule. Indeed, since taking control of civilian administration Suu Kyi and her government have espoused what political scientist Mary Callahan (2017: 1) terms a "socially conservative ideology of radical self-sufficiency and laissez-faire relations between the state and society". Following the November 2015 election, in which the NLD secured a land-slide victory, Suu Kyi has repeatedly emphasised the importance of personal 'courage' and 'responsibility' to democracy, for example telling

crowds gathered at multiple public events: "Think of what you can contribute for the development of your country, not what benefits you can have from your country… Only demanding rights without assuming responsibility and accountability, which are wholly left to the government, does not comply with democratic standards" (Suu Kyi in Callahan 2017: 2). This discourse of 'responsibility' (B: *tawun*) is coupled with an implicit acceptance that the assets and wealth of Myanmar's military-linked business class will not be seized or redistributed by the democratically-elected state. Indeed, soon after taking office Suu Kyi advocated successfully for the lifting of remaining US economic sanctions, encouraging foreign investment while urging Myanmar's military-linked 'cronies' to engage in philanthropy as a path to reputational salvation.[3]

Suu Kyi's 'puritanical' political ideology is puzzling given she spent much of the 1990s and 2000s criticising Myanmar's military regime for what she and democracy activists framed as a self-serving and immoral mode of rule that instilled fear and failed to protect 'the people' (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991). During the 2015 election campaign, for instance, Suu Kyi promised that an NLD government "shall exist for the citizens", committed to ensuring that "the people won't suffer" and that she would negotiate the exit of the military from civilian politics (Suu Kyi in Callahan 2017: 1). In November 2015 the NLD was elected to take almost 80 percent of the elected seats in the national legislature (see Thawnghmung 2016). Since March 2016, when the NLD took control of civilian governance across the country, the executive and lawmakers have scaled-back expectations – domestic and international – that citizens should look to the state for social assistance or redistribution. Instead, voices demanding greater state role in social expenditure and redistribution in recent years have emanated almost exclusively from ethnic armed groups and ethnic minority civil society as part of long-running peace negotiations about the terms of a 'federal' Union.[4]

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[3] See Nyein Nyein. 2017. 'Burmese Tycoons Contribute $8 million to Govt Peace Fund'. The Irrawaddy. 24 January.

[4] As of mid-2018 negotiations about the terms of a federal Union of Myanmar had not moved beyond an abstract commitment to the principle of 'federalism'. Myanmar's peace process was designed by the military (Tatmadaw) and Thein Sein government to require all armed groups to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) before any substantive negotiations about political transformation and constitutional reform can commence. The same peace process structure has been maintained by the NLD government since taking control of civilian governance in early 2016 (see Maung Aung Myoe 2018). As a number of major armed groups refuse to sign the NCA until the Tatmadaw permits smaller armed groups to join negotiations, Myanmar's peace process is thus 'stalled' as of mid-2018 (see Lwin Cho Latt, Hillman et al. 2018). For insight on the alternative visions of the state proposed by ethnic armed groups during initial ceasefire and peace negotiations see Kyaw Myo Min et al. 2017. 'No Resettlement of IDPs Without Ethnic Peace in Myanmar's Kachin State: Aung San Suu Kyi'. Radio Free Asia. 28 March http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/idps-03282017173403.html [accessed 8 May 2017]; Gleeson, S. 2017. 'KNU return to conflict 'inevitable' without political dialogue'. 3 April

This dissertation argues that systems of private, non-state redistribution which benefit the affluent and entrench insecurity for the poor have been institutionalised during Myanmar's transition to partial civilian rule.[5] Existing literature shows how authoritarian-era institutions often shape the trajectory of democratic distributive politics in ways that serve the interests of economic elites. This dissertation provides a unique contribution to the literature, arguing that informal redistributive institutions generated during authoritarian rule can shape the trajectory of social policy during political transition independently of formal political institutions. Through the Myanmar case, it is shown that informal redistributive institutions thus present a separate, less overt, and arguably more pernicious, constraint on democratic redistribution than elite economic interests embedded in formal political institutions.

This chapter frames the study and proceeds in three sections. Section One surveys existing literature on democratisation and redistribution, highlighting how authoritarian-era logics and models often endure political transition in ways which shape the development of welfare regimes. Section Two asks why the state would assume little direct role in redistribution despite democratic electoral incentives. In order to address this question, the chapter turns to literature on the endurance of regressive distribution in both developed and developing contexts, focusing on state social policies, political party welfare provision and on the role of brokers in mediating access to state social assistance. It then highlights the limits of existing research on the origins of informal redistributive institutions and their endurance during political transition. Section Three provides an introduction to the context and methods enlisted to study informal institutions in the context of Myanmar's transition from direct military rule. It explains Myanmar as a relevant case study, and outlines the utility of complementing historical

http://frontiermyanmar.net/en/knu-return-to-conflict-inevitable-without-political-dialogue-report [accessed 8 May 2017].

[5] Throughout the dissertation I refer to Myanmar's regime type since early 2011 as 'partial civilian rule'. I use this term to signal the more representative form of governance which has existed since the military junta held the November 2010 election. Though not openly contested or considered free and fair, that election resulted in the formation of a reformist government largely led by civilianised former military officers who then held a more openly contested election in November 2015. In March 2016 power over civilian administration was then formally transferred to an elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi. However, as Myanmar's military retains 25 percent of seats in the legislature, formal control over the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs and Border Affairs and a veto on constitutional reform by virtue of the 2008 Constitution, I continue to refer to governance after the November 2015 election as 'partial civilian rule', albeit a more democratic form of it. The 'political transition' I refer to throughout this dissertation denotes the broader categorical shift from direct military rule to partial civilian governance since 2011 as well as the more specific transition from an unfairly elected government comprised largely of civilianised military officers (2011-2015) to a democratically-elected civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi (since March 2016).

institutionalism with a mixed-methods interpretive approach to researching the evolution and entrenchment of private redistributive ideals and practices during political transition.

Section One: Democracy and redistribution

Democratisation and welfare states

How do democratic institutions shape the politics of redistribution? Theories of democracy and inequality have long assumed that representative forms of governance lead to greater state-led redistribution. In one of the clearest and earliest expressions of this theory Aristotle argued that the incentive to appeal to the masses through redistribution may result in the downfall of democracy as elites would seek to protect their wealth by eroding representative institutions. He thus advocated that "the rich should be spared" from redistributive demands made by democratic publics and politicians (in Slater, Smith et al. 2014: 355). The Meltzer-Richard model (1981) systemized these redistributive expectations of democracy into a 'median voter' model, which argued that democratic elections incentivised politicians to advocate policies that redistribute wealth from the rich to the far poorer 'median' voter. More recent formal models by political scientists Carles Boix (2003), and Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2006), built on the Meltzer-Richard hypothesis by emphasising the intervening variable of inequality in underpinning negotiations over democracy and redistribution. In Acemoglu and Robinson's (2006: 37-38) model the degree of incongruence between median and mean income within a polity increases the likelihood of mass mobilisation in support of redistributive policies and democratic reform. Elites then calculate the costs of repressing inequality-driven uprisings relative to making redistributive or institutional concessions. Following this logic democratic transitions and redistributive policies are seen to be less likely in regimes with high inequality as elites with more to lose have greater incentive to brutally suppress mass democratic mobilisations. The same logic is seen to endure once democratic reform has occurred, as electoral incentives to redistribute to the 'median voter' is assumed to lead economic elites to usurp democratic institutions through coups that create new regimes that protect their interests (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 222).[6]

In recent years, however, scholars have increasingly challenged the 'median voter hypothesis' on which redistributive models of democracy and regime change have been based.[7] Political

[6] See Slater, Smith and Nair (2014) for a useful critique of the theory and empirics upon which these economic explanations for democratic breakdown largely rest.

[7] See Perotti (1996), Ross (2006) and Scheve & Stasavage (2012) for critical empirical assessments of

scientists Ben Ansell and David Samuels (2010, 2014) argue that the Meltzer-Richard model has little relevance to political transitions, arguing that the degree to which the interests of non-incumbent elites – especially the middle class – are embedded in political institutions determines whether and how regime change impacts inequality. They develop and test a contractarian model in which varying patterns of income and land inequality during authoritarian rule shape the demands different class interests seek from democratic reform. The degree of income *inequality* produced by industrialisation and degree of *equality* in land ownership, they argue, determines the extent to which economic interest groups perceive democracy as a means to secure income redistribution and protect land assets from autocratic expropriation (Ansell and Samuels 2010: 1551). In contrast with the Meltzer-Richard model, they conclude that democratisation is driven more by redistributive demands and fears of competing economic interests than by tensions between economic elites and the abstract 'median voter' (Ansell and Samuels 2010: 1577). A similar critique derives from political scientists Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman. Based on analysis of within-case political transitions between 1980 and 2005 they argue that more than 40 percent of transitions to democracy during this period did not conform "even very loosely - to the causal mechanisms specified in the distributive conflict models" enlisted by dominant theories of redistribution and democracy (Haggard and Kaufman 2012: 495).

Moving away from the logic of 'median voter' models, literature focused on welfare state formation in industrialised democracies explains the determinative role of coalition politics upon state social policies. The conceptual and methodological approach of Gosta Esping-Andersen's 'Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism' (1990) continues to shape contemporary social policy and welfare state research. Enlisting comparative historical analysis and focusing on 18 developed countries within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD), Esping-Andersen (1990: 37) traced the extent and mechanisms through which "individuals, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation". The study yielded a typology of three 'welfare state regimes' which varied in relation to: i) the extent of protection provided by states, markets and households from the vagaries of market forces; and ii) the basis upon which people or families were considered entitled to receive assistance from the state. The three types of welfare state were:

redistribution under democratic rule.

1) Liberal welfare states, where notions of *need* animate state assistance, an approach seen as typical of Anglophone OECD countries;
2) Conservative/corporatist welfare states, common in much of continental Europe and Japan, where *individual contribution* is the basis of entitlement to assistance;
3) Social democratic welfare state, typical of Scandinavian countries, in which *citizenship* is the primary basis of entitlement.

The responsibility born by the state, market and household varied considerably between these different types of welfare capitalism. Building on earlier work on the determinant impacts of labour unions and left-wing parties upon welfare state development (see Stephens 1979, Korpi 1983), Esping Andersen argued that these differences derived from the varying strength of labour-based political parties, employers and the state during key moments of institutional negotiation. These confrontations generated a degree of popular and elite consensus regarding the means and extent to which labour should be de-commodified, prompting the passage of policies and establishment of schemes which have since evolved and expanded over time.

Studies of post-authoritarian social policy similarly highlight the role of interest-group politics rather than the abstract 'median voter' in shaping the democratic welfare mix. As political scientists Isabel Mares and Matthew Carnes (2009) highlight, autocratic leaders often use state-mediated or mandated redistribution to ensure the economic viability and political stability of their non-democratic regimes. The logics and systems of redistribution institutionalised during autocratic rule often endure democratisation. Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman (2008), for instance, explore how the conditions of earlier authoritarian regimes shaped the trajectory of social policy in more democratic contexts. Focusing on the development of welfare regimes in East Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, they describe how the 'welfare mix' which emerged after transitions to democracy was shaped by the *political coalitions* formed between elites, labour and peasant organisations as well as mass political parties; and the *industrialisation strategy* of earlier regimes (import substitution industrialisation, export-led industrialisation or socialist industrialisation).

In East Asia, authoritarian regimes tended to ally themselves with industrial capitalists in order to distribute the rents associated with export-led industrialisation. As labour and popular movements were largely suppressed there was little incentive for political elites to expand

systems of state-led social welfare and redistribution. The coalition between state and capital meant that social policy in these regimes thus tended to serve the interests of industrialists. What political scientist Ian Holliday (2000) termed 'productivist welfare capitalism' subsequently became the dominant approach to social policy in East and South East Asia between the 1970s and 1990s. Though the specific approach adopted varied in each country, these states largely focused state expenditure on improving human resources and education in order to boost the productivity of workers. Given the skew towards encouraging labour-force participation, the schemes of social insurance required co-contribution by employees and employers and were thus confined to workers in the formal sector (Cook and Pincus 2014: 8). More 'protective' areas of social policy such as aged care, pensions, health insurance and social assistance, in contrast, largely remained the domain of private, household and charitable providers.

Democratisation in these contexts certainly introduced incentives for politicians to expand the government's direct role in social welfare in order to win the support of new electoral coalitions. Indeed, the state's role in the 'welfare mix' was reconfigured across the region as democratic governments sought electoral support through state-led programmes that assumed roles in welfare provision previously left to the family and the market (see Wong 2006, Nam 2014). However, the trajectory of democratic social policy was mediated by the legacies of earlier authoritarian welfare schemes. As trade unions were largely suppressed during authoritarian periods throughout much of industrialising Asia, for instance, leftist groups were able to garner little popular political support. Consequentially democratically-elected conservative governments predominantly took the lead in expanding state-mediated schemes of welfare and redistribution. The evolving welfare mix in these contexts thus disproportionately benefitted the middle-class over working-class and informal sector workers. As Haggard and Kaufman (2008: 259) note:

> In Korea and Taiwan, for example, politicians were attracted first and foremost to broad middle-class entitlements – pensions and particularly healthcare – and in Thailand a number of initiatives were less redistributive in design than they might have been. When government either initiated unemployment insurance or expanded it... they did so in conjunction with initiatives designed to increase labor-market flexibility.

Elite influence on formal institutional design can 'feed back', shaping the nature and potential for state-led distribution in a democratic context. Political scientists Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo (2013) theorise these dynamics, arguing that the strength of economic elites in a prior authoritarian regime shapes the redistributive potential of subsequent democratic governance. Informed by a cross-national dataset on government social expenditures and taxation over time, they argue that elites can 'game' democracy by "complicat[ing] the ability of democratic politicians to orient public spending priorities toward the poor majority" (Albertus and Menaldo 2013: 576-577). Drawing on case-studies from Latin America in particular, they highlight cases where elite dominance prior to transition produces legal constitutions which formally entrench elite economic interests including through military veto power over policy and via elite dominance in local politics. Based on regional and cross-national analysis, Albertus and Menaldo conclude that democratic regimes formed through revolution or uprising engage in far more redistribution than those who inherit formal constitutions crafted by authoritarian-era political and economic elites. Elite influence on formal political institutions thus have the potential to shape the redistributive potential of subsequent democratic regimes. Research on social policy expansion in Latin America, for instance, emphasises how electoral incentives to expand benefits are shaped by the strength of labour and social movement coalitions relative to elite interests and the extent to which politicians seek votes from populations excluded from formal social protection (Segura-Ubiergo 2007). Political scientist Candelaria Garay (2017) attributes varying patterns of expansion of state income support, health care and pension schemes across Latin America to whether politicians compete for the votes of unentitled 'outsiders' and the extent of societal mobilisation in support of broader coverage. In contexts where earlier restrictive state policies to labour organisations eroded the ability of social movement coalitions to mobilise, such as in Mexico and Chile, governments tended to negotiate social policy reforms with conservative legislators. The social schemes that resulted in these contexts thus tended to be restrictive in their coverage and benefits, and their fiscal sustainability was often eroded by tax concessions linked to their passage which imposed tight fiscal constraints on state revenue (see Fairfield and Garay 2017). The logics underpinning formal political institutions and policies of earlier authoritarian regimes can thus 'feed back' in ways which shape the redistributive possibilities of future democratic governance. The notion of 'policy feedback' from formal state policies recurs in literature on the distributive politics of industrialised welfare states.

Policy feedback can create informal institutions

The concept of 'path dependency' derived from historical institutionalism posits that institutions, once established, tend to stabilize and reproduce themselves over time (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003, Capoccia and Keleme 2007). Political scientist Kathleen Thelen argues that institutions endure, or eventually collapse, as a consequence of the way they empower some groups and restrict the political influence of others:

> The distributional biases in particular institutions or policies 'feed back' so that over time, some avenues of policy become increasingly blocked, if not entirely cut off as decisions at one point in time can restrict future possibilities by sending policy off onto particular tracks (Thelen 1999: 394).

Policy feedback can make substantial reform or evolution of political structures difficult or unlikely. One way that state welfare policies 'feed back', especially in democratic contexts, is that they generate popular expectations of the state's role in providing welfare and social aid. As political scientist Lauren MacLean notes from mixed-methods research in developing countries, expectations of the state's role in social welfare and redistribution is stronger in sectors where the state has previously been a significant provider of support than in areas where private and localised providers have been the dominant source of assistance (MacLean 2011b). Studies of Latin American welfare states have similarly found that expectations of state involvement generated by earlier welfare policies complicated later attempts at retrenchment of state social expenditures (Segura-Ubiergo 2007). State-policies may thus cultivate not just functional but also *normative* support for the ideals embedded within them, as they fill – directly or indirectly – a need at the community or individual level which then comes to be perceived as a social right to which citizens are entitled. While individuals may initially engage in rational calculations of the costs and benefits of compliance versus resistance to state policies, even grudging compliance with state measures often precedes an internalization of the norms embedded within state policy.

Examples of path-dependence in popular expectations of political institutions abound in studies of democratic welfare politics. Esping-Andersen (1990) notes the normative dimension of path dependency in his study of industrialised welfare state regimes. Lower ratios of female labour market participation in Germany, he argued, derived from the fact that the assumption of single

breadwinner families in the conservative-corporatist model offered little incentive for women to enter the labour market. Skocpol (1992) similarly notes the power of path dependency in her study of America's welfare state development. Adopting an historical institutional approach, she argued that the patronage nature of America's party system and the competing interests of jurisdictions across ties of the federation, "actively mediated against the development of a unified working class that could then spearhead the movement for comprehensive social policies in the United States" (Thelen 1999: 394). As a result, following the US Civil War veterans and war widows were the only groups able to form viable social movements across jurisdictions to successfully advocate for state-mediated social welfare provision, marginalising other potential interest groups such as single mothers or African Americans.

Policy feedback loops have also been noted in socialist and post-socialist contexts. Research by political scientist Yusuke Kawamura (2016), for instance, focused on constraints to reform of the Egyptian welfare regime during the rule of Hosni Mubarak. Kawamura argues that state subsidies for food stuffs and energy during the earlier governments of Nasser and Anwar Sadat 'fed back' later as they created popular expectations of state-mediated social welfare and redistribution and limited the reform options of Mubarak. The path dependency of formal institutions as well as norms of redistributive justice entrenched during earlier regimes can have important implications for distributive policies in later governments, authoritarian and democratic alike.

Comparative literature on welfare states thus highlights how state policies can either entrench equilibriums or lay the ground for shifting policy coalitions over time, depending on the logics and norms embedded within them. As a result, norms or distributive ideals which underpin social policies can usefully be conceived as *informal* institutions. Informal institutions are generally defined as the "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 727). As Ronald Jepperson (1991: 145) writes, informal institutions comprise the "social patterns that, when chronically reproduced, owe their survival to relatively self-activating social processes". Despite often not being enshrined in law or official policy, norms embedded within social policy set the 'rules' of the distributive game and can thus markedly shape what role the state assumes in social redistribution and who is entitled to receive that aid over time (see Béland 2005).

Existing scholarship on social policy feedback, however, tends to focus on *formal* state policies such as subsidies for consumer goods or government transfers to specific beneficiaries (see Béland 2010). Meanwhile, analysis of how democratisation impacts redistribution has largely focused on the magnitude of direct state social expenditure. As the growing literature on inequality in industrialised welfare states highlights, however, a full picture of redistributive social expenditure requires direct state outlays to be combined with the fiscal outlay and role played by private and charitable providers. These contributions often comprise significant proportions of overall social expenditures, are often mandated by legal and regulatory frameworks imposed by formal state institutions and, importantly, tend to have distributive outcomes that benefit the affluent far more than the poor (see Adema 1999, Martin and Prasad 2014, Hacker 2016a). A number of key questions central to explaining the trajectory of distributive politics in democratic regimes thus remain. How do welfare mixes which entrench the role of market, family and other social institutions in redistribution and social protection 'feed back' over time? In what ways do ideals and practices of private social expenditure and redistribution endure and embed themselves during political transition? The following section surveys existing literature on informal institutions and the phenomena of regressive democracy, before Section Three introduces the context of Myanmar.

Section Two: Explaining regressive distribution in democratic regimes

In both developing and developed democracies for-profit providers of welfare along with families and non-governmental institutions play resilient and significant social protection and redistributive functions. Studies of welfare in late developing countries, for instance, have argued that "meaningful rights and correlative duties" are frequently found "through *informal* community arrangements" rather than the state (Wood and Gough 2006: 1700, 1702, emphasis in original). While some of these non-state mechanisms of social support, such as non-government organisations (NGOs), are formalised others are based on personalistic, clientelistic and reciprocal relations among people in often unequal social and economic positions of power. In addition to providing a source of social protection these relations can reinforce 'adverse incorporation' defined by contingent or 'problematic inclusion' rather than absolute 'social exclusion' (see Wood 2003). In other words, welfare regimes that entrench the role of private and non-state providers or intermediaries often deliver a degree of social protection to the poor while simultaneously benefitting more affluent people, thereby delivering redistributive yet regressive outcomes.

On the basis of these empirical realities, sociologists Geof Wood & Ian Gough conceive of a broader category of 'welfare regimes' which vary both on the degree of commodification of labour and the extent to which brokerage and clientelism are essential features of social protection. Informed by their framework, and following Douglass North (1990: 200-202), 'regime' throughout this dissertation is defined as "a set of rules, institutions and structured interests that constrain individuals through compliance procedures". Throughout this dissertation I enlist this understanding of 'welfare regime' to refer to "repeated systematic arrangements through which people seek livelihood security both for their own lives and for those of their children, descendants and elders" (Wood and Gough: 2006: 1700). Though the state often plays a major role in directly providing or mandating welfare provision, this broader understanding of welfare regime allows me to couple a focus on formal state policies with the informal institutions which often shape the nature of redistribution and social protection.

The persistence of insecure welfare regimes that entrench the role of private, non-state sources of social protection despite democratisation present us with a puzzle: *How do insecure welfare regimes survive transitions to more democratic forms of governance?*

The next section provides a brief overview of relevant literature on the integration of non-state distributive ideals into social policy, on partisan welfare provision and on clientelistic mediation of the state. It offers conceptual and analytical tools useful for studying how insecure welfare regimes which deliver contingent social protection and disproportionately benefit the wealthy can endure despite democratic electoral incentives.

State social policies institutionalise non-state redistribution

Normative preferences for market-based and non-state redistribution of wealth embedded in state social policies can profoundly shape the trajectory of democratic welfare regimes. Literature on American political development, for instance, highlights how distributive ideals enshrined in early state welfare schemes institutionalised a link between employment and access to social protection. The New Deal welfare initiatives erected in the wake of the Great Depression, as well as the highly progressive tax system which funded them (see Thorndike 2009), were the consequence of compromises reached between Progressive idealists and industrial capitalists. As political sociologist Ann Orloff (1988) recounts, as economic elites feared that social benefits not linked to market-based employment could promote indolence among poor Americans and drain government budgets, the social initiatives introduced by

President Roosevelt linked access to health care and other key state social schemes to workers' participation in the market (see also Quadagno 1984). Concerns about promoting indolence through provision of aid not linked to market participation was then entrenched further through the private health insurance model implemented after Second World War, reinforcing ideals and sources of social protection that repeatedly complicated later campaigns for national, state-provided health insurance (Béland and Hacker 2004: 52). As a result, despite recent reforms introduced by President Obama the vast majority of Americans still receive health care via private insurance policies taken out by their employers on their behalf (see Hacker 2016a). This is in contrast to most European industrialised democracies, where health care is considered a basic 'social right' and is largely provided to citizens by state-managed treatment systems regardless of their employment status. Perversely, these enduring logics have produced lower life expectancy in the United States than other industrialised democracies, despite households, employers and the American state collectively spending far more on health care as a percentage of GDP than their counterparts in the OECD (Prasad 2012: 8).

Ideologies which see economic redistribution as best occurring through the market, family and community rather than via the state can also shape how the state makes social expenditures. Challenging the characterisation of America as an "underdeveloped and stingy welfare state" relative to its European counterparts, studies of fiscal outlays have highlighted that the U.S. state is not a welfare laggard – at least in terms of amounts committed for ostensibly social objectives (Hacker 2002, Martin, Mehrotra et al. 2009: 15, Hacker 2016a). Political scientists Jacob Hacker and Christopher Howard argue that the more 'visible' or direct social schemes of the American state must be assessed alongside the ubiquitous provision of tax *concessions* by American policy-makers to achieve social policy objectives. These indirect or 'hidden' forms of social spending include a range of tax offsets for home owners, deductions for health insurance premiums, concessional treatment of pension contributions along with a range of tax credits for families with dependent children and deductions for charitable donations (Howard 1999, Hacker 2002). These tax expenditures have expanded significantly in recent decades and cost the United States government as much as directly-funded progressive social programmes which have been systematically cut over the same period.[8] In contrast to direct state social programmes which disproportionately benefit the poor and destitute, especially the elderly poor

[8] Since the 1970s American policy-makers and legislators have cut or instituted strict conditions on access to progressive state social programmes such as Medicare, Medicaid, 'welfare' (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF), food stamps, public housing and other social initiatives (Howard 2009: 90).

who receive over half of all direct government welfare spending, tax expenditures overwhelmingly benefit the middle-class and affluent, adding further to pre-existing economic and social inequalities (Howard 2009: 89, Hacker 2016b). Despite producing regressive distributive outcomes, granting tax concessions to people and companies that make social expenditures can be consistent with the ideals and interests of key segments of the electorate. Central to the electoral viability of socially-oriented tax concessions as well as broader tax cuts has been an ideology which values and rewards 'hard work', strict obligations to family and charitable donations to others made freely and voluntarily without state compulsion (Block 2009: 78). This ideology, often termed 'neoliberalism', frames social protection and redistribution as both *practically* and *normatively* better achieved by private actors rather than by the state. It thus satisfies the shifting ideals and interests both of economic elites and mostly middle class religious conservatives by legitimising tax expenditures as well as formal tax cuts.

The use of tax policy to deliver social benefits to middle and upper-classes may not appeal to the median *citizen*, especially given that more people live in poverty in America than other industrialised democracies (Prasad 2012: 7). In a context where political participation including voting varies directly with income and education, however, linking tax policy to this ideological reconfiguration of individual and state responsibility has formed the basis of a new electoral coalition (see Jacobs and Skocpol 2007). Consequently, tax cuts which disproportionately benefit the rich, deprive the state of revenue essential for more progressive, pro-poor policies and generate highly regressive distributive outcomes that exacerbate inequality have been implemented by every Republican administration since President Reagan (see Block 2009, Newman and O'Brien 2011). The appeal of tax cuts and concessions is not entirely partisan, however. Democratic law-makers have also embraced indirect social expenditure through tax concessions both as a way of granting aid to needy populations through the Earned Income Tax Credit and as a counter-cyclical measured aimed at stimulating the economy through increased spending (Howard 2009, Martin, Mehrotra et al. 2009: 17, Hacker 2016a). In perhaps unlikely ways, distributive norms or ideals which entrench the role of private, non-state providers in the welfare mix can thus endure over time as their logics or effects find contingent bi-partisan appeal.

Formal state policies towards the charitable and voluntary sector can also generate or embed informal institutions that reshape popular perceptions of entitlement and responsibility. Anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach (2012) recounts how the Italian state encouraged,

cooperated with and regulated the 'Third Sector' to assume care responsibilities for the unemployed, aged, disabled and poor amid welfare state retrenchment. Drawing on historical research and ethnographic fieldwork with charitable welfare groups in northern Italy, Muehlebach (2012: 17) exposes how welfare state retrenchment was justified in public discourse by a 'crisis of loneliness' allegedly sweeping the continent of Europe which could only be addressed through 'relational labor' of volunteers. Despite the diverse political and ideological leanings of the welfare groups that responded to this 'crisis' — from conservative Catholic volunteer groups to socialist trade unionists highly sceptical of state retrenchment — Muehlebach (2012: 12) recounts seeing "many a citizen disagreeing ideologically with the prevailing order [of state retrenchment] while signing on, either consciously or inadvertently, to its discourses and practices in ontological terms". Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality, Muehlebach (2012: 12) argues that the notion of moral obligation popularised by these groups allowed neoliberal conceptions of individual and community responsibilities to become "organic, that is to say, historically effective, because [they] articulat(e) and incorporat(e) 'different subjects, different identities, different projects, different aspirations' into a single configuration". Practices of communitarian welfare provision that entrench the role of non-governmental providers of care can reshape how 'society' and 'citizenship' are popularly conceived. As Muehlebach (2012: 43) recounts, in contemporary Italy:

> the social now usually comes as an addendum and descriptor rather than as an object sui generis. It is a relation produced, step by step, by participatory citizens rather an *a priori* domain into which the state interjects.

The entitlement of worker-oriented 'social citizenship' upon which European welfare states were erected is thereby replaced by a deeply contingent and relational 'ethical citizenship' that "encloses citizens within the intimate space of the 'welfare community' or 'welfare society'" (Muehlebach 2012: 43). State policies aimed at reconfiguring the role of charitable and non-governmental providers, or which privilege private schemes, can thus markedly shape popular perceptions of entitlement and citizenship and shape the trajectory of distributive politics. As political scientists Daniel Beland and Jacob Hacker (2004: 52) argue in relation to the trajectory of American health policy over time, private provision of social protection has 'path dependent' impacts as it "creates obstacles as well as opportunities for policy-making" in the future. The consequences of social policy which privileges private provision of social protection can thus influence the trajectory of redistributive politics just as deeply as the far better-studied feedback effects of formal political institutions and policy (see Beland and Hacker 2004: 53).

Political party welfare provision

Informal redistributive practices may also endure because they provide the social base of political parties in electoral democracies. In some cases, dispersion of privately-funded aid can play an essential role in political party electoral strategies. For instance, political anthropologist Javier Auyero (2000) argued that social assistance rendered by the Peronist party was essential to the party system of late 20th century Argentina. Conducting ethnographic research in a slum on the outskirts of Buenos Aires during the mid-1990s, Auyero argued that political identity was not 'created' or 'bought' in the small gifts and welfare assistance provided by parties to their supporters. Rather, such loyalty relied upon how the discursive framing of these interactions shaped the social identity of local residents. Everyday people's perceptions of political identity in Argentina, Auyero concluded, could only be understood via the pre-existing informal networks of everyday reciprocity reinforced through the spectacle and drama of political party rallies. As Levitsky (2001) notes, these informal institutions tying social life to political parties and increasing the social cost of vote defection, often present the key to analysis of political cleavages and party systems in many new democracies.

In other cases, political organisations may play central roles in mediating access to state benefits. Melani Cammett's (2014) mixed-methods study of the welfare provision strategy of Hezbollah in Lebanon, for instance, highlights how the formal design of social policies can entrench the role of non-state providers in delivering health care, food, poverty relief and other social aid – including that funded by the state. A key source of Hezbollah's political loyalty and finance both among co-religionists and other Lebanese people, she argues, derives from the role their operatives play in brokering access to state-financed health care for ordinary people. Though the Lebanese state dedicates considerable budget to health spending, the scheme effectively runs on a reimbursement model which results in most hospitals refusing to treat patients unless the costs are paid upfront in cash at time of treatment. By covering the immediate costs of hospitalization and later claiming back reimbursement from the Lebanese government, Hezbollah operatives are thus able to use their brokerage of state-financed health care to generate an electoral base and secure a source of financing for the organisation. Similar dynamics of political parties mediating state social initiatives in ways that ultimately exacerbate the insecurity of ordinary people has been observed in other democratic contexts. Political scientists Ward Berenschot and Gerry van Klinken (2018) have similarly highlighted how mediation of state welfare initiatives by political party and non-state agents can produce

a form of 'mediated citizenship' which relies on brokers or intermediaries for access to social assistance (see also Berenschot, Hanani et al. 2018). Even where the state does expend a larger proportion of budget on social priorities, the scope provided for informal brokerage by political parties may thus allow problematic inequities in access to aid to endure despite democratic incentives (see Cammett and MacLean 2011).

Oligarchic mediation of the state

Oligarchic interests can also use the informal mediation of functions typically left to the state to strengthen their economic or political dominance. Vedi Hadiz (2004) studied the first sub-national elections in Indonesia following the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1999. Informed by qualitative fieldwork in provincial Indonesia, he argued that decentralisation and democratisation had simply allowed Indonesia's political parties and local assemblies to become "vehicles for the distribution of the spoils of power among the wealthy" (Hadiz 2004: 628). Political elites may use their mediating influence over state schemes and programmes to shape popular norms or identities. Yoshinori Nishizaki (2011) studied the rise and enduring dominance of provincial Thai strongman Banharn Silpa-archa between the 1970s and 1990s. Based on extensive archival and ethnographic fieldwork in Suphanburi province, Nishizaki argued that the intermediary role allocated to provincial political elites by the patrimonial apparatus of the Thai state enabled Banharn to claim personal credit for state development and social initiatives. Through his role as intermediary Banharn cultivated transactional bonds with voters of Suphanburi but also generated a larger provincial identity in which many people found a source of collective self-esteem. Nishizaki recounts how stories of Banharn participating in the opening ceremonies of schools, hospitals and other public goods, erecting signifiers of his publicly-funded largesse and making constant favourable comparisons of Suphanburi province to other regions of Thailand in speeches were often repeated and adapted with pride by residents of Suphanburi in everyday life. By looking beneath the instrumental or material dimensions of 'patronage', Nishizaki (2011: 163) exposes how informal social practices can generate affective or identity-based electoral loyalty and secure the political and economic dominance of elites.

Research on constituency development and poverty alleviation programmes in developing democracies around the world similarly highlight how informal institutions shape the functioning of formal state initiatives (Blair and Bartilow 2014). Ethnographic research in rural Brazil, for instance, has demonstrated how "intimate hierarchies" of horizontal community

solidarity and vertical patronage distort state-led anti-poverty schemes aimed at remaking provincial political culture (Ansell 2014). As Ansell observes from ethnographic fieldwork in northern Brazil, the 'Zero Hunger' scheme strengthened horizontal community ties but largely failed to achieve its aim of eroding reliance of the rural poor on local elites to mediate access to government social schemes. Instead, he recounts how rural beneficiaries embraced "the programme's effort to expand their lateral solidarities, while they rejected its assault on their vertical affiliations" and ties to local patrons as they feared it may weaken systems of moral obligation upon which community life was predicated (Ansell 2015: 1268). Studies of informal institutions or 'rules of the game' thus highlight how 'intimate' hierarchies, and the distributive norms embedded within them, can mediate the objectives of formal state schemes in ways that reinforce the power of oligarchic interests and perpetuate inequality.

Limits of existing research

Existing literature on informal institutions and redistribution largely fails to distinguish between formal and informal constraints to democratic redistribution. Albertus and Menaldo (2013: 581), for instance, focus on how pre-democratic economic elites seek to formally entrench their interests by 'gaming' formal institutions such as constitutions in ways that ensure their economic advantage upon regime change. Though they identify a number of "informal mechanisms" of elite leverage whereby elites shape formal institutional outcomes during political transition such as clientelism, vote-buying and bribery, their data focuses solely on state social spending and thus fails to consider how a welfare regime in which private actors play central roles can entrench itself in key political moments (Albertus and Menaldo 2013: 581, 584). Studying how ideals and practices of private redistribution and social protection generated during earlier regimes are institutionalised during political transitions may thus reveal key dynamics underpinning regressive democracy that existing scholarship largely elides.

These distinctions are essential as formal and informal institutions may impose different kinds of constraints on the possibilities of democratic redistribution. The threshold of social mobilisation and political brinkmanship required to successfully challenge 'rigged' constitutional arrangements may be extremely high in new democracies. During later periods when shifting elite or electoral coalitions provide scope to amend authoritarian-era formal institutions, however, existing literature from industrialised democracies suggest that vested commercial interests involved in private social welfare may complicate the adoption of more

socially optimal and progressive policies. Meanwhile, more redistributive policy options that rely on greater government involvement may drop off the reform agenda entirely if actors across the political spectrum see private mechanisms of redistribution as normatively and practically preferential to state provision. The extent to which ideals and practices of private redistribution are rewarded with formal or informal tax concessions by the state may also impose financial constraints on state-mediated redistribution by depriving the public purse of the revenue required to finance more progressive and less contingent provision of redistributive public goods. Attempts to challenge tax concessions for private social expenditure, however, can run the risk of electoral revolt if there is a lag in implementation of state-mediated schemes or if non-state systems are disrupted by imposition of new imposts. The constraints imposed on redistributive policies by informal institutions of private redistribution entrenched during political transition may thus shape the trajectory of progressive reform independently of the formal institutional dominance of economic elites or the military. As existing literature on regressive democracy largely fails to distinguish between formal and informal institutions or focuses predominantly on private social welfare provision in industrialised democracies, there are significant gaps in our understanding of the constraints informal redistributive institutions can impose on democratic social policy during regime change.

The path dependent nature of ideals and institutions of private redistribution has implications for how best to study both their origin and evolution during political transition. Historically-oriented studies of normative 'policy feedback' primarily enlist comparative institutional methods that rely on secondary sources rather than in-depth ethnographic fieldwork. As a result these approaches are limited in their ability to explain how informal institutions evolve during periods of contingency and how they shape the incentives of decision-makers or privilege particular policy pathways.[9] They also limit our understanding of how these mechanisms are enacted and understood from the perspective of ordinary people. Meanwhile, field-based and ethnographic research alone may be unable to adequately explain the origins of distributive ideals or policies which shape popular and elite policy preferences during a period of institutional contingency.

[9] See Beland and Hacker (2004) for a useful discussion of these dynamics in relation to American health-care reform.

Few studies have focused both on the evolution and durability of informal institutions over time while also advancing understanding of their historical origins. Political scientist Lauren MacClean's (2004, 2010b, 2011a) work on personal reciprocity and notions of entitlement in Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire provides one of the few in-depth accounts of how informal institutions are formed and the ways they impact both popular practices of reciprocity and conceptions of entitlement from the state. Based on fieldwork with a tribal group split by the creation of new states in the post-colonial period, MacLean argues that personal reciprocity – measured by financial, material and labour assistance given free of charge to those both inside and outside family and kinship groups – differed greatly between Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire despite otherwise similar pre-colonial tribal social organisation.[10] Maclean traces these differences to specific state policies in welfare provision adopted by successive regimes in both Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire. She argues that these policy choices created more diffuse, cross-cutting reciprocity networks in Ghana and more family and ethnic focused networks of assistance in Cote D'Ivoire. Over time, these everyday variances in experiences shaped 'norms' of social obligation and expectations of the state by generating social ties, identities and mechanisms through which individuals, households and communities managed or engaged in personal and socio-political conflict.

However, few studies have coupled a historical focus on the political *origins* of informal institutions with an in-depth ethnographic study of their contemporary *durability* and *evolution* during a period of political transition. As a result, the independent impacts of informal redistributive institutions upon the possibilities of progressive democratic redistribution have been minimally explored in comparative literature. This dissertation thus seeks to fill this gap by studying how informal institutions or 'rules of the game' generated during earlier regimes evolve and are entrenched during a transition from direct military rule.

Section Three: The scene and the approach

The scene of research

Given its political history and social make-up, Myanmar is an important setting in which to study the path dependency of informal redistributive institutions. After almost five decades of

[10] In Ghana, MacLean found that informal institutions of reciprocity were much more diffuse with individuals providing assistance and social support to a larger network of people across ethnic, tribal and religious identity. In Cote D'Ivoire, reciprocity was of a larger magnitude but largely bounded to an individual's direct family networks.

authoritarian rule, in recent years Myanmar's military leaders have led a transition to partial civilian rule (Farrelly 2013, Bogais 2015, Bünte 2016).

In 2011 the junta which initiated marketisation following the 1988 dissolution of state-led socialism handed power to an elected legislature and executive made up, largely, of civilianised former army officers. Political prisoners were subsequently released, media censorship relaxed and wide-ranging socio-economic reforms were subsequently implemented. Meanwhile, previously paltry state financing for health and education was expanded. In November 2015, national elections were held which were convincingly won by the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by prominent opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

During decades of junta rule, democracy activists claimed that successive authoritarian regimes had inadvertently or deliberately set out to destroy the livelihoods of ordinary people. Despite these earlier claims, in recent years Myanmar's civilian leaders including Suu Kyi have made few promises or reforms to increase the state's direct role in social welfare and redistribution. Rather, many activists and ordinary people who lived in government-controlled areas during the post-socialist period of the 1990s and 2000s espouse a conservative market ideology which views redistribution via private and non-governmental mechanisms as the preferred means of achieving social outcomes.

The relative absence of state-led redistribution from the demands of democracy activists during this period of political transition highlights how formal institutional constraints on redistribution alone are insufficient to explain regressive forms of democracy. This thesis thus sets out to explore and explain *how* informal institutions of private redistribution are being entrenched during Myanmar's transition from military rule, and the constraints they are imposing on more progressive modes of redistribution.

Key arguments of the thesis

Informed by the literature on informal institutions and regressive democracy, I argue that distributive ideals of state intervention in the market generated during the colonial period mutated and evolved as they were reinterpreted and enacted by successive post-colonial regimes. Drawing on original oral histories and archival research, the thesis uncovers how these ideals shaped junta mediation of marketisation following the collapse of socialist dictatorship

in 1988, generating private and non-state practices of redistribution and remaking popular conceptions of obligation to 'community'.

In an original contribution to the literature on path dependency, the thesis draws on ethnographic work with welfare and political activists prior to and after the November 2015 election to show how notions of democracy, entitlement and the role of wealthy elites in welfare and public good provision are reinforcing a redistributive politics which disproportionately benefits the rich and burdens the poor: what I term *regressive democracy*. As economists Benjamin Olken and Monica Singhal (2011) note, it is common for redistributive systems such as taxation to be regressive yet still deliver valuable public goods. Regressive in this sense refers to a system of public goods provision in which the poor contribute a larger proportion of household income or labour than the wealthy but receive less proportional benefit from those goods relative to the more affluent.

The dissertation sheds new light on how informal redistributive institutions generated during earlier regimes prove path dependent during political transition and thus shape the redistributive form and functions of democracy.

Introducing Taungoo and central-east Myanmar

The argument of this dissertation is informed by extensive mixed-methods fieldwork in provincial central-east Myanmar throughout 2015 and 2016. Though the thesis focuses predominantly on lowland areas, comparisons are also made throughout the thesis between areas under government control after 1988 and a region that experienced conflict throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

Qualitative fieldwork was predominantly concentrated in Taungoo, a town in the eastern plains of central Myanmar that was, between the 14th and 16th centuries, the seat of "probably the largest empire in the history of Southeast Asia" (Lieberman 2003b: 152). Though no field-site in Myanmar could be nationally 'representative', Taungoo and the broader region of central-east Myanmar provides a fruitful prism through which to study the evolution and durability of informal institutions in the country's political transition for three reasons.

First, Taungoo township offers an insight into administrative and social life in the lowland plains where the bulk of Myanmar's Bamar Buddhist majority reside. The area experienced

direct rule during the British colonial period and has been under the control of the Burmese state since soon after independence.[11] Since the colonial period the town has been a major hub for the trade of rice and other commodities cultivated in surrounding lowland rural areas, as well as timber, teak and others forest products harvested in the adjacent mountains to the east and west of the township. Like many strategically located towns on the fringe of lowland and upland areas Taungoo is also a major node of regime control. It plays host to a number of Myanmar military installations including army engineers corps, artillery and infantry units, as well as an air base (ANU-MMPI 2014). At the most recent 2014 census the township had a registered population of 262,056 people, of which 41 percent lived in urban wards and 59 percent lived in rural villages – a proportionality that roughly reflects Myanmar's growing urbanization which was estimated at 35 percent in 2015 by the World Bank.[12] Importantly, Taungoo's sizable urban population and growing tourism sector meant that my presence did not attract undue suspicion from authorities in ways which may have compromised my research agenda and interlocutors. State surveillance was the major issue which ruled out the alternate fieldsite of Magwe, another mid-sized Bamar Buddhist provincial majority town in lowland Myanmar with sizable ethnic and religious minority populations. I cut short an earlier stint of fieldwork in Magwe and excluded it from potential selection as a fieldsite after I was actively and openly followed by Intelligence officers.

Second, Taungoo and the broader region of central-east Myanmar is a demographic microcosm of the country as a whole. For centuries Taungoo has been a meeting place for trade and government administration within lowland central Myanmar and for populations in mountainous upland areas to the east of the township. These historical flows intensified during British colonial rule and have bequeathed the township sizable minority populations. While the majority of residents are ethnic Bamar Buddhists, significant numbers of Karen Christians, Muslims, Hindus as well as Shan and Chinese Buddhists and other minorities also reside in the township.[13] Taungoo did not experience communal violence in the period after liberalisation in 2011 as many towns around the country did (see Cheesman 2017b). However, the city was

[11] As discussed in Chapter Two, Taungoo was also known as Toungoo during the colonial period.
[12] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=MM [accessed 23/07/2017].
[13] Official government data on ethnicity and religion recorded at the 2014 census had not been released at township level at the time of research or writing. According to discussions with township officials familiar with the ethnicity and religion data of the 2014 census, as well as extensive qualitative fieldwork and survey data collected by the author, Taungoo's Karen Christian population probably comprises around 20 percent of the township while other minorities including Muslims, Hindu as well as Shan and Chinese Buddhists and other minorities comprise around 10-15 percent or so. The remaining 65 to 70 percent of the township was considered by most local interlocutors to be 'Bamar Buddhist'.

the site of religious conflict in May 2001 which resulted in the deaths of at least ten Muslims and the destruction of a historical mosque which dated back to the pre-colonial period (see HRW 2001: 7-8). Though the township is certainly not nationally 'representative', its ethnic and religious composition broadly reflects the demographic and political divides within Myanmar's population which estimates place at around 68 percent ethnic Bamar and 88 percent Buddhist.[14]

Third, proximity of Taungoo to restive mountainous regions to the east enable illustrative comparison between lowland informal institutions and normative ideals and upland regions which did not experience government administration during the 1990s and 2000s. The eastern administrative limits of Taungoo township directly borders Thandaungyi in northern Karen State, a mountainous and densely forested region that has been the site of ongoing conflict between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the state military since soon after independence. The conflict continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s until a bi-lateral preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the Myanmar military and the KNU in 2012.[15] Figure 1 depicts the topography and administrative boundaries of Taungoo and Thandaungyi townships.

[14] Here I am using definitive ethnic labels for simplicity, though in reality many people identify as numerous ethnicities without any sense of exclusivity. National-level data on ethnicity collected at the 2014 census had not been released at the time of writing. However, people who identify as at least partly 'Bamar' are widely reported as constituting 68 percent or around 36 million of the 53 million population enumerated at the 2014 census. Religion data used here is drawn from The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Census Report Volume 2-C (2016), Department of Population Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Myanmar. pp. 12–15.

[15] The 2012 ceasefire was reinforced when the KNU signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in October 2015.

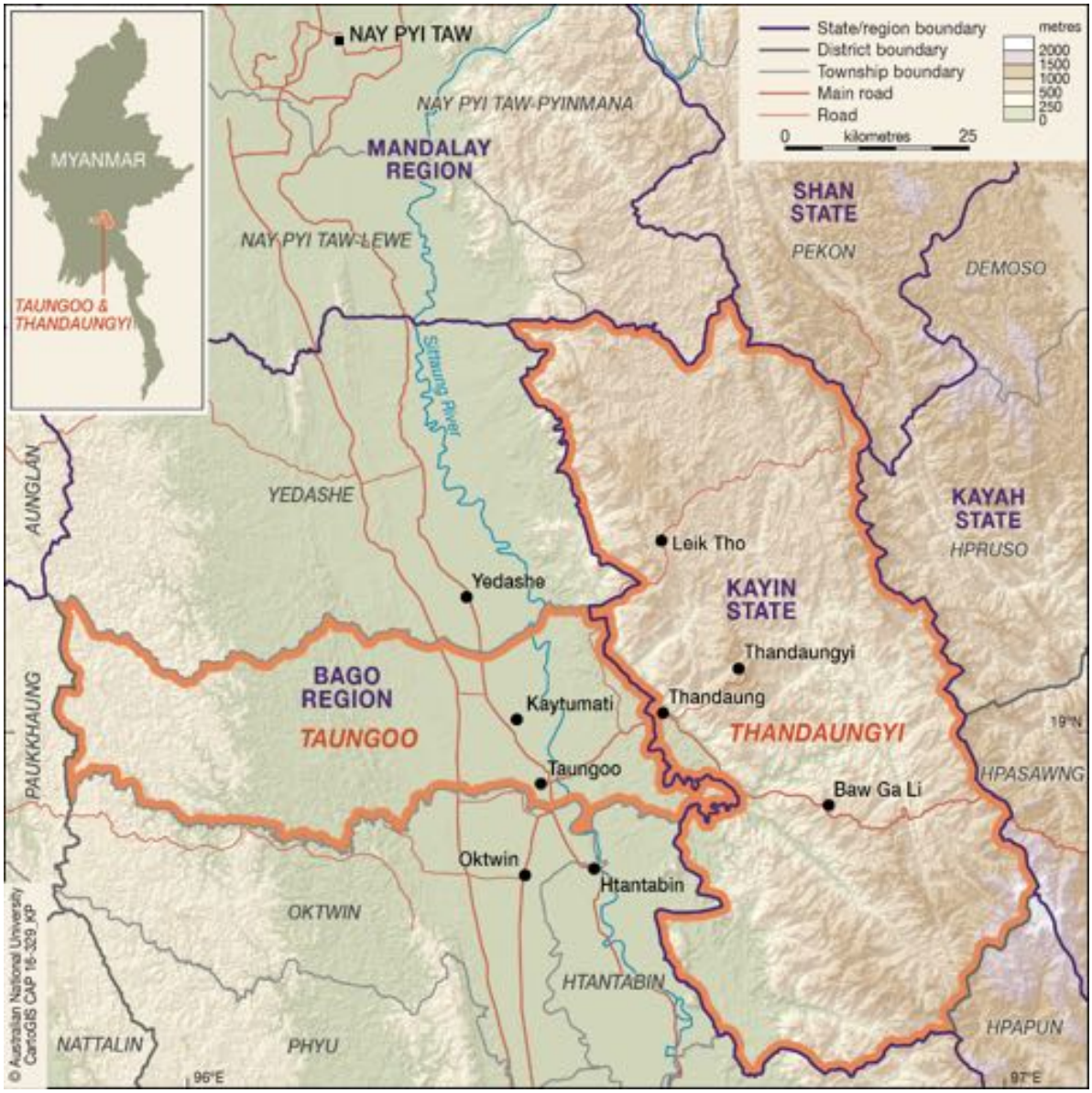

Figure 1 Topographical map of Taungoo (main fieldsite) and Thandaungyi (secondary fieldsite).

Though some less elevated regions of northern Karen State have been under government control since the 1990s, much of the region remained under either mixed KNU-government administration or sole KNU administration during this research. According to available 2014 census data which was collected only in government and mixed-administered areas of the township, the region has a population of 96,000 people of which 22 percent live in three small urban areas and 78 percent in rural, mountainous villages.

Taungoo's setting at the cross-roads of various commercial, administrative and political flows, coupled with its viability as a relatively open and accessible field site proximate to upland

ceasefire areas, thus made it an ideal place from which to study the evolution and durability of informal institutions during Myanmar's political transition.

Methodology

To understand the way informal institutions evolved and endured at a period of political transition, my qualitative fieldwork was conducted in a phased, mixed-method manner throughout 2015 and 2016. Fieldwork was deployed iteratively according to an interpretive logic which privileged the categories and understandings of my interlocutors[16], and involved four key elements:

i) Participant observation with welfare and political groups and networks;
ii) Spatially-focused qualitative fieldwork including key-informant interviews;
iii) 1000 household survey informed by qualitative fieldwork; and
iv) Additional post-survey fieldwork to deconstruct patterns of survey response.

Due to logistical, linguistic and authorisation constraints, long-term fieldwork was predominantly conducted in the government controlled township of Taungoo, while interviews and a household socio-economic survey were conducted in both townships.[17] Oral histories and archival research were also deployed during periods of organisational and network ethnography to provide additional historical context to contemporary ethnography. By coupling a historical institutional approach with extensive and iterative interpretive fieldwork I viewed informal institutions "as products of the complex sets of associations and experiences which composed them" rather than simply the outcome of 'traditions' or the intended outcome of formal institutional design (Marcus 1998: 63-66).

Participant observation as primary method

Participant observation was the dominant approach enlisted during fieldwork as it is uniquely suited to the study of normative ideals and social practices of redistribution. Investigating patterns of continuity and change in informal institutions requires studying processes of invention and stabilization in what political anthropologist Jan Kubik terms '*statu nascendi*':

[16] I prefer to use the term interlocutor throughout the dissertation to refer to my research contacts rather than less relational terms such as 'informant' or 'research subject'. I feel it better describes the two-way dialogue about democracy, welfare and obligation I developed and maintain with many Burmese people. I hope to contribute to that dialogue through this dissertation research.

[17] As a result, Part Two and Three of the dissertation focus predominantly on distributive politics in government controlled areas. However, some comparisons with the ceasefire area of Thandaungyi are noted in Chapters Six and Seven and in the Conclusion, drawing especially on the March 2016 household survey.

"as various flows intersect in a single locale and/or are traced down through several locations/locales" (Kubik 2009: 45). The in-depth descriptive method of political ethnography enables a process of hypothesis testing through structured and iterative interactions with institutions and people (see Chapter One of Kuhonta, Slater et al. 2008).

Developing long-term relationships with interlocutors also enables the researcher to track dynamics of change, continuity and contradiction at an individual or institutional level in ways that one-off interviews and snapshot surveys simply cannot reliably provide (Trickett and Oliveri 1997: 149). Ethnography can thus help to unsettle what is considered at first glance as ordinary or taken for granted by demonstrating how macro-level developments or processes such as practices of commercial licensing or democratic elections shape the behaviour and perceptions of micro-level actors or institutions (Wedeen 2010: 261). As studies of post-socialism in Eastern Europe have demonstrated, long-term ethnographic research in a specific site or with a particular group exposes how macro-level political changes "create space for micro worlds to produce autonomous effects that may have unexpected influence over the structures that have been emerging" (Burawoy, Verdery et al. 1999: 3). Exposing the micro-level logics or processes whereby systems and ideals of non-state redistribution endure and evolve despite political change thus required an interpretive, ethnographic approach.

Phase one: Organisational ethnography (March through June 2015)

To gain a progressively deeper understanding of how informal institutions shape economic redistribution, participant observation and fieldwork more broadly was conducted in two key phases. These phases were linked to the commencement of new social processes such as the 2015 election campaign as well as the progressive improvement of my Burmese language skills.

Within a month or so of commencing fieldwork my level of conversational Burmese was sufficient for me to begin conducting participant observation with five predominantly Buddhist social and welfare groups based in Taungoo. Welfare groups were selected on the basis of variation as to when they were established (pre-2011 and post-2011) as well as the spatial focus of their operations (township, ward, village or place of worship). During the *first phase* of ethnography, between March and June 2015, I rotated between these groups, spending an average of one to two days every fortnight assisting with the everyday activities of individual organisations and following their mobilisation during special events or periods.

I enlisted the translation support of research assistants when conducting more detailed and in-depth interviews throughout this period to help understand key questions of organisational structure and culture, including:

i) who supported the groups in financial and labour terms;
ii) who received assistance from them, and who did not;
iii) their relationship, if any, to state officials; and
iv) the ideas, symbols and discourses enlisted to make meaning of their work.

In addition to participant observation and interviews with volunteers and managers of groups, I also studied the donations records of several key groups or initiatives. In some cases, these records traced back to the 1990s and 2000s and provided important insights into the role of junta elites in the formation and patronage of welfare groups. Alongside oral histories conducted with managers or donors of welfare groups, the organisation-focused period of fieldwork uncovered dynamics of post-socialist lowland administration and marketisation essential to understanding contemporary informal institutions.

Phase two: Network ethnography (July 2015 through June 2016)

In the second phase of my research between July 2015 and June 2016 I shifted focus from organisations to the network and practices which surrounded them. I continued to engage with many key welfare groups throughout the second phase of my fieldwork. However, the *people* from these organisations with whom I had developed particularly close relationships in the first phase became the primary focus of my participant observation during the second phase. As we developed rapport they began to invite me to join them in activities outside of welfare groups, in some cases asking me to support local social initiatives and integrating me into their broader social networks through invitations to nightly betel-nut shops and beer stations to exchange gossip and discuss current events among friends.

By focusing my participant observation upon the *people* who engaged in welfare work rather than simply the *organisations* they worked with I was able to trace the larger economic and social context in which private redistribution occurs in provincial Myanmar. Focusing on these flexible networks and practices exposed key dynamics including how wealthy donors manage and are managed by welfare groups; and the complex ways in which religious actors and institutions financially and administratively support systems of reciprocity and risk-pooling.

Most importantly, following volunteers and donors beyond the organisational boundaries of local welfare groups also exposed the overlaps between welfare and political activism. Especially after August 2015, when formal campaigning ahead of the November 2015 national elections commenced, many of my interlocutors assumed formal or informal roles supporting the NLD campaign and in a few cases other political vehicles including ethnic parties and the regime-linked Union Solidarity and Development Party. The close relationships I developed with my interlocutors as we engaged in welfare work and more casual social interactions granted me access to private discussions, gossip and planning to which outsiders would usually have been excluded. In many cases, aspirations and frustrations vented in these discussions proved invaluable in making sense of the larger contexts and stakes of their welfare work, particularly the distributive ideal expressed by socio-political activists who have managed many of these initiatives since the 1990s.

Supplementary neighbourhood and village fieldwork (July 2015 through June 2016)

In order to gain an insight into how informal redistributive institutions varied according to the degree of state presence at a local level, from July 2015 I complemented network ethnography with mostly interview-based fieldwork at the neighbourhood and village level. Informed by demographic profiles, the role of state development initiatives in these areas as well as the proportion of residents employed by the government, I selected three urban ward and six rural villages upon which to spatially focus fieldwork.[18] By recurrently visiting interlocutors in these areas at least once every fortnight, this element of fieldwork provided a weathervane of sentiment and perceptions on redistributive questions at the level of neighbourhood politics separate from the more urban and educated welfare volunteers who ran formal organisations.

Between July 2015 and June 2016 I repeatedly returned to these neighbourhoods and villages at least once a fortnight to meet with interlocutors. I initially developed relationships with local residents either during visits with welfare groups as part of ambulance or funeral work, during political campaigns, through introductions from research assistants and friends, and in some cases by arriving at village shops or houses of worship and striking up conversations with potential respondents. After these initial contacts, I would express an interest in returning later

[18] The latter variable of state employment was particularly relevant in one urban ward nearby railway tracks, where hundreds of employees of the Ministry of Railroads lived in government housing.

to learn more about issues of welfare in the area, specifically how residents supported each other and what support the government provided. In many cases I was invited to attend major village events such as weddings and meditation festivals, and initiatives such as collective road construction. At these events I often met other interlocutors who I would then visit individually or collectively.

During visits I would often conduct loosely structured individual or group interviews. These interactions would often focus on what government or charitable organisations interlocutors had received assistance from or engaged with recently, as well as discussing various events such as the 2015 floods, the November 2015 election campaign or local neighbourhood politics, including who free-rode from supporting local social initiatives. By returning regularly to neighbourhoods and villages which varied according to the role that welfare groups and state social schemes played in the lives of residents I was able to test and challenge hypotheses and propositions developed through the more concentrated participant observation with mostly urban-based, educated welfare volunteers.

A secondary fieldsite (Thandaungyi, Karen State).

As I developed wider networks across Taungoo's diverse ethnic and religious communities throughout 2015, a number of Karen Christian interlocutors encouraged me to visit, and interview, their relatives in the adjacent township of Thandaungyi in northern Karen State.

From July 2015 until June 2016 I began regular visits to interlocutors in the administrative town of Thandaung located at the bottom of the mountain of Thandaungyi, around 30-minutes motor-bike ride from the urban core of Taungoo. I usually spent a full-day in discussions with residents in this region every two to three weeks accompanied by Karen research assistants. Fieldwork largely involved key informant interviews with representatives of Karen political parties, Christian pastors and Myanmar government officials with whom I began to test some hypotheses developed in Taungoo. I also developed close relations with the managers of a township-based Karen community organisation working on maternal health, land-mine clearance and ceasefire monitoring. Through this organisation I also met and interviewed the Karen National Union's civilian administrator for the township on a number of occasions, providing an insight into larger systems of non-state administration within the region.

In addition to research in and around the town of Thandaung I also made four research trips to the town of Thandaungyi at the top of the mountain for interviews with town elders, businesspeople and religious authorities. These contacts and networks helped to shed light on government service delivery following the 2012 bilateral ceasefire between the KNU and Myanmar military, the role of non-governmental providers of welfare in the lives of ordinary people and elite and grass-roots aspirations of the more 'federal' political system promised by the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). They also exposed distributive ideals and informal redistributive institutions which, though often similar in modality to lowland areas, appeared to produce quite different expectations of the state.

Household survey (March 2016)

It was extremely difficult to reliably establish how contributions to and experiences of state and non-state redistributive mechanisms varied according to key factors such as wealth, geography and religion using qualitative fieldwork alone. For these reasons, following a year of in-depth qualitative research in March 2016 I fielded a household socio-political survey in Taungoo township, Bago Region and Thandaungyi township, Karen State. The key practices and categories of redistribution measured in the survey were informed by the in-depth ethnographic fieldwork which preceded it. Versions of all conceptually complex questions were piloted and adapted during interviews with interlocutors between December 2015 and February 2016. They were amended again after a full-scale pilot of 40 households in Yangon in February 2016 and of 50 households in Taungoo in March 2016.

A total of one thousand (1000) households were included in the survey, split equally between Taungoo and Thandaungyi townships (500 each). To roughly reflect the proportionality of urbanization across the two townships and Myanmar as a whole, 300 rural respondents and 200 urban respondents were recruited in each context. Respondents were recruited in a systematically randomised fashion across 14 villages and 7 urban wards in each township, with a minimum threshold of 25 interviews conducted in each. Interviews were conducted in Burmese and Sgaw Karen by a group of 28 survey enumerators recruited and managed by the Yangon School of Political Science who I trained and ultimately supervised. The survey was funded by a grant from the International Growth Centre, Myanmar. More information on the survey methodology and approach is available in Appendix III.

There were a number of intriguing quantitative patterns exposed in initial analysis of the data in April 2016 (see McCarthy 2016). Between May and July 2016 I then explored and conceptually clarified these patterns through additional qualitative fieldwork, including patterns discussed in Chapter Six which suggested 'self-reliant' local improvement was highly correlated with recent receipt of government development assistance. My interpretation of the quantitative survey thus followed and supported the larger qualitative research approach and logic of the project, with potentially counter-intuitive results leading me to focus fieldwork on new aspects and logics of non-state redistribution.

Ethics protocol and anonymisation

At all times, including my engagement with welfare groups and with individuals, I introduced myself as a researcher working on 'social affairs' or 'social work'. Consistent with the ethics protocol approved by the Australian National University, I provided general thematic information about my project prior to commencing in-depth discussions and always received oral consent from interlocutors to take notes during discussions and interviews. Throughout my fieldwork I was frequently asked about progress with my research and writing by interlocutors, and we often discussed whether I would anonymize them when describing them in my thesis. Many requested to be named in my research, while some did not.

To maintain consistency with the ANU-approved research protocol and to limit any risk of potential retribution against interlocutors I have given pseudonyms to people and places below the level of the township which I describe or quote directly and with whom I spent considerable time. In most cases, the name of welfare groups with which I engaged have also been given pseudonyms. The major exception is a group with which I engaged sporadically throughout my fieldwork and which is essential for making historical or conceptual links to developments elsewhere in the country. I have included an asterisk (*) the first time I name interlocutors or groups which have been given pseudonyms.

Some chapters of the thesis draw on Facebook posts made by interlocutors either on publicly accessible group pages or on private personal pages to which they had granted me access. This approach was essential in the rapidly digitising context of post-2011 Myanmar, where social media increasingly comprises one of the most dominant sources of media and information in the country (see McCarthy 2018b). Facebook posts often offered a fascinating and useful insight into the opinions interlocutors expressed for the consumption of public or semi-public

audiences of friends and acquaintances. There are complex issues of informed consent involved with using statements made on private and public pages for research purposes (see Townsend and Wallace 2016). However, there are also clear benefits to studying social media commentary as opinions expressed on threads are less subject to risks of researcher bias, reducing the pressure for interlocutors to self-censor in order to save face or avoid disagreement with me on potentially controversial topics.

To secure informed consent in use of social media posts I considered relevant to my research, I discussed private or public posts made by interlocutors on Facebook directly with them in person. These discussions provided additional context about what they had posted publicly, helped identify potential nuances or contradictions between the opinion expressed on social media and their private views, and also allowed me to flag with them my interest in including their post in my research. The convention of using pseudonyms for close interlocutors was retained when citing these Facebook posts.

I treat *publicly* accessible Facebook posts made by groups, media outlets or prominent local and national individuals to be public statements not requiring informed consent for citation. The same approach was taken towards public posts made by local welfare group leaders dispersing propaganda about a person or organisation, though in most cases I have given pseudonyms to the pages or people that made these posts. When I cite comments made by other Facebook users on these public posts I also anonymise names and paraphrase potentially controversial statements in order to maintain a reasonable degree of privacy despite their openly accessible nature. Extending participant observation to opinions, content and dynamics encountered on Facebook was essential to following dynamics of change and continuity in non-state redistributive practices and ideals during Myanmar's political transition and throughout the period of writing up when I was physically out of my fieldsite.

Conclusion

Research on the endurance of inequality in democratic regimes predominantly focuses on how elite 'gaming' of formal institutions erodes the incentives of politicians to confiscate wealth from the rich and redistribute it to the median voter (see Meltzer and Richard 1981, Boix 2003, Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, Shapiro, Swenson et al. 2008, Albertus and Menaldo 2013). This chapter has reviewed the comparative theoretical literature on democracy and redistribution, seeking to understand why informal and private institutions of redistribution

which disproportionately burden the poor can prove resilient even in established democratic regimes. Drawing on a growing literature on policy feedback, it has argued that *systems*, *norms and ideals* of private and non-state redistribution can, much like formal institutions and polices, prove path dependent over time. However, informal institutions may impose different kinds of constraints on the possibilities of democratic redistribution than constitutions or other formal institutions, complicating the adoption of more socially optimal and progressive policy even when formal institutions can be feasibly amended or revised. Despite their potentially significant role in shaping the redistributive trajectory of democracy, our understanding of how informal institutions change and are entrenched amid political transition is weak as researchers have tended to rely on either historical institutional analysis of their origins or solely on ethnographic studies of their adaptation and change during shorter temporal timeframes. As a result, a convincing account of the origins of informal institutions and how they evolve alongside and in parallel to formal institutions during political transition in ways that independently limit progressive paths of redistributive reform remains elusive.

To fill this gap, this dissertation explores the case of Myanmar.[19] Part Two of the dissertation traces the genealogy of distributive politics in Burma since the colonial period, helping to uncover the tensions between redistributive ideals and institutions which have pervaded politics since independence. Chapter Two reviews existing literature on distributive ideals in post-colonial Burma, highlighting the significant lacuna in extant research on how concerns about inequities generated by capitalist and foreign domination inequities shaped the nature of marketisation following the dissolution of socialist dictatorship in 1988. Chapter Three then exposes the authoritarian mode of welfare capitalism via which post-socialist officials outsourced state redistributive functions via mechanisms of marketisation, generating informal redistributive ideals and practices. Chapter Four explores how these largely local ideals and practices were recurrently extended during natural catastrophes, forming a bounded notion of post-socialist obligation which continues to shape the political imaginations of contemporary democracy activists.

Part Three of the dissertation assesses how informal institutions of private redistribution are evolving in the context of the contemporary critical juncture. Chapter Five explores how ideals

[19] Throughout this thesis I refer to the country as 'Burma' prior to 1988 and 'Myanmar' after 1988. See Appendix I for a discussion of the controversy about the name of the country and explanation for this approach.

and practices of private redistribution shape popular conceptions of liberty and democracy, especially among grassroots welfare activists involved with the NLD. Chapter Six outlines the claim-making required to be seen as 'worthy' of state development assistance in contemporary Myanmar and highlights the inequities generated by the entrenchment of 'self-reliance' as a political ideal. Chapter Seven assesses how tycoons who accrued wealth during junta rule now render themselves essential to democratic conceptions of moral community through philanthropy of public goods, collective identity and the democracy movement itself. It notes how renunciation of wealth in this manner legitimises prior capital accumulation, shields assets and power from scrutiny or public demands for redistribution while also depriving the state of formal tax revenue essential for expanding the role of the state in redistribution. Chapter Eight concludes, assessing the implication of the dissertation for research on regressive democracy in comparative perspective.

Chapter Two: Distributive Politics since Colonisation

Understanding the recent trajectory of Myanmar's democratic distributive politics requires an account of how distributive ideals generated under colonial rule have endured and evolved through successive regimes. This chapter explores the distributive legacies of colonial rule in post-independence Burma, before assessing existing literature on the marketisation and state-building processes led by the post-socialist junta which dissolved the BSPP and seized power in 1988. The chapter argues that elite and popular concerns regarding distributive injustices attributed to capitalism have been a recurring feature of post-colonial rule, including in the post-1988 period. These institutional and ideological legacies critically shaped post-independence governance, especially the approach to state-mediated redistribution adopted during parliamentary rule between 1948 and 1962, and then by General Ne Win and his Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) between 1962 and 1988. However, existing literature largely assumes that distributive anxieties associated with capitalism evaporated with the military-led process of marketisation and state-building after 1988. These accounts contradict much of the comparative literature on post-socialism and, as I show in subsequent chapters, cannot be sustained if provincial dynamics of marketisation during the 1990s and 2000s are re-examined.

The chapter proceeds in four sections. Section One shows how British colonisation and the Second World War generated an elite Burmese Buddhist consensus against free-market capitalism, a military deeply divided along ethnic and ideological lines, an economy highly reliant on agricultural commodity export and a weak central state administrative apparatus, especially in upland and borderland areas. At the core of elite distributive ideology was the dire indebtedness and land alienation generated by the rigid commitment of British colonial officers to ensuring a 'free-market' agricultural economy. Coupled with British practices of taxation, especially the imposition of the regressive head tax, this chapter highlights how colonial rule thus formed elite and popular consensus in support of a seemingly paradoxical political vision: an economically interventionist and redistributive state which engages in minimal taxation.

Section Two recounts the early period of independence between 1948 and 1962. It shows how civilian leaders sought to satisfy diverse electoral constituencies, including commercial elites and Communists, by embracing a form of interventionist welfare capitalism. This vision required private and foreign enterprises to assume significant social obligations to employees, with minimal role played by the state. As the army crafted itself increasing autonomy from civilian oversights and coalesced around a potent blend of nationalism and socialism during the 1950s, U Nu's partial embrace of capitalism and foreign investment came to be seen by military leaders as a threat to territorial integrity and to achievement of a more equitable economy.

Section Three analyses how the BSPP's rigid rejection of market mechanisms and suppression of independent civil society constrained its ability to deliver the promise of state-mediated distributive justice. It shows that the unprofitability of industrial enterprises, the limited export of rice and the growth of an untaxed black market trade eroded the revenue viability of the BSPPs policies which were aimed at industrialisation and redistribution. As black markets flourished to plug holes in production and distribution systems, often benefitting insurgent movements in border-land areas, the socialist answer to the redistributive anxieties bequeathed by colonial rule began to lose elite and popular credibility among lowland populations.

Section Four outlines how distributive ideals and institutional inheritances shaped the junta's mediation of marketisation following the 1988 dissolution of the socialist regime. It tracks how the transition to mediated capitalism allowed the junta to challenge some of the key institutional inheritances of colonial rule, especially the state's minimal administrative presence in the periphery and borderlands, while simultaneously reinforcing the dominance of the military. It surmises that the social space provided by the junta to ostensibly apolitical civil society during the 1990s and 2000s permitted proliferation of mechanisms of self-help or self-reliance in the absence of the state. However, minimal researcher access during this period made it difficult to discern how redistributive ideals which had defined post-colonial governance until that point were enforced and enacted through junta mediation of marketisation. The chapter concludes that in order to expose the authoritarian origin of informal redistributive institutions it is necessary to reassess how looming concerns within the military about the distributive inequities generated by capitalism and foreign investment shaped the post-socialist period in Myanmar.

Section One: Colonial rule and the consensus against 'free-market' capitalism

Colonial rule was designed to facilitate economic extraction

British colonial administrators adopted both direct and indirect approaches to political and economic governance in order to facilitate efficient commodity extraction in different parts of the country. In fertile lowland areas, especially the Ayeyarwaddy delta, the British encouraged the development of an intensive system of cultivation. The frontier nature of the deltaic plain formed by the Ayeyarwaddy and Sittang rivers was the central element of the colonial economy. The area was "sparsely populated and largely abandoned to nature" following the annexation of Lower Burma after the first Anglo-Burmese War (1852-1853) (Brown 2013: 44). Subsequent British land legislation and administration provided strong incentives for Burmese 'pioneer agriculturalists' to clear tracts of vacant land and then cultivate, occupy and pay revenue on it as twelve years of doing so would allow them to acquire a title to the land (Brown 2013: 37).[20] In order to encourage investment in cultivation prior to receipt of formal title, British regulations permitted squatters to use the land they cleared as collateral for credit. These regulations and practices resulted in a massive expansion in the area under cultivation in the final three decades of the 19th century as both cultivators as well as creditors, a sector dominated by Indian *chettiars*, moved into the delta (Adas 1974: 128, 131). A path from tenancy to ownership and land accumulation was subsequently followed by many Burmese cultivators, some of whom were able to accrue modest fortunes by claiming land and using it as collateral to establish thriving land holdings (see Brown 2013: 46; Adas 1974, chapter six).

There were, however, tensions inherent to the credit system underpinning the agricultural economy. Money-lenders were legally permitted to claim land that cultivators used as security if they defaulted on their loans (Brown 2013: 38-40). Fearful of a reduction in land revenue and commercial expansion, British colonial administrators in Burma failed to impose constraints on ownership of agricultural land by foreign or non-agricultural interest as had been done in Malaysia around the same period (Brown 2013: 42). The result was the gradual alienation of land to foreign and non-agricultural interests in the rice-growing areas of lower Burma by the early years of the twentieth century (Brown 2013: 38). Meanwhile, as the frontier became crowded with cultivators around the turn of the century, and competition for increasingly poor quality land intensified, the material circumstances of both tenant-cultivators

[20] Squatters could technically be evicted by the authorities during the period of squatting, though this rarely occurred in practice (Brown 2013: 37).

and landless labourers deteriorated markedly. The price of land in the delta increased more than five-fold, from Rs 20 per acre around 1900 to Rs 70 in 1910 and Rs 105 in the early 1930s (Adas 1974: 79, 148). The price of land rental rose accordingly, with the amount of output paid by tenants to land owners increasing from 10 percent in the late 1880s to up to 50 percent in the most fertile areas and 20 percent in less fertile areas by the 1920s (Brown 2013: 47). The erosion of paths of upward mobility and the alienation of land through default quickly began to feed grievances about the colonial economy and British rule more broadly.

Colonial administrators deployed a more indirect approach to governance and extraction of commodities in Burma's mountainous periphery and borderlands. A degree of autonomy was granted to ethnic elites in upland areas in exchange for recognition of British dominion over natural resources such as teak, gemstones and precious metals (Thant Myint-U 2001: 216-217). After extraction, these commodities were quickly transported to lowland areas for processing and trade. Following the felling of teak logs, for instance, they would then be dragged by elephants and buffaloes to creeks, where they were floated to main lowland rivers of the Ayeyarwaddy, Sittang and Salween and dispatched by raft to Rangoon or Moulmein for on-sale (Brown 2013: 11-12). Though the bulk of workers in sawmills — as with oil refineries and rice-mills — were Indian, local populations were often engaged as manual labourers in the forests and on the rivers (Brown 2013: 12). Some hereditary rulers, regional elites and their clients were also able to act as intermediaries in logging, harvesting or transportation, forming the basis of an emergent commercial class in upland areas. Combined with British projects of railroad construction and other infrastructure initiatives which employed local labourers, the colonial economy thus offered an important source of income for populations in some remote upland areas (Thant Myint-U 2001: 222-227).

The contingent economic integration of the periphery was coupled with significant political autonomy for some existing authorities. In a form of rule which political scientists Adnan Naseemullah and Paul Staniland (2016) have conceptualised as 'hybrid rule', chiefs and tribal councils in hilly ethnic areas were selectively acknowledged and charged with administration on behalf of the British. Following the colonial suppression of insurgency, for instance, a number of hereditary Shan dynasties (s*awbwa*) submitted to British authority and recognised the colonial state's right to forests and mineral resources in these areas (Thant Myint-U 2001: 216-217). In return, they were recognised in colonial law as indirect-rulers able to maintain royal courts and engage in trade. Other ethnic minority "Frontier" or "Excluded Areas" also

remained under the nominal authority of their traditional rulers throughout colonial rule, often retaining considerable power to manage social and political affairs according to tradition and custom (Smith 2007: 9, Taylor 2009: 80). As the struggle for independence from Britain began to intensify in lowland areas this diachronic mode of rule effectively mapping populations in the 'Frontier' or 'Excluded' areas "out of the political struggles and imaginations of the center" (Callahan 2004: 107). As political scientist Mary Callahan observed, "the center was where politics happened, full citizens lived, and Burmese was the currency of public life; in the margins… lesser citizens lived out 'primitive' existences and language was not a public activity, since the public had been territorially limited to the center" (Callahan 2004: 107, 109). As a consequence, upland 'native' territories were placed on radically different paths of political and economic development to directly-ruled Burmese areas, a pattern which was to endure for decades to follow (Smith 2007: 9). The combination of direct-rule in lowland areas and varying forms of indirect rule in the periphery (see Figure 2 below) thus generated what historian Michael Aung-Thwin (1985) termed "order without meaning" which would endure for decades to follow.

Figure 2 Administrative and infrastructure limits of colonial Burma. Adapted from Tinker 1983 with addition of all-weather roads from 1944 US Army map.

In contrast to the indirect rule of the periphery, in lowland areas British administration was largely geared towards the functioning of the cultivation economy. A system of direct rule from Calcutta via Rangoon sought to create a semblance, if not reality, of legal and administrative order down to the village level (see Saha 2013: 3-5).[21] Amid escalating agitation for greater autonomy in 1923 the existing post of Lieutenant-Governor was upgraded and granted additional autonomy. He promptly transferred administration of 'non-critical' areas such as agriculture, education, forestry and local government to Burmese ministers (Nash 1965: 4). However, all major organs of civil service and law enforcement in 'Ministerial' or 'Burma proper', defined as areas ruled directly by Rangoon, continued to be staffed at upper ranks by British officers (Thant Myint-U 2001: 208). The bulk of administrative work at lower-levels of the colonial state was managed by Indian civil servants and Burmese township and village heads who were mostly overseen by European deputy commissioners stationed in the largest towns (Saha 2013: 47-50). A colonial system of courts was also established, which extended to the local level. While the justice system was used by some elites embroiled in disputes often involving land (Thant Myint-U 2001: 231-233), in the booming delta region courts were avoided by many small-scale cultivators (Taylor 2009: 103-107, Saha 2012).[22] Populations which resisted the British system of rule were violently 'pacified' by large garrisons of British and Indian soldiers stationed in major urban centres. More quotidian 'order', especially in the increasingly fractious delta where armed robbery became increasingly common in the early decades of the 20th century, was enforced by predominantly Indian military police as well as largely Burmese, Karen and Indian civil police (Taylor 2009: 99-103; Thant Myint-U 2001: 208). In contrast to the more devolved systems of social governance in upland, indirectly ruled areas, the role of foreigners and perceived outsiders in enforcing colonial 'order' became a major source of lowland discontent.

Anger at the colonial administrative imposition was compounded by the British approach of directly taxing the lowland agricultural economy to finance its colonial apparatus of repression and administration. Land revenues were the largest single source of the colonial government's

[21] These systems were largely extended to Upper Burma following the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885, which led to the British dissolution of the monarchy seated in Mandalay and abolishment of rural hereditary rule (see Thant Myint-U 2001: ch 8).

[22] Saha (2012; 2013: 44-45) notes that in the booming economy of the pre-Depression delta, local administrative and court systems could not cope with the pressures posed by the demographic explosion of the region. Though some towns in the delta saw a five-fold increase in population in the two decades after 1890, Saha cites data which suggests that "the amount of civil litigation had remained roughly at a standstill" and thus concludes that many ordinary people were "wary of the languishing colonial courts and justifiably sceptical of their benefits" (2013: 45).

financial receipts, comprising 31 percent of total revenue in 1926/27 prior to the Great Depression, ahead of customs duties, business tax and forestry which together delivered 42 percent (Brown 1999b: 385-386, Taylor 2009: 258). Land revenue dues were calculated as a percentage of the net output of the cultivator's land by acreage, with adjustments made by colonial officers for soil type and water conditions (Brown 1999b: 385). In contrast to land revenue rates in colonial India (Brown 1999b: 386), land revenue dues in Burma were calculated by the area under cultivation, rather than the total acreage of the holding, and were reassessed annually (Adas 1979: 201). Remissions were apparently granted relatively regularly if cultivators lost one-third or more of a crop due to flood or other exigency, with exemptions proportional to the loss incurred (Furnivall 1931 in Brown 1999b: 386). Villagers in areas with particularly high rates of armed robbery and murder, especially in the socially-fragmented delta, paid additional taxes on top of the normal land rates to cover the costs of deploying additional Karen and Indian police (Taylor 2009: 102-103).

A smaller though more controversial source of direct tax revenue—around 6 percent of total revenue in 1926/27—was derived from a head or capitation tax (Brown 1999b: 386). The individual rate was levied on males aged between 18 and 60 at the rate of Rs 5 a year for a married man and Rs 2-8 for a bachelor (Brown 1999b: 387). The rate was the same regardless of individual wealth or the impacts of externalities, and thus "bore particularly hard on tenants and laborers", often constituting "a direct threat to consumption needs" after crop failure, a fall in wages or during periods of unemployment (Scott 1976: 99).[23] A flat-rate capitation tax was not levied in any other part of British India, and it was deeply unpopular among Burmese taxpayers—and some British officials—as it was not linked to relative productive capacity and was seen to burden the poor disproportionately more than the rich (see Brown 1999b: 387, fn 12). By the 1920s, colonial taxation of the lowland economy had become a significant point of contention. Opposition to forms of revenue raising such as the head tax, which had regressive economic effects upon people at the lowest rungs of the frontier economy, was particularly acute.

[23] As Brown (1999: 387) notes there were exemptions for "government officials, school teachers and monks" and scope was also provided for exemptions on the grounds of poverty. A less stringent form of the head tax, inherited and subsequently adapted by colonial rulers after the dissolution of the monarchy in 1885, was applied in Upper Burma (Scott 1976: 99; Than Myint-U 228-229).

The dominance of foreign interests at higher-rungs of the colonial economy was another source of wide-spread discontent among Burmese peasant and student groups which proliferated in the 1910s and 1920s. A path to modest commercial success for Burmese cultivators had existed through to the turn of the 20th century in the Ayeyarwaddy delta region, creating a small class of indigenous land-holders. While a commercial class mostly composed of pre-existing elites or hereditary rulers, was able to emerge in some parts of the country (Thant Myint-U 2001: 236).[24] However, in key sectors of the economy British administrators discriminated against Burmese businesspeople in favour of Western-owned companies (Aung Tun Thet 1989: 64-65). The teak industry, for instance, was dominated by five British companies who were issued licences on a long-term, renewable nature (Thant Myint-U 2001: 227). Meanwhile, the British-owned Irrawaddy Flotilla Company was permitted to maintain a near monopoly in transport services, and received substantial subsidies from the colonial state (Aung Tun Thet 1989: 65, 78-79). British administrators similarly permitted Indian *chettiar* money-lenders to play increasingly dominant roles in the provision of credit in both the delta and 'frontier' trading and mining towns.[25] The gradual result was widespread indebtedness among Burmese and ethnic minority populations to mostly Indian bankers, who increasingly turned to British courts to recover defaulted loans (Thant Myint-U 2001: 224). Indian labourers were also favoured for skilled roles in the rice-milling, teak and oil industries (Brown 2013: 19). Though the imbalances of the colonial economy meant that substantive Burmese participation in the market was effectively foreclosed, British administrators largely maintained a rigid "belief in the efficiency and effectiveness of the market" and avoided intervention (Brown 2013: 19).

Lowland animosities towards the colonial economy were also exacerbated by cultural insensitivities. The British abolition of the monarchy, failure to assume obligations of prior rulers to maintain the Buddhist order and refusal to remove shoes at pagodas gradually came to be seen by activists as threats to sovereignty and the Burmese 'nation' (see Thant Myint-U 2001: 127, 209-210; Brown 1999b: 144, Turner 2014, ch 5 and 6). Despite the introduction of legislative elections at the district and township level in the early 1920s, protests and strikes against the colonial economy and Burmese subordination within the colonial education system intensified (Taylor 2009: 184-188). The leaders of prominent Buddhist organisations

[24] There was significant regional variation in British policies regarding existing local elites. See Thant Myint-U (2001: 235-240) for a discussion of variation in policies towards aristocrats in lowland Upper Burma.
[25] See Turnell (2009), especially chapter 2, for a useful history of the *chettiar* class and Egreteau (2011: 36) for insightful discussion of how Indians became the first targets subject of xenophobic nationalism before more powerful Anglo-Burmese, Europeans and Chinese communities in the late colonial period.

subsequently formed a General Council of Burmese Associations, with the goal of unifying the largely Buddhist patriotic groups (B: *wunthanu athins*) that were proliferating in mostly rural areas of the country (Turner 2014: 138, Walton 2016: 20). Anti-colonial sentiment deepened further when the Great Depression caused a slump in rice prices and prompted the alienation of large tracts of land to creditors.

The Great Depression intensified anger at the 'free-market' and colonial taxation

The Great Depression delivered a major shock to the already fractious lowland colonial economy. The price of rice almost halved in value during 1930 and did not begin to return to earlier levels until 1935.[26] As Burmese cultivators defaulted on loans taken out to finance their land reclamation and cultivation efforts, *chettiar* and non-agriculturalist moneylenders foreclosed on debts and repossessed land. In the absence of colonial regulations restricting the alienation of land to foreign interests, by 1937 Indian *chettiars* owned 25 percent of the delta while non-agriculturalists controlled 50 percent, a dramatic increase from 6 and 19 percent in 1930 respectively (Adas 1974: 188).

Anger towards the 'free market' colonial economy, especially regressive forms of taxation, became a defining feature of Burmese political movements which began to take increasingly violent forms. As political anthropologist James C. Scott (1976: 99) notes, the burden of colonial revenue collection on cultivators had already made taxation and the head tax in particular the "central issue of popular nationalist agitation from 1915". Despite the rapid decline in rice prices and subsequent wave of defaults and dispossession following the Depression, colonial administrators continued to collect land revenue dues as well as the regressive head tax. The anger generated by British administration in rural areas resonated with growing frustration towards the colonial economy in urban areas. In early 1930, riots broke out in Rangoon between Indian and Burmese dock-workers following a pay dispute with dock managers.

Then in December 1930, a rebellion against colonial rule commenced in Tharrawaddy district north of Rangoon after colonial administrators both there and in Rangoon rejected petitions from thousands of landowners, cultivators, rice millers and moneylenders for "drastic cuts" to,

[26] Popular kinds of rice, for instance, lost almost half their value (43 percent) between July 1930 and January 1931 (Brown 1999b: 388).

or postponement of, the land revenue collection and the controversial head tax (Brown 1999b: 389). The rebellion quickly found traction among dispossessed farmers and disaffected labourers who raided weapons from police stations and attacked government representatives. The leader of the rebellion, a traditional healer and fortune-teller turned peasant activist Saya San, combined anti-tax rhetoric with Buddhist prophecies in his popular appeals (Adas 1979, Aung–Thwin 2010).[27] Within weeks the rebellion spread throughout the delta, to Rangoon and north into central Burma and the Shan States, eventually encompassing 12 of Burma's 20 districts (Brown 1999a: 143). Emergency powers were granted by India to help colonial officers put down what they called "the Burma rebellion". A Special Rebellion Commission was also appointed and hundreds of troops were dispatched from India (Aung-Thwin 2010: 6-8). Though Saya San was ultimately arrested in August 1931 and promptly trialled and executed, the rebellion continued for more than two years, resulting in the deaths of more than 1300 rebels and the surrender of another 9000 (Cady 1958: 316, Aung–Thwin 2010: 8). Colonial administrators were subsequently encouraged by superiors to exercise "careful discretion" in levying the regressive head tax from 1931, belatedly granting a reduction of 25 percent for 1931-1932 and then 20 percent between July 1932 and June 1935 (Brown 1999b: 391).[28] Remissions on land revenues were also provided to farmers between 1931 and 1935, though with significant variation by region (Brown 1999b: 390).[29] Despite these belated concessions, abolishing regressive taxation and intervening into the ostensibly 'free market' colonial economy became articles of faith for the Burmese political and nationalist groups which emerged in the wake of the Depression.

The Saya San rebellion and nationalist groups (B: *wunthanu athins*) which had proliferated throughout rural areas of the country during the 1920s gradually coalesced into the '*Dobama Asiayone'* (Our Burma) independence movement. Inspired particularly by the May 1930 dock riots, the group was officially founded in 1933 and quickly became the primary political vehicle

[27] Scott (1976: 151-155) argues that the capitation tax "provided the detonator" (151) for the Saya San rebellion as it was "a unifying issue par excellence… [Whether] smallholders, tenants or labourers, the capitation tax was the single material claim weighed on all of them at a given, regular time" (155). See Brown 1999 for a critical assessment of the extent of tax remissions provided by colonial administrators during the Depression.

[28] However, given the collapse in the price of paddy the continued collection of the head tax had the effect of tripling its real burden when the Great Depression hit (Brown 1999b: 384). Despite the anger and frustration at the perceived unfairness of the head tax, its centrality to colonial administrative revenue meant it was not abolished in its entirety until 1941, after the outbreak of the Second World War (Brown 1999b: 391).

[29] As Brown (1999a: 392) notes, the level of remission from land revenue peaked at 10.3 percent and 11.5 percent in the district of the initial Saya San uprising (Tharrawaddy) in the two years following the rebellion. However, only 0.5 percent was provided in the year prior to the uprising. In contrast, Hanthawaddy district in the delta saw remissions of 5.6 in 1931/1932 and 1.4 percent in 1932/1933.

of largely middle-class student leaders who would later lead the national government, including Aung San (Khin Yi 1988, Taylor 2009: 216-217). Leaders of the group initially sought legal reform of colonial institutions and thus distanced themselves from the tax revolt campaigns that *wunthanu* groups had led prior to and following the Great Depression. The movement instead focused on organising factory workers and oil field labourers with the aim of making demands from existing colonial state institutions (see Taylor 2009: 215-217). Strikes became a favoured tool of the *Dobama* movement's leadership, with walk-outs often escalating into riots in major cities and towns which were met with violent suppression by British and Karen troops. The *Dobama* movement was heavily involved in the student strikes of 1936 and oil field strikes of 1938, both of which devolved into violence targeting Indian and Muslim populations and lethal clashes with mostly British, Indian and Karen police in Rangoon and Mandalay (Callahan 2003: 36, Walton 2016: 25).[30] *Dobama* activists criticised the role Karen troops played in suppressing these uprisings, as well as the earlier 1930 Saya San rebellion, accusing them of failing to "love their own country, cherish their own literature, or respect their own language" (Nemoto 2000, Callahan 2003: 36). Clear political cleavages began to develop between lowland political leaders, who saw colonial rule as exploitative and inequitable, and ethnic minority populations that served in the colonial security apparatus.

In the context of escalating anti-colonial sentiment in India and Burma the British extended greater political autonomy to Burma. By 1937, Burma was entirely separated from India and a new constitution was imposed which established a parliamentary form of government (see Taylor 2009: 121-124). Despite these reforms, revolutionary and especially Marxist thought found increasing traction among elite Burmese activists as it offered a potent critique of the colonial capitalist economy (Thompson 1959: 19, Taylor 2009, ch 3, Walton 2016: 27). The independence movement increasingly converged around a broad leftist ideology, especially after the translation of Marx's writings into Burmese in 1937 (Walton 2016: 26-27). The terminology of 'socialism', 'Marxism' and 'communism' were used interchangeably by many in the movement, with activists often explaining these concepts to colleagues and the general population using widely known Buddhist terminology (Walton 2016: 27-28). The main parties that emerged from the *Dobama* movement varied in their opinions of existing legal institutions but largely converged around a leftist, anti-capitalist ideology of a redistributive but low-taxing

[30] See Than Tun (1938) for a Burmese socialist critique of the British colonial response to the 1938 riots. Thanks to Phyo Win Latt for the referral.

state. The outbreak of the Second World War and mobilisation of nationalist leaders by Japan subsequently laid the institutional ground for full independence, generating deep centre-periphery divides which would shape redistributive politics for decades to follow.

Second World War further fractured state administration

Imperial conflict in Burma during the Second World War decimated the revenue capacity of the state and deepened pre-existing fractures between upland and lowland populations. Early in the war, leaders of the Burmese independence movement, popularly termed the "Thirty Comrades", sought out and received military training from Japan (Taylor 2009: 235). The group, led by Aung San, subsequently established the Burma Independence Army which participated in the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942. Subsequent military campaigns brought ethnic Burmese forces into conflict with British troops, predominantly comprised of ethnic minority soldiers recruited from upland areas.[31] After British forces abandoned Rangoon, Burmese administrators took control of non-military organs of the colonial state. However, there were minimal funds for state spending and the bureaucratic separation of lowland Burma from most upland areas continued (Guyot 1966: 215). The Japanese claimed revenues from customs, business income tax and forests for themselves, while the land taxes, which had provided the largest source of revenue until the Depression, collapsed further in the absence of export opportunities for rice (Guyot 1966: 209). Despite the ambitious social plans of Burmese politicians who were collaborating with Japanese imperial forces, government expenditure dropped precipitously, with political scientist Dorothy Guyot (1966: 209, 212-214) calculating it at 5 percent of the pre-war level in 1943-1944, and 3 percent in 1944-1945.

The relationship between independence leaders and the Japanese became increasingly strained as both Burmese resistance and Allied advances intensified in 1942. Both Communists and nationalists had been disseminating anti-Japanese propaganda and organising peasants in rural areas throughout the war, and these efforts received increasingly formal support from the

[31] Fearing potential rebellion, the British had explicitly avoided recruiting or training men from the plains and delta after the creation of the British Burma army in 1937, instead focusing pre-War recruit efforts on ethnic minorities from upland areas (see Callahan 2003: 31-42, Taylor: 2009: 100-101). Following an intensive recruitment drive between 1939 and 1941, the British Burma Army around the time of the Japanese Invasion reported more than double the number of soldiers from upland ethnic minority groups (2,797 Karens, 1,258 Chins, 852 Kachins – total 4907) than Burman troops (1893), in addition to 2578 Indians as well as smaller numbers of Chinese, Yunnanese and others (cited in Taylor 2009: 101).

British from late 1943 (see Guyot 1966, chapter ten; Callahan 2003: 72-82). In August 1944 the Anti-Fascist Organisation (AFO) was established which unified senior members of the Burma National Army (the reformulated Burma Independence Army) with the Communist Party of Burma and the Socialist Party (Callahan 2003: 73). The group declared national liberation as its primary goal, and the August 1944 agreement included a commitment to "fight against any force that did not recognise the AFO's 'provisional freedom government'" (Callahan 2003: 82). Subsequent correspondence, artfully crafted by the AFO's liaison to the Allies, Thein Pe, and dispatched to Supreme Allied Commander, Admiral Louis Mountbatten, called for eventual independence yet stated no timeframe (Callahan 2003: 83-84). The letter was received favourably by Mountbatten, and in March 1945 he decided to arm the AFO in attempt to control the Burmese nationalists and ease the path of Allied forces into Burma (Callahan 2003: 83). Later that month, Aung San marched the Burma National Army with British troops against the Japanese who then agreed to withdraw (Taylor 2009: 237). By May 1945, a compromise was reached between Burmese nationalist leaders and British officers to permit a British military administration and integrate the BNA into the British-led Burma Army (Taylor 2009: 237-238). A standing army of 12,000 men was established which granted senior command positions of three newly raised Burman-majority battalions to a trio of 'Thirty Comrades' independence leaders, including later dictator Ne Win (Callahan 2003: 98). BNA leaders demanded ethnicity-based division of ethnic Karen, Kachin and Chin soldiers within the military on the grounds of potential persecution and insubordination. These groups formed the non-British core of the Burma Army but were considered by the mostly ethnic Bamar counterparts to be 'British loyalists' (Callahan 2003: 96-99).

Following these negotiations, Aung San promptly commenced a campaign for full independence from the British. In August 1945, the AFO was reorganised into the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), a mass organisation aimed at unifying a "motley assembly of young left-wing politicians and the old guard" including civil servants and public figures previously aligned with both the British and Japanese (Maung Maung 1989: 182). Aung San was appointed the Chairman of the Supreme Council along with independence leaders Let Ya and Ne Win. The leader of the moderate 'White Flag' faction of the Communist Party was made Secretary General, and members of diverse party, business, ethnic and religious groups were appointed to the 15-member Working Committee (Maung Maung 1989: 180-183). The organisation attracted wide-spread support, with the first public meeting of the organisation in

Rangoon on 19 August 1945 attended by an estimated 300,000 people (Maung Maung 1989: 181).

The terms of the May 1945 military compromise also permitted Aung San to establish the People's Volunteer Organisation (PVO) which quickly began to work closely with the AFPFL mass campaign for independence (Callahan 2003: 110). A subsequent attempt by the British to partially disband the organisation in May 1946 led to clashes with police and the arrest of hundreds of PVO volunteers. AFPFL demands for independence for the entirety of Burma, including both lowland 'Ministerial' and upland 'Frontier' areas, thereafter intensified (Callahan 2003: 110-111).

Growing anger about escalating inflation and insufficient pay from the British administration to its Burmese employees prompted strikes by clerks and police officers in June and July 1946 (Callahan 2003: 107). Enlisting its close links with labour unions and the Communist and Socialist Parties while maintaining ties with Indian and Chinese businesspeople, in August 1946 the AFPFL encouraged a nationwide general strike which crippled all ports, roads and trade routes (Slater 2010: 267, Maung Maung 1989: 188). Threatening further mass demonstrations and labour unrest if the AFPFL did not form government, Aung San subsequently reached an agreement with British Prime Minister Attlee in January 1947 for independence within a year.

In order to secure sovereign claim over the entire territory of Burma the Aung San-Attlee Agreement required Burmese politicians to secure the assent of elites from indirectly-ruled upland areas to join a Union of Burma based in Rangoon (Taylor 2009: 228). Decades of autonomy, militarisation as well as promises of self-determination made by British officers during the war led some ethnic elites to question whether Burmese politicians would respect and maintain the status they had been granted during colonial rule after independence (see Taylor 1982, Walton 2008). As cleavages between lowland Burmese politicians and upland ethnic minorities populations deepened, a number of ethnic elites boycotted the February 1947 Panglong Conference. For instance, a group of Karen leaders instead met to form the Karen National Union, a political organisation aimed at safeguarding the interests of Karen people at independence (Callahan 2003: 120). Other ethnic groups including those located in lowland 'Burma Proper' such as Mon, Arakanese as well as more remote groups such as the Wa, Naga and other smaller ethnicities were excluded entirely (see Walton 2008: 901-903). In their

absence, Aung San, along with his AFPFL colleagues and other Shan, Kachin and Chin elites agreed to include principles of federalism within the 1947 constitution, specifically autonomy in internal affairs as well as revenue sharing and a right to secession (see Tinker 1984: 404-405). After ratification of the agreement by a British House of Commons special committee in April 1947, the issue of the 'Frontier' areas and of Burma's independence was treated as resolved from the perspective of the British (Taylor 2009: 229; Walton 2008: 897).

Lowland nationalist politicians opposed to the colonial economy subsequently enshrined the vision of a redistributive state in independence political institutions. A constituent assembly in Rangoon ratified a constitution drafted by non-Communist factions within the AFPFL calling for the establishment of a "socialist and egalitarian society" (Taylor 2009: 229-230). Historian Hugh Tinker argued that the independence constitution reflected a consensus expressed by Aung San in June 1947 "to bring to an end the 'colonial economy', based on the export of raw materials" through a form of socialism focused on nationalisation and industrialisation (Tinker 1967: 93). The socialist objectives enshrined in the constitution departed radically from the 'free-market' ideology of British rule. However, the centralised federal structure created by the constitution retained considerable colonial-era autonomy granted to some upland ethnic elites to manage their own tax regimes, budgets and police forces (Taylor 2009: 230). Varying lowland and upland experiences of colonial rule thus shaped the subsequent design of independence political institutions through elite negotiation. This bequeathed an independent state which was ideologically committed to redistribution yet which granted considerable autonomy from central state priorities to some ethnic minority populations.

After Aung San and part of his cabinet were assassinated by a political rival in July 1947, British colonial rule finally came to a legal end with independence in January 1948. Almost a century of British governance geared towards agricultural and commodity extraction had generated a constitutionally entrenched consensus among lowland political and military elite against 'free market' capitalism and in favour of a more actively redistributive state. Deep divides of ideology, class and personal loyalty remained among lowland elites, especially within the cross-class nationalist AFPFL whose new leader U Nu inherited the newly independent administration in January 1948 following Aung San's assassination (Maung Maung 1989: 242). Despite the formal constitutional and informal elite commitment to state-led redistribution, however, the Second World War left central institutions with little administrative or fiscal capacity to raise and effectively expend revenue. This generated deep

divides, especially in the upland periphery where minority elites had either negotiated considerable constitutional autonomy or were beginning to form insurgent groups to fight for greater autonomy or independence. These formal and informal institutional dynamics would shape the course of distributive politics for decades to follow.

Section Two: The rise and fall of interventionist welfare capitalism (1948-1962)

Post-independence leaders embrace interventionist welfare capitalism

The post-independence government sought to advance industrialisation through state interventions into a partially market-based economy. The 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma gave significant power to the state to own and control resources and regulate economic life (Mya Maung 1970: 535). Bequeathed with these powers, Prime Minister U Nu attempted to balance the competing interests of the business and trading class. Demands for land nationalisation were voiced by the left of the AFPFL as well as the Communist Party, part of which briefly joined Aung San's AFPFL alliance after the more radical 'Red Flag' faction moved into underground rebellion against the state (Badgley 1974: 244)**.** U Nu attempted to bridge these constituencies through a vision of modernisation and industrialisation best expressed in the Eight Year Plan, also referred to as the Pyidawtha Plan, launched in August 1952. The more technical English version and the Burmese folk version crafted by Prime Minister U Nu differed greatly in their rhetorical emphasis (see Tharaphi Than 2013). However, reflecting U Nu's continued commitment to ending the extractive dimensions of the colonial economy, both plans aimed squarely at reducing Burma's economic reliance upon raw commodity export – especially rice, oil and teak – and encouraging industrialisation so as to improve the welfare of the average Burmese citizen (Brown 2013: 106). Pyidawtha was translated into English as the 'Welfare Plan' but literally means 'Happy Royal Land', signalling U Nu's simultaneous desires "to embrace tradition and promise development to the country" (Tharaphi Than 2013: 647).

Formulated with the assistance of foreign consultants, the Pyidawtha Plan comprised ten key schemes aimed at achieving economic modernisation. These included nationalisation and redistribution of cultivatable lands to create small land holders, schemes to provide health and welfare services, improvements in education and infrastructure as well as transfer of power to regional governments (Tharaphi Than 2013: 646). Central to these objectives was the creation of state industrial enterprises and public corporations ranging from steel and sugar mills to

pharmaceuticals, brick and tea factories (Brown 2013: 106). All were to operate according to 'business principles' and were to be financed initially through the sale of rice, which had boomed in the early 1950's with the outbreak of the Korean War (Khin Maung Kyi 1966, Brown 2013: 106) (Khin Maung Kyi 1966: 96, Brown 2013: 106). A statutory monopoly in the export of rice was granted to the newly-created State Agricultural Marketing Board (SAMB), continuing a practice established during the British wartime administration (Brown 2013: 104, Khin Maung Kyi 1966: 96). SAMP set the purchase price for rice at a set-rate and then sold at fluctuating international export prices, justifying the practice on the basis of protecting farmers from extreme fluctuations in commodity prices. The scheme netted considerable profits, and SAMP quickly became an essential source of state revenue, partly supplementing the collapse in land tax revenues which had not been re-established after the War (Taylor 2009: 222, 258).[32] A State Agricultural Bank was established to provide loans to cultivators and replace the credit functions performed by *chettiars*, many of whom had fled either during the war or in the early years of independence (Turnell 2009: 174-202).[33]

Despite state intervention into the rural economy, the Pyidawtha Plan stopped short of socialising all ownership and production. Rather, it aimed for a 'mixed economy' in which 65 percent of capital would be held by the private sector (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 54). Measures designed to redistribute assets thus retained private property ownership. Land 'nationalisation' legislated initially in 1948 and again in 1954 effectively served to shift legal ownership of agricultural land from foreign and indigenous landlords to sitting tenants, with compensation – albeit with plenty of conditions – provided for their loss (see Taylor 2009: 278-280). Profits from state monopolisation of the agricultural economy, meanwhile, were intended to drive a form of welfare capitalist industrialisation which provided for the welfare of workers. Rather than funding redistribution through direct taxation, an approach resisted by many in the AFPFL and opposed by the Socialist and Communist parties, the private sector and industrial workers were legally required to shoulder the bulk of responsibility for provision of social insurance.

[32] By 1956-57 land revenue comprised only 4 percent of tax revenue and 2 percent of state income, while income from ministries, state trading corporations, Japanese war repartitions and customs together comprised 60 percent of total revenue (Taylor 2009: 258). A smaller proportion of revenue (22 percent) was also derived from an income tax, though this was almost exclusively paid by state employees as the government was reluctant to force traders and shopkeepers in the private sector to shoulder increased tax burden (Khin Maung Kyi 1966: 101; Taylor 2009: 258).

[33] The war-time flight, combined with attempts to nationalise and indigenize the economy after independence, saw the numbers of Indians in Burma drop considerably from 1.1 million in 1942 to between 700,000 and 800,000 by the 1950s (Egreteau 2011: 36, 40, Brown 2013).

The blending of market and social concerns in the Pyidawtha Plan bore striking similarity to the American ideology of welfare capitalism which had been dominant in the decades prior to the Great Depression. The philosophy of welfare capitalism idealised an 'associative state' in which companies would voluntarily provide welfare to both their workers and the broader community through privatised or local charity (Hawley 1974, Orloff 1988: 62-63). Advocates argued that corporate measures to improve the welfare of workers such as eight-hour days and enterprise-level collective bargaining, would boost worker productivity and strengthen loyalty to employers (Zieger 1977: 178-179). Though rarely enacted on any consistent basis, welfare capitalism as a cultural ideal appealed to American reformers and political leaders who opposed public, state-led social efforts (see Brandes 1976, Brody 1980: 61). One of the major advocates for welfare capitalism in the 1920s was Secretary of Commerce and later US President Herbert Hoover. In a series of writings in the early 20th century, he developed a notion of collaborative industrial democracy in which businesses would cooperate with each other, with government and with their employees through self-governing organisations to deliver "desired outcomes for society" (Himmelberg 2001: 34-35).[34] Government regulation to ensure these outcomes was considered undesirable and unnecessary as the benefits of such action would be evident to all and have greater meaning if taken voluntarily rather than compelled by state intervention. In the first decades of the twentieth century Hoover's own Burma Corporation had enacted a form of welfare capitalism at a mining concession in upland areas of Shan State.[35] Later as US President, Hoover responded to the economic downturn of the Depression by encouraging private philanthropic efforts and lending minimal state welfare assistance to those rendered destitute (see Wilson 1975, ch 4). The blatant failure of voluntary employer-based and charitable initiatives to alleviate the dire need created by the market collapse drove increasing "demands for federal action to cope with the economic crisis" (Orloff 1988: 65). This laid the path for President Roosevelt's later New Deal programme which encompassed the state-mandated employer-provision of old-age and unemployment insurances.

[34] As Secretary of Commerce, Hoover spent much of the 1920s responding to economic downturns and other social crises by formulating plans with "enlightened" corporate capitalists to "meet the needs of industrial democracy without the interference of government bureaucrats" (Wilson 1975: 89).

[35] Between 1906 and 1935 the Burma Corporation, in which Hoover was an early investor, held one of the largest mining concessions in upland Burma, in Namtu, Shan State. He personally managed mining operations and developed a corporate apparatus of welfare services including both education and health-care for mine workers. See Baillargeon, D. 2017. "'The Commonwealth of Namtu': British World Mining, Finance, and Development in the Northern Shan States, 1906-1935". Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies - Annual Conference, Toronto, Canada.

An interventionist form of welfare capitalism appealed to U Nu and other middle-class AFPFL politicians, at least ideologically, as it allowed them to chart a course between a regulated form of capitalism on the one hand and anti-tax campaigns and redistributive demands of the Communist Party of Burma on the other (Khin Maung Kyi 1966, Tharaphi Than 2013: 649).[36] The initiatives of the Pyidawtha Plan thus sought to couple redistribution of land as well as a state monopoly over rice export with a market-based economy which encouraged private enterprise and foreign investment. In U Nu's vision of welfare capitalism, capitalist enterprise would be regulated to require employers and employees to co-contribute for the provision of a formalised system of social protection. One of the central mechanisms for ensuring this welfare mix for industrial sector workers was the 1954 Social Security Act. The Act created a state-run Social Security Board (SSB) which would provide workers with medical treatment, maternity and injury benefits, a survivor's pension, and funeral assistance. The scheme was drawn up with the assistance of consultant Louis Walinsky, who had obtained a doctorate in economics from Cornell University in the 1920s (Tharaphi Than 2013: 641). Progressive-era concerns about budgetary viability and the need to encourage worker participation in the industrial economy were entrenched in the scheme's design, reflecting the co-contribution model of social insurance schemes created during Roosevelt's New Deal (see Quadagno 1984).[37] The scheme was to be financed by a set percentage contribution of monthly salaries to the Social Security Board by employers and employees, with capital contributions made by the government (see Walinsky 1962, Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 85). People who were unemployed, employed in small businesses or worked outside of state-owned, private, foreign and joint ventures were excluded from the scheme.

[36] Tharaphi Than (2013) notes considerable discord about the Pyidawtha Plan among political elites, particularly regarding the degree to which foreign investment and aid would be permitted as part of the Plan. She cites two female politicians with past histories of interaction with the British as encouraging U Nu to seek foreign aid and expertise "as long as the country did not sacrifice its ideologies to the donor countries": Karen politician and representative of Burmese Christians Mrs Ba Maung Chain; and Daw Mya Sein, who studied a BLitt at Oxford University (Tharaphi Than 2013: 649, 643 fn 19).

[37] Many Progressives including Roosevelt feared that state-led social protection schemes which did not require co-contribution on behalf of beneficiaries may prove 'fiscally irresponsible' and promote a sense of entitlement from the state which could remove the incentive for beneficiaries to seek work (see Orloff 1988: 67-70). The social insurance schemes established by President Roosevelt subsequently required employers and employees to co-contribute for social insurance schemes, enshrining a worker-based system of social protection which continues to shape America's welfare regime (see Orloff 1988: 37-81).

U Nu's domestic campaign to support Pyidawtha Plan initiatives such as the SSB attempted to transcend the critique of the colonial economy, and instead envisioned a normative ideal of a 'morally rich' capitalist society. Collective improvement, he promised, would be achieved through a combination of state economic intervention as well as hard work, moral conduct and popular participation of ordinary citizens in schemes of national development. U Nu drew heavily on Buddhist cosmology as well as Burmese legends to encourage "public co-operation" with the government's Pyidawtha Plan (see Figure 3 and Tharaphi Than 2013: 648).[38] In widely circulated Burmese language speeches and writings U Nu argued that "poverty brought corrupt morality" and warned of the "dangers of not uniting or working hard or having loose morals" (Tharaphi Than 2013: 648). The Plan encouraged cooperation at a national level among charitable welfare groups and the formation of local 'Community Chests' to raise funds "for the use of voluntary social welfare agencies" (Union of Burma 1954: 125). U Nu urged Buddhists to see their contributions and sacrifices to the various schemes and components of the Pyidawtha Plan as meritorious donations (B: *dana)* and promised their collective effort would make them "as healthy and strong as the legendary heroes" of Burmese history (Tharaphi Than 2013: 648).

[38] U Nu's campaign reflected similar attempts by Gandhi in India to enlist Hindu vernacular notions of giving (dan) and service (seva) to encourage contributions to 'development' including "education, sanitation, protection and promotion of… village industries to help local handicrafts and artisans, and the fight against untouchability" (Tandon 2002: 7 in Bornstein 2012: 35).

Figure 3 Cartoon by Pe Thein in 'The Burman', 7 Sept 1952, pg. 1. Source: Egreteau, R. 2017. Personal correspondence.

Anthropological research during the early independence period suggested a strong preference to give charitable donations to monks, monasteries and pagodas rather than to poor or secular institutions. Melford Spiro noted that in the 1950s many Buddhists viewed donations and the patronage of Buddhist structures and monks as attracting the highest form of spiritual merit (B: *kutho*), thereby improving chance of ending the cycle of rebirth and reaching Nibbana (B: *neikban*). According to Spiro's interlocutors, contributing to more socially-oriented causes attracted little or no merit (Spiro 1982 [1970]: 463). To help justify the disproportionate burden

born by rural cultivators who were forced to sell their produce to the state at a fixed rate, U Nu appealed directly to the "strong Burmese tradition of charity (*a-hlu*)" in an effort "to persuade the people that merit can be acquired through devoting their resources and their energies to the building of works of social benefit" (Tinker 1957: 129). Analysts at the time noted that if "Buddhism and socialism could be conjugated to the extent of making social service a part of the acquisition of merit", it would have significant implications for the "whole nature of Burmese society" (Mendelson 1975). U Nu's broader vision of Pyidawtha thus promised a welfare capitalist form of modernisation, supported by contributions from rural cultivators, companies, industrial workers and the state, with a minimal increase in direct taxation. The welfare capitalist ideal allowed U Nu to combine the potentially paradoxical consensus reached by lowland independence politicians in favour of a low-taxing yet redistributive state with his own personal commitment to rejuvenating Buddhist customs and morality.

By the mid-1950s it was clear that the administrative and economic assumptions underpinning the Pyidawtha Plan were overly optimistic. The rising global price of rice, which drove sizable budget surpluses in 1951 and 1952 and underpinned the finances of the Plan, subsequently slumped, resulting in sizable deficits in 1953/1954 and 1954/1955 (Brown 2013: 106). Newly established state-corporations struggled to manage both industrial production and the distribution of goods. As their commercial performance was relatively poor and government revenue had become scarce, no additional state-run enterprises were created after 1952 (see Brown 2013: 106-109). With the AFPFL increasingly fractured over whether to continue to accept foreign investment or aid, international companies such as Unilever became reluctant to invest in new facilities or in joint ventures with state enterprises for fear that the state may later nationalise assets (Brown 2013: 111). Private sector manufacturing did begin to expand and diversify during the 1950s, though on a relatively modest scale (Tin Maung Maung Thant 2007: 89-90; Brown 2013: 113-115).[39] Although budgetary and administrative constraints to the Plan were significant, the major threat to U Nu's vision of welfare capitalism came from the institutional and ideological development of Burma's post-independence military.

[39] Government data on industrial production notes a significant increase in its contribution to gross national product from 6.5 percent in 1950/1951 to 15.1 percent in 1960/1961. However, the data is not disaggregated between state and private production, hiding the growth in the private sector which likely occurred during this period (Tin Maung Maung Thant 2007: 82). Total employment in private manufacturing in 1957 was 154,000, compared with 250,000 civil servants employed across all departments, boards and corporations (Taylor 2009: 284-285). The average size of private manufacturing establishments was 39, however, suggesting that the scale of the private industrial sector in Burma during this period was small relative to emergent companies in independence Indonesia, Malaya or Thailand (see Brown 2013: 114-115).

Consolidation of the military lays the path for socialist dictatorship

Colonial rule and the struggle for independence left the Burmese army (Tatmadaw) organisationally and ideologically fractured, pitting ethnic Bamar soldiers and armed leaders against their mostly British and Karen commanding officers. The 1945 merger of BNA forces into the British Burma Army reinforced ethnicity as an organising principle for military affairs, placing as it did ethnic Karen soldiers into senior command positions upon independence (Callahan 2003: 119-120). The arrangement proved debilitating for the post-independence army, exacerbating anxieties among recently integrated soldiers that their commanding officers were conspiring against the independence government (Callahan 2003: 118-119). While anger at what they perceived as a continuation of British rule generated a degree of unity among senior Burmese officers and soldiers, they were also deeply divided along ideological lines. In March 1948 the Communist Party of Burma insurgency intensified its insurrection against the government with the support of the more moderate 'White Flag' faction previously aligned with the AFPFL (Smith 1999: 105-106). The ethnic Karen leaders of the military subsequently adopted the same "ruthless scorched-earth policy" taken by the British against Communist insurgents in the immediate post-war period, razing villages suspected of sympathising with, or harbouring, Communists and executing potential insurgents (Callahan 2003: 123). Many soldiers merged or recruited into the military after the 1945 agreement associated capitalism with imperialism and thus sympathised with communism themselves (see Callahan 2003: 123). As a consequence, many viewed the brutal approach adopted by their British, Burmese loyalist and Karen superiors to the Communist rebels as denying their legitimate political grievances. The violent suppression thus only served to confirm Communist propaganda circulating at the time which framed AFPFL leaders as "tools of the imperialists who cared nothing for Burmese villagers" (Callahan 2003: 124, 123).

In the wake of the counter-insurgency campaigns, a large number of mostly ethnic Bamar soldiers deserted the army to join local PVO militias which had increasingly aligned themselves with the Communist insurgency (Callahan 2003: 122, 123). In May and June 1948, the AFPFL government and senior Burmese officers, viewing Karen loyalists as a far greater threat to independent Burma than the Communist rebels, offered them amnesty and sought to forge an alliance in an effort to counter Karen dominance within the army (Callahan 2003: 124, 129). After the power-sharing plan failed, the AFPFL government began to expand resourcing for a new paramilitary force, the Sitwundan, under the control of the AFPFL-aligned Minister

of Home Affairs. Earlier support provided by U Nu to the armed wing of the Karen National Union, the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), was also withdrawn (Callahan 2003: 127). Karen militia leaders quickly recognised that Burmese politicians and army officers were moving against them. Karen police and Sitwundan mutineers, as well as KNDO units and some defectors from the army, took control of major towns and strategic assets outside of Rangoon in the final months of 1948 (Callahan 2003: 131-132). Despite a British-brokered peace deal between U Nu and the Karen rebels in November 1948, in December 1948 and January 1949 local Sitwundan units began slaughtering Karen civilians (Callahan 2003: 132). The massacres prompted a further mutiny of Karen army units previously deployed against the Communists, many of whom promptly joined forces with the KNDO. By early January 1948 these units took control of Karen-majority neighbourhoods of Rangoon. The insurgency then spread throughout central Burma as a Karen army unit mutinied in Toungoo before proceeding northwards to Pyu and Maymyo (Callahan 2003: 133). The KNDO was promptly outlawed by U Nu, and in early February 1949 General Ne Win, one of the few senior Burmese army officers remaining in the military, deposed Karen General Smith Dun as Supreme Commander of All Defence and Police Forces (Callahan 2003: 134).

Upon taking control of the army, Commander in Chief Ne Win deployed several strategies aimed at unifying an army deeply fractured by mutinies. By February 1949, fewer than two thousand men remained in the uniform of the Union army, a fraction of the 12,000 soldiers at the time of the 1945 agreement between Aung San and the British (Callahan 2003: 114, 98). In order to bring a semblance of order to restive regions outside Rangoon, U Nu deployed Socialist Party politicians to strike alliances of convenience with local PVO, Sitwundan and other militia leaders in provincial areas (Callahan 2003: 138). Their contingent loyalty and assistance in counter-insurgency campaigns was secured through dispersion of state spoils such as weapons, commercial licences, land, loans, subsidies and grants from the Pyidawtha Plan, as well as "unofficial promises" to ignore their smuggling of teak, rice, gold and other commodities (Callahan 2003: 141-142).[40] PVO, Sitwundan and other irregular forces were also integrated into the military, and by 1950 major insurrections began to lose steam as locally raised militias assisted state forces to recapture strategic towns (Callahan 2003: 149).

[40] Many of these local militias allegedly engaged in widespread robbery and illegal activities into the early 1950s, prompting attempts by U Nu and army leaders to integrate more 'respectable' members into the Tatmadaw and disband less 'reliable' ones (Callahan 2003: 143).

Ne Win also set out to transform the army's organisation and separate it from the oversight of civilians. Fear of the growing presence of the Kuomintang (KMT) in the Shan states bordering China in the early 1950s was a primary driver of these organisational reforms.[41] Following the Tatmadaw's repeated defeat at the hands of the better-trained KMT military leaders between 1950 and 1953, Ne Win and military leaders began crafting themselves expansive planning and budgetary powers autonomous of civilians (Callahan 2003: 150). Ne Win and other military leaders had earlier developed the perception of U Nu and his civilian government as naïve and overly trusting of British and Karen officers, and criticised them for being willing to cede central authority to armed leaders for political benefit. Fearing that U Nu was willing to make political concessions with armed leaders they saw as threatening the state, in 1951 Ne Win and senior ranking officers demanded a sizable increase in the army's budget to 40 percent of the civilian government's expenditures (Callahan 2003: 150). Backed by expanded civilian financing, reforms were also implemented to military doctrine, command structures, training and logistics aimed at cultivating a distinct organisational *esprit de corps* for the organisationally fractured military.

Most innovations during this period including professional training, foreign study trips, military ceremonies, discipline and incentives were adopted by Ne Win and his senior planning staff without any civilian oversight (Callahan 2003: 159-169). Newly-developed military doctrine positioned Communist China as the most likely external threat to Burma. Meanwhile, the Psychological Warfare Unit established in 1952 developed a vernacular ideology combining nationalism and socialism which resonated with the political and economic grievances of soldiers and officers while unifying them against Burma's own Communist threat (Callahan 2003: 182-184, Maung Aung Myoe 2009: ch 2). Military doctrines and ideologies emphasising the importance of preserving the army and the socialist state at all costs were instilled into the officer corps at the West Point-style Defence Services Academy, also established in 1952 (Taylor 1985; Nakanishi 2013: 84-88). Non-profit, tax-exempt enterprises were also created to provide food and supplies for field units but which quickly expanded into other sectors (Callahan 2003: 168-169). By the late 1950s, a degree of organisational unity and

[41] Burmese civilian and armed elites imposed martial law in the Shan states in 1950 fearing an invasion by the People's Liberation Army and seeking to increase control over a restive region increasingly occupied by anti-Chinese and anti-Rangoon forces, some which were receiving regular supply drops from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Callahan 2003: 155-156). Already stretched by civilian administration duties, the military engaged in a number of failed operations against the KMT between 1950 and 1953, the last of which saw them roundly defeated by superior KMT firepower (Callahan 2003: 159).

self-confidence (relative to civilian politicians) had developed among both military staff and field commanders. When a 1958 split within the AFPFL prompted rumours that U Nu would integrate Communist guerrillas into the government and the army, senior military officers including Ne Win responded by demanding a period of military 'caretaker' rule (Callahan 2003: 185).

The military administration between 1958 and 1960 saw army leaders further institutionalise their organisational dominance, exacerbating their pre-existing scepticism of civilian politicians. Army officers were embedded throughout the bureaucracy while brigade commanders were appointed to head regional 'security councils' charged with disarming civilian-controlled police and militias at a local level, taking control of mass organisations and leading population registration efforts (Callahan 2003: 192). Meanwhile, military-owned business conglomerates, such as the Defence Services Institute and Burma Economic Development Corporation, diversified rapidly. By 1960 the tax-exempt, ostensibly non-profit enterprises managed by the DSI had expanded into banking, shipping, hotels, manufacturing, fisheries and poultry distribution, as well as a construction firm, a bus line and the biggest department store in the country (Mya Maung 1970: 538, Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 57, Callahan 2003: 191).[42] The military was also increasingly critical of the constitution and of civilians both internally and in public. The Psychological Warfare Directorate released papers criticising liberal aspects of the 1948 Constitution as well as U Nu's conciliatory approach to anti-government forces. A 1958 paper, which later formed the basis of public military propaganda, claimed that the Constitution granted too much freedom to citizens to "express his views and desires upon all subjects in whatever way he wishes":

> What we dread most is that unscrupulous politicians and deceitful Communist rebels and their allies may take advantages of these flaws, weaknesses, contradictions and inadequacies in the Constitution and bring about in the country gangster political movements, syndicalism, anarchism and a totalitarian regime (cited in Callahan 2003: 189).

Despite these increasingly public critiques of civilian rule, the Union parliament extended the mandate of the caretaker administration until general elections were held in February 1960.

[42] The military also actively encouraged military officers to start small businesses by issuing loans to purchase vehicles and equipment, a welfare capitalist approach that would later form the basis of approach to veterans pensions (Callahan 2003: 169).

Power was then returned to U Nu, whose party won a decisive victory despite apparent attempt by some military field commanders to rig the poll against his party (see Callahan 2003: 197; Nakanishi 2013: 89). Given the low rice price, lack of foreign investment interest, as well as the military's commercial expansion and acquisition of state assets, the targets for private sector development central to the Pyidawtha's optimistic plans were falling behind. By the end of 1960 the state's share of capital remained at 56 percent relative to less than 44 percent for the private sector, well below the 65 percent private sector objective in the original Pyidawtha Plan (Mya Maung 1970: 537). The shortfall prompted the passage of a new 'Four Year Plan' in 1960 and a law which sought to encourage further foreign investment (Mya Maung 1970: 537, Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 58). In August 1961 the Parliament declared Buddhism the state religion, fulfilling a promise made by U Nu during the election campaign but angering many Christian Kachin and Karen leaders (Brown 2013: 133). U Nu also appeared to be considering granting more extensive autonomy to Shan and Kayah leaders, who had been given a right to secede from the Union by Aung San in the Panglong Agreement of 1947.

The military viewed the government as chaotic and blundering, reinforcing a growing disdain for civilians and civilian rule among both officers and enlisted personnel. Following further consolidation after the Caretaker Administration, by 1962 the Tatmadaw had entrenched itself as the largest and most cohesive institution in the country, boasting 57 infantry battalions and more than 100,000 soldiers (Callahan 2003: 173). The military's growing institutional capability and self-confidence, combined with its unification of uniformed personnel around an ideology of nationalist socialism, ultimately enabled Ne Win to seize power and terminate the path of interventionist welfare capitalism chartered until that point by Burma's civilian leaders.

Section Three: The rise and fall of military socialism (1962-1988)

Military-dominated socialism supersedes welfare capitalism

The Revolutionary Council (RC) chaired by Ne Win justified its March 1962 coup against U Nu's democratically elected government in explicitly redistributive terms, blending socialist, Buddhist and nationalist discourses (see Nakanishi 2013, chapter 3). Contrary to dominant theoretical explanations for military coups against democratic governments, Burma's military in 1962 thus did not seize power to protect commercial elites from democratic demands for economic redistribution (see Slater et al. 2014). Drawing heavily on propaganda formulated in the 1950s by the military's Psychological Warfare Directorate, the coup leaders articulated

their social and economic goals in the texts *The Burmese Way to Socialism* (April 1962) and *System of Correlation of Man and His Environment* (January 1963). Both emphasised the need for military intervention to put an end to the ongoing exploitation of Burmese people by commercially-minded 'feudalists' and 'imperialists'. Referencing the role of foreign advisers and the government's plans to attract foreign investment and encourage private capital, the new junta claimed U Nu had collaborated with foreign profiteers to return "landlords and capitalists" to positions of dominance within the economy (RC in Mya Maung 1970: 538). *The Burmese Way to Socialism* provided scope for some profit-oriented businesses to function, stating that "national private enterprises" which had been "steadfastly contributing to the general well-being of the people" would be permitted to "occupy a worthy place in the new society" (cited in Brown 2013: 135). However, profit-seeking enterprises were declared to be "social evils" as they relied on "exploitation of man by man" (cited in Brown 2013: 134). The Revolutionary Council's July 1962 *Constitution of the Burma Socialist Programme Party* also repeated concerns about the "general apathy of the electorate" earlier expressed during the caretaker administration (see Callahan 2003: 189). These concerns were used to justify the dominance of military officials, especially General Ne Win, over a pyramidal structure of socialist order (see Kyi May Kaung 1995).[43] The more philosophical *System of Correlation of Man and His Environment* reinforced the regime's commitment to a top-down interpretation of Marxist-Leninism with a Buddhist inflection (Brown 2013: 135, Campbell 2014). Civilian leaders who attempted to satisfy the colonial-era ideological consensus of a redistributive yet low-taxing state via a form of welfare capitalism were declared "guilty of having betrayed socialism by perpetuating capitalism and infecting the masses with a bourgeois mentality" (Mya Maung 1970: 538). In their stead, the Revolutionary Council resolved itself "to march unswervingly and arm-in-arm with the people of the Union of Burma towards the goal of socialism" (cited in Brown 2013: 134). The industrialisation strategy adopted by the Revolutionary Council was thus deeply shaped by the elite consensus generated during colonial rule in favour of a redistributive state.

The BSPP quickly became pre-occupied with rooting out what it considered the 'moral degeneracy' of capitalist enterprise and foreign interests, a theme which had been central to colonial-era nationalist and independence movements. In 1963 Ne Win committed the state to

[43] Civilian participation in the BSPP was tightly restricted until the party became a mass organisation following the 1974 national constitution, though even then only at the sub- township village, ward, workplace and cell level.

take over production, distribution, import and export of all major commodities, and moved quickly to nationalise all local and foreign traders and capitalists. In early 1963, western companies such as the Burma Corporation, Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation and subsidiaries of Unilever Co and other multinationals were nationalised and integrated into the newly formed Socialist Economy Construction Committee. All of Burma's private commercial banks, around half of which were Indian owned, were also nationalised and reconstituted as 'People's Banks' (Brown 2013: 135, Turnell 2009: 224-228). Then in late 1963 the Revolutionary Council banned private imports and, breaking clearly with the AFPFL's more accommodating approach to the private sector, nationalised the export trade and all wholesale and retail outlets, including more than 15,000 small private shops (Turnell 2009: 229). Combined with the earlier seizure of many Indian-owned banks, these nationalisations prompted the exodus of perhaps 300,000 Indian and sub-continental traders and financiers between 1963-1964, leaving mostly the stateless and poor (Brown 2013: 136, fn 11). In a further measure aimed at rooting out the commercial class, in May 1964 the RC demonetised all 100 and 50 Kyat notes in an attempt to strip funds away from 'foreign capitalists' and the wealthy who it claimed were using the currency "to attack the construction of the socialist economy" (Mya Maung 1970: 542).[44] The 1960s and 70s thus effectively saw the almost "total displacement of all private enterprise by governmental trade corporations" in the service of the RCs vision of a socialist order (Mya Maung 1970: 548).

The BSPP used control over trade and distribution to pursue an import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) economic strategy. Though nationalisation was pursued far more aggressively than during the early independence period, the ISI approach relied on many of the mechanisms of state economic intervention enlisted by U Nu's independence government. The state-enterprises which had achieved minimal success in the 1950s were expanded and driven far harder through the appointment of military officers as factory and enterprise managers, most of whom had no prior business experience (see Brown 2013: 145). However, welfare capitalist initiatives established as part of the 1950s Pyidawtha Plan also endured into the BSPP period. The state-mediated Social Security Board was extended to provincial towns and its scope expanded to make establishments with five or more workers eligible to participate. As a result, the number of enrolled participants in the scheme increased from 296,000 in 1962 to a

[44] Yet a commitment from the government "to redeem the notes of those who had saved the money honestly" apparently allowed a sizable proportion of domestic entrepreneurs to avoid confiscation on the grounds of 'humanitarianism' (Mya Maung 1970: 542).

high of 365,000 in 1973 (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 141).[45] Schemes such as emergency loans from cooperative credit societies and direct purchasing through factories were also introduced later in an attempt to maintain worker welfare amid the escalating inflation and scarcity of the 1980s (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 273).

Despite the BSPP's aversion to formal taxation, state-led industrialisation was financed by expansive demands on the country's rural population. The private agricultural market, which had functioned during the colonial and early independence periods, was superseded by a system of cooperatives, quotas and food stores. Retaining the state rice trading monopoly model established by the British and retained by U Nu, the BSPP set quotas for the sale of agricultural produce, with farmers forced to sell at a fixed price to the state enterprise (Brown 2013: 140). Rice and other staple goods were then sold by the state monopoly at a floating international market rate or disbursed domestically through government shops, known as 'People's Stores', which were chronically understaffed.[46] Cooperatives were organised through the BSPP which served to ensure, along with other mass organisations, at least ritualistic adherence of their members to the language, symbols and ceremonies of the socialist state (Taylor 2009: 373). The cooperatives were often established through confiscation of land, an approach legitimised by the state's claim to ownership of all agricultural land (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007: 252).

Cooperatives, as well as small-holder farmers more broadly, received state support through agricultural loans but this credit was short-term and insufficient to finance long-term improvements in agriculture – covering only 11 percent of average cultivation costs in the early 1970s (Brown 2013: 140, Mya Maung 1970: 546). Though cooperative-based land ownership increased cultivator access to land and achieved a degree of equity, 87 percent of these plots were too small to produce economies of scale or facilitate surplus essential to finance the BSPP's ISI strategy (Myat Thein 2004: 89). Cooperative cultivators also were not permitted to sell or mortgage their holding or purchase a further holding, effectively eliminating the potential for legal cultivator productivity investment (Brown 2013: 142). The cooperative movement was central to the BSPPs claim of helping farmers "overcome the vicious circle of indebtedness and eliminate capitalistic exploitation by merchants and moneylenders" (Mya

[45] Efforts were made from 1973 to narrow the beneficiaries of the Scheme to exclude workers who were not classed as 'active' members (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 282, fn 59).
[46] Brown (2013: 146) notes that the distribution of goods through the private marked during the civilian period involved perhaps 2 million people, whereas "the entire system of [BSPP] public stores employed just 50,000" throughout the 1960s.

Maung 1970: 546). Indeed, most other community or civil society groups independent of BSPP mass organisations were often brutally suppressed (Steinberg 1999). The absence of market options for sale and incentives for productivity improvements resulted in a steep decline in agricultural productivity, low rates of loan repayment and in many cases increasing indebtedness – though now to the state rather than foreign creditors (Mya Maung 1970: 544-545).

Meanwhile, the colonial boundaries of directly-ruled 'Ministerial' Burma and indirectly-ruled 'Frontier' or periphery Burma largely endured until 1988. Ethnic minority areas, especially mountainous regions, were mostly excluded from struggles over control of the state or 'political community' headquartered in Rangoon, where Burmese was the *lingua franca* of post-independence administration and government. Consequentially, Mary Callahan argues that the map of political contestation remained tightly constrained to lowland Burman majority areas throughout BSPP rule (Callahan 2004: 102). Though the BSPP did make policies which applied to the ethnic minority or 'Frontier' regions, she argues that few AFPFL or BSPP politicians sought to "[deliver] on the goods of citizenship to these territorially and linguistically distinct populations" with whom they had little contact or means of communication (Callahan 2004: 107). Instead, initiatives run in upland areas were largely "programs aimed at teaching 'backward' peoples how to think correctly" as BSPP Socialists, and were modest in scale and scope in comparison to the ideological and linguistic programmes in lowland central Burma (Callahan 2004: 104).[47]

Socialist-era propaganda campaigns that were run in the periphery meanwhile only fed feelings of marginalisation among ethnic and religious minorities (Lehman 1967: 104). These sentiments were reinforced when the Socialist government revised the citizenship laws in 1982 and effectively rendered minority peoples 'inferior' to the ethnic 'Bamar' majority.[48] Widespread minority perceptions of political exclusion by the state provided fertile ground for insurgent elites to extend and expand their resistance to the socialist state (Smith 1999: 98-99,

[47] See Callahan 2004: 106 for a discussion of the significant resources these initiatives received in lowland areas.
[48] The legislation created three categories of citizens - full, associate and naturalized – which essentially relegated ethnic minorities to associate status at best. Attaining citizenship also required presentation of government identification cards that had often not been issued in rebel-held areas or in government-held territory where local populations could not speak Burmese. As Josef Silverstein (1997: 167-196) argued, many minorities subsequently "lost their qual standing with other indigenous peoples of Burma and were treated as stateless". Some were issued with Foreigners' Registration Cards which subsequently barred them from key occupations and disqualified their children from university (Silverstein 1997: 182).

283). By the mid-1970s more than a dozen ethnic-based armed militias and guerrilla groups had launched or intensified rebellions against the state. In some cases armed elites and their societal partners developed health and education systems to cultivate popular support, often financing social governance through their control of licit and illicit smuggling routes that criss-crossed Burma's borderlands with Thailand, China and India (Smith 2007: 19, Oh 2013: 8). The dwindling of government revenue, partly a consequence of the blossoming borderlands black market, was becoming one of the major threats to BSPP socialism.

BSPP attempts to resolve the contradictions of its economic strategy

The mechanisms of price-setting and food quotas at the core of the BSPPs redistributive apparatus were economically contradictory in the context of broader ISI policies. In addition to border smuggling, a sizable black market began to flourish within lowland Burma to plug the gaps which often developed in the command and control economy. In rural areas many farmers sold excess rice to black marketeers at a price above the fixed government price, providing an important alternative source of technically illicit income but reducing the overall supply of rice provided to food stores. Most farmers then collected quotas of rice and other food stuffs from government stores, depleting already limited state supply (Mya Maung 1970: 543). The role of the informal economy as an essential coping mechanism was reinforced in the mid-1960s when severe food shortages in parts of the country resulted in riots in Rangoon in 1967. The state responded by temporarily "permit[ing] consumers to purchase directly from the farmers in order to reduce the spreading panic in the cities", effectively encouraging commercial transactions to occur outside the state (Stifel 1971: 805).

In addition to helping to solve distribution problems, the black market was also central to local BSPP officials hosting state spectacles and official visits by senior members of the regime. In many cases these illicit enterprises were run by the same local bosses who had formed alliances of convenience with Socialist Party politicians during the early independence period (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2003: 45-54, 57-58). In addition to fulfilling essential supply functions for the local state, political scientist Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2003: 51) recounts that many illegal traders (*hmaung-kho*) also maintained good relations with BSPP officials at a local level through regular donations to government initiatives. In this context of implicit and sometimes explicit tolerance of non-state commercial transactions, by the mid-1980s the black market was

estimated at up to 75 percent of Myanmar's officially recorded international trade.[49] Though it deprived the state of taxation revenue and foreign currency essential for achieving the BSPPs vision of socialist equity, the black market also fulfilled essential economic functions of supply and distribution which the understaffed and inefficient state system struggled to perform.

Low agricultural productivity and the ubiquity of the black market compounded another contradiction within the BSPPs economic strategy: distribution of rice quotas to mostly industrial workers depleted the available stock of rice for the state monopoly to export. This deprived the BSPP of the foreign currency it needed to import machinery and grow its manufacturing sector as the ISI strategy demanded (Kudo 2005: 11). Rice exports collapsed from 1.7million tons in 1960 to just 0.6 million in 1980, down from 3 million tons in 1940 (Brown 2013: 163). It is little surprise then that the output of the manufacturing sector increased by less than 7 percent throughout the 1960s and 1970s, despite attracting almost 25 percent of state investment by the mid-1970s (Myat Thein 2004: 61). The BSPP effectively enlisted an ISI model which had achieved minimal industrial growth during the welfare capitalist early independence period, drove it harder with the coercive apparatus of the military state and forced a significant proportion of economic activity 'underground'.[50]

Meanwhile, the strict limits imposed on civil society and legal market trade prevented U Nu's vision of Buddhist 'charity' contributing to social and national development from gaining traction among ordinary people or the few licit commercial elites who carved out niches during this period. The sparse ethnographic fieldwork conducted during BSPP rule suggests meritorious charity (*dana)* remained narrowly understood. It was largely enlisted to describe "formal acts of generosity" between laity and monks who acted as 'fields of merit' (Schober 1989, Schober 1996: 197). While merit was often shared among lay participants in ritual performances of generosity, anthropologist Julianne Schober's research during the 1980s suggests that explicitly meritorious charity rarely provided material public goods or engaged in social redistribution as U Nu had envisioned in the 1950s. Instead *dana* predominantly took the form of ritualised giving to monks or monastic institutions, especially for the purposes of

[49] Conservative estimates were that 40 percent of all trade activity occurred outside of state control during this period (Smith 2007: 19), while others placed illegal trade in the early 1980s at 75 percent of total official trade (Mya Than 1992: 58).

[50] However, as Kyaw Yin Hlaing notes, the black market was mostly tolerated at a local level throughout the 1960s and 1970s given it was central to party functions as well as keeping order by supplying and distributing goods unable to be sourced in required amounts through state monopolies.

religious celebrations to which both legal and illegal businesses and government officials often made sizable donations. However, as Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2003: 51) points out "*hmaung-kho* [illegal] traders could donate more, and more often than others" to support religious as well as social organisations as they were more affluent and wealthy than the far *smaller* licit commercial class. Moreover, the BSPP did not seek to explicitly enlist Buddhist concepts to legitimise the regime, beyond claiming in official propaganda that its leaders were "men of excellent morals" (Tin Maung Maung Than 1993, Campbell 2014). In the context of the constrained economic and civil life of the BSPP period, neither a broader interpretation of 'charity' nor a non-state system of social protection were able to emerge on any widespread basis (Walton 2016: 152).

A partial embrace of the market and the end of the BSPP

Reform of the BSPP's redistributive apparatus was almost inevitable after it produced such stark economic contradictions as well as recurrent social uprisings. The state began to welcome foreign aid and technical assistance, receiving more than US$2 billion in loans from the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and others during the 1970s and 1980s to finance productivity improvements, especially in agriculture (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2003: 23). Even private capital was given some minimal role in the economy through new laws that ostensibly made state nationalisation of businesses illegal and others that introduced market-based and production incentives into agriculture and state enterprises (Cook 1994: 131, Brown 2013: 172). The 1970s reforms, along with significant investment in agricultural improvement, did encourage marked growth in rice and other crop yields along with significant expansion in oil, natural gas and raw metals production and export (Brown 2013: 152). However, contradictions between the new measures and the BSPPs twenty-year economic plan meant they largely failed to stoke substantial domestic investment (Cook 1994: 131). State-led import-substitution industrialisation remained the driver of BSPP economic strategy, claiming over one third of government expenditures between 1978 and 1985 (Brown 2013: 152). Constraints in financing, input sourcing and foreign trade for small and medium enterprises endured, for instance. The regime also rejected foreign direct investment (apart from off-shore oil), continued to suppress market-based activities and allocated the bulk of state resources to state enterprises and co-operatives sectors (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 275; Brown 163).[51]

[51] The only exception to foreign investment was the offshore oil sector, where joint-ventures were permitted (see Brown 2013:172).

Contrary to the objectives of the 1970s reforms, sizable private manufacturing operations thus declined markedly during this period. As political economist Tin Maung Maung Than (2007: 260-261) recounts, enterprises employing between 10 and 100 workers almost halved from 4792 in 1974 to 2531 in 1988, with particularly steep declines in the private sector. Meanwhile, large private enterprises employing more than 100 workers were "virtually wiped out", dropping from 26 in 1974 to 4 in 1988. With the decline in sizable employers came a drop in the number of workers covered by formal social insurance schemes, with 1973 being the peak in Social Security Board membership despite sizable state investment in the sector.[52]

The unprofitability of industrial enterprises, the limited export of rice and the large volume of untaxed black market trade eroded the revenue viability of the BSPPs policies aimed at industrialisation and redistribution. The colonial system of revenue which relied heavily on land taxation had effectively been replaced by a system of informal taxation via state-imposed commodity supply quotas and price setting for basic commodities. Informal taxation was not necessarily converted into state revenue, however, as only a fraction of that rice was exported for profit and the rest disbursed to satisfy the BSPP's commitment to a minimal food quota. Formal tax revenue as a percentage of GDP declared by the BSPP was consequently well below more export-oriented regional neighbours during this period, averaging around 9 percent between 1974 and 1987 compared with 13 percent in Thailand and 17 percent in Indonesia (Brown 2013: 161).[53] The vast bulk of state revenue that was collected throughout the 1980s came from commodities and services taxes (around 60 percent), along with customs duties (around 20 percent), and a smaller portion (around 5 percent) from profit and income taxes (Brown 2013: 161). Having assumed considerable debts to international lenders during the 1970s, these minimal revenue flows meant that the BSPP quickly began running large budget deficits. By 1986/87 the dollar cost of servicing Burma's almost US$4 billion of external debt had ballooned to 80 percent of overall export values, bringing the state to the brink of debt default and state bankruptcy despite attempts to print large volumes of new money (Brown 2013: 165).

[52] With the inclusion of health care benefits in 1978, however, benefits received as a percentage of contribution did increase from around 20 percent in 1978 to 45 percent by the mid-1980s (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 273).
[53] These figures do not include the sizable untaxed trade in the informal or 'black market' economy already mentioned, and probably overinflate tax revenue as a proportion of overall trade and thus GDP.

The financial crisis led Ne Win to impose reforms and demonetise currency in an attempt to 'formalise' the black market economy and tax its revenues. The first demonetisation occurred in November 1985 and permitted a per-head quota of kyat to be converted into new currency, a loop hole which enabled friends and clients of illegal traders to exchange notes on their behalf (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2003: 53). After that measure failed, in August 1987 Ne Win called an extraordinary meeting of the BSPP Central committee and announced further economic reforms. In September 1987 the state monopoly on rice procurement was abolished and restrictions on domestic trade in agricultural commodities including rice were lifted, prompting rapid inflation in the urban price of rice (Brown 2003: 157). Five days later Ne Win imposed a more punitive demonetisation of almost 80 percent of all currency, with no loop-hole for transfer into the new denominations. The blunt measure effectively decimated the networks of illegal trade that had provided an alternative to the state's command and control economy while wiping out the currency-based savings of many households (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2003: 52-54; Brown 2013: 155).

The economic and social grievances generated by these measures, combined with the military's brutal response to subsequent protests, led to an escalating cycle of demonstrations against the regime. General Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, emerged as a key leader of the protest movement along with senior military leaders purged by Ne Win, students, monks, civil servants, striking industrial workers and, later, commercial elites (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2003: 56-57). Despite Ne Win's resignation in July, on 8 August 1988 and for weeks following people went on strike and marched through towns and cities across the country demanding an end to BSPP rule. Military leaders brutally suppressed the protests, leaving several thousand people dead (Ferrara 2003: 303). After protests continued when Ne Win's civilian successor committed to holding multi-party elections in 1990, in September 1988 a faction within the army dissolved the BSPP and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).[54] The BSPP's attempt to enact the post-colonial consensus in support of a redistributive but formally low-taxing state through a stringent import-substitution industrialisation economic strategy had brought the country to the brink of bankruptcy and provoked violent political upheaval. Shaped by the military's continued institutional dominance, the subsequent junta

[54] For useful descriptive and analytical accounts of these events, including chronologies and estimated death counts, see accounts by Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2003: 53-57) and Federico Ferrara (2003: 323). The SLORC was reorganised into a more hierarchical structure of military administration in 1997 and renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) (Taylor 2009: 393-395). Hereafter, I refer to the period as the SLORC/SPDC junta.

embraced market-based mechanisms as a means of coercively and administratively penetrating the borderlands.

Section Four: Towards capitalist state-building? (1988-2010)

Senior members of the new junta quickly began disassembling the apparatus of nationalist socialism which had governed Burma for more than twenty-five years. A series of market-oriented reforms were introduced in late 1988 to improve the dire economic situation. Foreign investment was invited in a swathe of key industries including agriculture, timber and fisheries.[55] Privatisation of state enterprises to foreign and local interests commenced, and the black market was legalised, resulting in a dramatic spike in the number of official business registrations from 27 in 1990 to 23,848 in 1991 (Brown 2013: 177, Kudo 2005: 11). Private credit was permitted for the first time since 1963 with the establishment of 21 domestic commercial banks (Turnell 2009: 258-260). Market trade in agricultural commodities was liberalised, and investment encouraged in exportable cash-crops such as rubber, oil-palm, sugarcane and biofuel (Woods 2015: 8). Compulsory procurement of rice, albeit at lower levels than during socialist rule, continued until 2003 in order to maintain food rations for government workers (Okamoto 2009: 219-221, 237). Trade in higher-value crops such as pulses, beans and peas was also liberalised, allowing many agriculturalists to diversify their crops and increase household income (see Tin Maung Maung Than 2007: 356-357, Fujita and Okamoto 2009:191-197). Military enterprises, previously nationalised in 1962, were re-established and quickly entered into joint ventures with foreign firms across a diverse range of extractive, manufacturing and hospitality industries (Brown 2013: 193).

Under pressure from the international community following the brutal suppression of the 1988 protests, the junta held elections. In the run-up to the 1990 poll Aung San Suu Kyi and her newly formed National League for Democracy (NLD) party toured both predominantly ethnic Bamar lowland and ethnic minority upland areas of the country canvasing for votes, during which Suu Kyi appeared in a variety of ethnic attire. The NLD's campaign apparently deeply disturbed the junta as it was the first attempt by ethnic Bamar politicians to develop constituencies in upland ethnic minority areas since U Nu and AFPFL leaders courted ethnic elites in the late-1950s (Callahan 2004: 102). The NLD subsequently won a massive majority

[55] Two key laws - the Foreign Investment Law (November 1988) and the State-owned Economic Enterprises Law (March 1989) - were passed during this period, enabling private foreign capital after 25 years and allowing authorized private enterprises to be engaged in all but 12 stipulated industries (Kudo 2005: 12).

of 392 out of 425 seats in the new parliament, including the vast majority of the vote in ethnic minority areas while the BSPP successor party the National Unity Party, which also contested, failed dismally. The SLORC subsequently disregarded the results of the 1990 elections as it lacked trust in the ability of civilians to manage either the apparatus of state or negotiations with ethnic minority elites regarding autonomy.[56] Instead the junta embarked on an ambitious programme of military expansion, ceasefire negotiation and state-building aimed at "march[ing] peripheral populations into national formation" (Callahan 2004: 103-104). In an attempt to integrate periphery ethnic minorities into political community the junta renamed the country 'Myanmar' and invested considerable resources into an "optimistic, no-holds bared assault on the everyday language and conceptual referents to be used throughout the country" (Callahan 2004: 111).

With revenue reaped from its embrace of capitalism the junta sought to confront ethnic armed groups in the restive borderlands which it viewed as depriving the state of revenue and threatening the state's existence. The junta adopted a new approach to state-building and regime legitimation which senior generals claimed would lay the path for eventual handover to a civilian-elected government.[57] Foreign investment boomed from US$58 million in 1990–91 to US$800 million by 1996–97, driven by the post-Cold War demand for natural resources from the rapidly growing economies of China, Thailand and other neighbours (Steinberg 2001: 169, Jones 2016: 99). Between 1989 and 1998 more than 300 foreign investment applications of a total value of US$7.2 billion were approved across a range of sectors including oil and gas exploration and extraction, hotels and tourism, manufacturing and light industry, real estate and construction (Brown 2013: 177). In a parallel to the BSPPs earlier toleration of the black market trade, Meehan suggests that the SLORC/SPDC junta also netted considerable revenue by laundering drug money for prominent armed groups and commercial elites operating in the borderlands (Meehan 2011: 3). Within a decade substantial growth in trade, mining, construction, finance and manufacturing had brought significant changes in Myanmar's economy. By 1998-1999 the private sector accounted for 85 percent of manufacturing output and almost three-quarters of GDP (Myat Thein 2004, 125, 200–205, 251).[58] The structural

[56] SLORC generals, according to Mary Callahan, viewed the potential for an alliance across the colonial-era 'Ministerial'/'Excluded' divide as the "single greatest threat to the military's power and to Burma's continued existence as a unitary state" (Callahan 2004: 103).
[57] A 'Roadmap to Discipline Flourishing Democracy' was announced in August 2003 by General Khin Nyunt (Pedersen 2011: 51).
[58] Military enterprises are here counted as 'private' rather than state activities.

economic challenges which had defined post-colonial Burma largely endured though, and in some areas worsened. GDP remained highly reliant on agricultural commodity export, especially the pulses sector which more than doubled in size during the 1990s (Myat Thein 2004: 182-183). By the end of the 1990s the junta declared impressive revenue growth of more than 12 times 1987-1988 figures, along with slightly smaller growth in expenditure of around 7.5 times (Myat Thein and Maw Than 2000: 10-11). Attempts were made to broaden the tax base during this period through expansion in indirect consumption tax (Myat Thein 2004: 145). These efforts were constrained by the poor pay and technical expertise of the tax administration, as well as the redirection of formal corporate tax into what one analyst termed "donations... for the favoured projects of authorities" (Myat Thein 2004: 146). Consequentially, both government revenue and tax revenue as a percentage of growing GDP from 12.1 percent and 6.4 percent respectively in 1987-1988 to 6.8 percent and 3.6 percent by 1997-1998 (Myat Thein and Maw Thein 2000: 10-11; Myat Thein 2004: 145-146).[59]

The junta used the recovery of their foreign currency and revenue situations to build or fortify the military and logistical infrastructure of the state. The Tatmadaw claimed around 40 percent of declared government spending throughout the 1990s, along with considerable off-budget revenue from military enterprises (Selth 2002: 253). Total troop numbers doubled from around 200,000 in 1988 to more than 400,000 service personnel by the late 1990s making the Tatmadaw the 18th largest military in the world (Selth 2002: 253). The junta also used foreign currency to purchase large quantities of Chinese arms through Singaporean banks, providing the fire-power necessary to pressure armed groups to ceasefire. The shifting geopolitics of Asia and Myanmar's emergent commercial relations with neighbours also saw China and Thailand withdraw their respective support for insurgents, depriving armed groups of smuggling revenue and weapons (Meehan 2011: 385-386; Jones 2016: 98). Faced with an increasingly well-armed and assertive Tatmadaw amid weakening external support, seventeen of twenty-one ethnic armed groups signed (tentative) agreements with the Tatmadaw in the early 1990s.

These ceasefires relied on market-based commercial incentives to secure the demobilisation or retreat of armed groups to agreed territories and the agreement of their commanders to permit the Myanmar military-state's encroachment into the borderlands (Steinberg 2006, Callahan

[59] See Myat Thein (2004: 146) for a more sceptical discussion of these figures in the context of the rampant inflation of the early to mid-1990s.

2007, Jones 2016: 101-102). Ethnic elites who signed agreements were granted licences to operate commercial business, could advise on the roll-out of 'border development programmes' and were invited to attend the National Convention convened to provide 'input' to a new Constitution (Meehan 2011: 382). Some larger groups also initially retained the right to tax goods – licit and illicit – which passed through borderland checkpoints, retaining a key source of socialist-era revenue (Callahan 2007; 24, Jones 2016: 100-101). In the years following these ceasefires many armed elites entered into joint ventures with Myanmar military and commercial elites in extractive industries such as logging, mining, agribusiness as well as illicit production, distribution and money-laundering for drug kingpins (MacLean 2008, Meehan 2011: 398, Jones 2016: 102). Ethnic elites who benefitted from ceasefires often disbursed a portion of profits via patronage of "traditional indigenous leaders, religious authorities, overseas refugee and diaspora communities, political party leaders, and NGOs" (Callahan 2007: 3-4). These 'ceasefire capitalist' (Woods 2011) arrangements, based on what one scholar has termed apolitical 'extraction pacts' (Snyder 2006) between armed elites, brought borderland areas into varying levels of state control by tying ethnic armed elites back to the Myanmar military-state through joint ventures, taxation regimes and money-laundering (Woods 2011; Jones 2016; Meehan 2011: 391).

The form of 'private indirect government' (MacLean 2010a) which emerged in ceasefire areas largely failed to address the demands for greater political autonomy that many ethnic elites and minority populations had spent decades fighting for. As a result, these commercial ceasefires in many cases lay the sociological seeds of their own demise as the plunder of natural resources and proliferation of the drug trade which they heralded compounded pre-existing popular grievances (see Brenner 2015, Brenner 2017b).[60] Some of these ceasefires collapsed in subsequent years (see Smith 2007, Sadan 2016). The growth in central state revenue and administrative scope during peacetime, however, allowed "the regime to expand its military, administrative and economic reach into areas of the country where it previously had little or none" (Maclean 2008: 143). Indeed, government data on roads and military installations by

[60] In the years following these ceasefires, the extent of local elite benefit narrowed as the Myanmar military-state took control of valuable mines and ensured that circuits of extraction in timber, jadeite, gemstones and other commodities were sold or left port in Yangon or Naypyitaw, shutting businesses linked to armed groups out of lucrative rents (Jones 2016: 105). Trade in illicit goods such as methamphetamines which flourished in borderland areas during this period also provided an essential means of financing the regime. State-controlled banks throughout the 1990s and 2000s, for instance, levied a 'whitening tax' initially at 40 percent and later at 25 percent in order to accept "deposits of dubious origin without question", providing an opportunity for laundering as long as it assisted the regime to achieve national priorities during this period (Meehan 2011: 391).

2012 spatially mapped in Figure 4 contrasts starkly with the parameters of central administration by the end of the colonial period**.** The state-building approach adopted by the junta in the 1990s and 2000s thus reshaped the nature of administrative boundaries in borderland areas, generating networks of Bamar and ethnic minority businesspeople with close social and commercial ties to the lowland military state.

Retrenchment of the socialist state in lowland areas

How did the SLORC's state-building approach impact social welfare in lowland areas previously incorporated into BSPP systems of economic redistribution? In-depth accounts of political, economic and social life in the plains of central Myanmar throughout this period are sparse due to junta restrictions on field research. Existing literature on largely national-level dynamics suggests that the SLORC/SPDC relied heavily on coercion and violent suppression to maintain control while making significant state investments in hard infrastructure and the propagation of Buddhism. Opposition parties and overtly political civil society groups were forcibly disbanded while activists and politicians including Aung San Suu Kyi were heavily monitored and placed either in jail or under house arrest. Meanwhile, the redistributive commitments which had been the hallmark of post-colonial government until that point are seen to have evaporated as the junta apparently felt it "was no longer obligated to provide the public with its basic needs" (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2001). Physical infrastructure projects such as highways, bridges, dams and reservoirs that were "easily visible by the populace" instead received the lions-share of non-military expenditure during this period (Myat Thein and Khin Maung Nyo 1999: 403, Steinberg 2005: 110). For example, the new administrative capital Naypyitaw was erected on the plains of central Myanmar, and linked to a new north-south highway connecting the southern city of Yangon to the northern city of Mandalay. Significant funds were also expended on the renovation and construction of Buddhist pagodas and monasteries and the patronage of ritualised merit-making in an effort to diminish the junta's reliance on often sceptical monks for legitimation.[61] These physical expressions of state largesse were expensive, especially when combined with the military expansion and the heavily coercive state-building strategy executed during this period. Consequentially the junta ran large budget deficits throughout the 1990s and 2000s, which it attempted to control by printing money, compounding already severe inflation in essential goods (Brown 2013: 199).

[61] Julianne Schober (1997: 221, fn 9), for instance, described the SLORC as a "modern theatre state" which claimed hegemony through "self-consciously constructed legitimation" grounded in the public performance of Buddhist cosmology.

Figure 4 Military installations and roads by 2012. Source: ANU-MMPI and MIMU.

Though the junta no longer sought legitimacy through state-mediated socio-economic redistribution, isolated accounts from this period do suggest that anxieties regarding inequities generated by unregulated market trade continued to shape the behaviour of junta officials. Economic liberalisation, for instance, was partly constrained by the fact that some SLORC members feared that privatization of state assets could generate politically-risky economic inequities (Jones 2014: 149). As a result, the agency responsible for privatization initially required private purchases to totally avoid retrenchment of staff (Brown 2013: 191). Amid the marketisation of agricultural trade in the early 1990s senior members of the junta also engaged in vigorous campaigns against emergent entrepreneurs, repeatedly accusing them of "forgetting their social responsibilities and fuelling inflation through excessive profiteering" (Cook 1994: 133). 'Committees for Reducing Commodity Prices' were set up at state and division level, and for a period private traders were required by military commanders to sell to government distribution and 'welfare' centres at prices fixed by the government-appointed Rice Traders Association (Mya Maung 1991: 288-289). Despite a brief reprieve in the immediate wake of the BSPPs demise, a system of compulsory rice acquisition and rice rationing endured until 2003 and 2004 respectively, though the beneficiaries were narrowed to military and state employees (Brown 2013: 191).

Accounts of junta officials occasionally intervening to offset politically-risky social inequities stand alongside data on the state's minimal direct social expenditures during this period. Government-declared spending on health and education declined as a percentage of GDP from 2.6 percent and 1 percent respectively in 1990 to 0.64 percent and 0.18 percent in 1998, compared with around 6 percent GDP dedicated to the military throughout this period (Myat Thein 2004: 147; Turnell 2011 141). The Ministry of Relief, Resettlement and Social Welfare, meanwhile, received less than 0.003% of GDP throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Apart from some 'in-kind' social expenditures, direct expenditures on formalised social welfare were mostly disbursed to charitable providers such as Buddhist centres for the elderly, or to regime loyalists through the junta-endorsed welfare association Union Solidarity and Development Association (Schober 1997: 238).[62] The group coordinated members to fulfil 'civic duties' such as blood donations for military personnel and other welfare activities, in return for rations

[62] Reflecting the junta's broader preference for state construction of physical infrastructure, its social expenditures largely took the form of hospitals and school buildings built by Ministry of Defence construction battalions (see Myat Thein & Khin Maung Nyo 1999; James 2005: 57).

of staple goods and other benefits (Schober 1997: 239, Brown 2013: 179).[63] Other regime-endorsed charitable groups were also established such as the Maternal and Child Welfare Association, which ran maternal health clinics funded by the regime and commercial elites under the supervision of senior junta member General Khin Nyunt's wife (Steinberg 1999, James 2005: 65).

In the context of state-absence from formal social protection a considerable body of research highlights the emergence of mechanisms of 'horizontal solidarity' during this period. Largely seen to have emerged as a result of the junta's "failure (or unwillingness) to alleviate the poverty of most Myanmar people" (Seekins 2009: 730), a widely referenced 2006 study found an estimated 214,000 community-based organisations (CBOs) including neighbourhood organisations, native-place and ethnic organisations and welfare groups operating in every corner of the country (Heidel 2006: 60).[64] Political historian Robert Taylor (2009: 445-446) observed that these social and welfare groups emerged in the wake of the SLORC's 'Law Relating to Forming Organisations', enacted ten days after the 1988 coup, which granted legal space for civil society groups to form provided they were "separate from overtly political institutions". However, the absence of in-depth local studies of how and why these groups emerged during marketisation in the 1990s and 2000s occludes an understanding of how the redistributive consensus that had shaped post-colonial governance until that point was reconfigured after 1988. Existing accounts of the emergence of self-help groups and practices in lowland areas of Myanmar thus suggest that minimal state social expenditures was the sole driver of the emergence of welfare groups during this period.[65] A reconsideration of the 1990s and 2000s period in government-controlled areas of lowland Myanmar is necessary to better understand the post-socialist origins of informal redistributive ideals and practices.

[63] Regulated by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the USDA later assisted in the conduct of the 2008 referendum on the military-draft constitution before transforming into the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party to contest the 2010 election.

[64] These groups and networks of risk-sharing and non-state welfare provision are described by a range of scholars who conducted research in Myanmar in the late 1990s and early 2000s including Helen James (2005), Ashley South (2004), Jasmin Lorch (2006, 2007, 2008a), Khin Zaw Win (Khin Zaw Win 2006), Kyaw Yin Hlaing (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2001, Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007a) and Petrie & South (2014).

[65] For instance Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2007a: 162-163) recounts the development of these groups thus: "After witnessing the difficulties of the ordinary people, some community leaders, Buddhist monks, retirees and businesspeople came together to form social welfare organisations. The first such organisations appeared in Yangon and Mandalay. These organisations were so successful at achieving their aims that many such organisations sprang up in many other parts of the country". For similar accounts which give little attention to how political economy dynamics were linked to the proliferation of communal risk-sharing during the post-socialist period see Lorch (2008b: 28-29), McCarthy (2012: 4) and Dove (2017).

1988 was a moment of ideational and institutional' friction'

Political scientist Richard Lieberman (2002) offers a useful framework for reassessing the post-socialist era in Myanmar. Lieberman theorises critical junctures as periods when political actors confront tensions between institutional and ideational sources of order. As 'friction' between ideas and institutions begins to escalate, the incentives and opportunities of actors shift. As new institutional arrangements emerge, previously dominant ideas and interests "might no longer find outlets in the same institutional settings" (Lieberman 2002: 704). However, political actors who have lost institutional power will often "find new ways to define and advance their aims" either by searching for new institutional forums or "by adapting ideas to take advantage of new institutional opportunities" (Lieberman 2002: 704). As studies of various post-socialist contexts have demonstrated, previously dominant redistributive ideals may thus be "recombined and reconfigured" (Lieberman 2002: 704) in ways that adapt or partly satisfy older social commitments of the state (see Burawoy, Verdery et al. 1999, Collier 2011).

The assumption dominant in existing literature on the post-1988 period that redistributive ideas or norms simply evaporated from logics of governance with the junta's embrace of capitalism begins to lose analytical credibility when the period is viewed as a moment of immense institutional and ideational friction. As will be shown in Part Two of this dissertation, my fieldwork in central-east Myanmar throughout 2015 and 2016 shows that the emergence of reciprocity and private redistributive mechanisms in provincial Myanmar was not simply an *incidental* outcome of junta absence in social welfare provision. Rather the development of community-based organisations and circuits of horizontal solidarity in lowland areas occurred in the wake of *explicit* transactional and moral suasion by military commanders in their interactions with entrepreneurs and societal actors throughout the 1990s and 2000s. As junta officials outsourced social obligations to private and charitable providers, the friction between redistributive ideals and post-socialist institutions produced an authoritarian form of welfare capitalism. The informal redistributive institutions generated during this period have since entrenched themselves during Myanmar's subsequent transition to partial civilian rule in ways that are constraining the possibilities of redistributive democratic social policy.

Conclusion

Between independence and 1988, the politics of post-colonial Burma was defined by an elite Bamar consensus in support of a low-taxing yet actively redistributive state generated during

colonial rule. After 1948 independence civilian leaders led by U Nu embraced an interventionist form of welfare capitalism in an attempt to enact this consensus and broach the interests and demands of the AFPFL's coalition of commercial elites, Socialists and Communists. As the military transformed itself into the largest and most cohesive institution in the country in the 1950s a rigidly nationalistic socialism was placed at the core of army ideology. Following U Nu's attempts to negotiate with rebels and attract greater foreign investment, the path of interventionist welfare capitalism which required the private sector and employees to shoulder much of the burden for formal social insurance was abandoned with the 1962 coup. Ne Win's BSPP subsequently imposed an autarkic form of socialism which saw the state nationalise all private and foreign businesses and assume all trade and distribution responsibilities. The BSPP thus implemented an extreme interpretation of consensus generated during the colonial period against 'free market' capitalism and in favour of a formally low-taxing state which achieved economically redistributive functions and attempted to equalise wealth among its citizens. The state's socialist ideology was propagated through approved mass organisations, while alternative ideas or civil society networks, at least in lowland areas of the country, were tightly regulated and suppressed. The territorial boundaries of the state inherited at independence largely endured between 1948 and 1988, however. Populations in upland areas indirectly governed during British rule were rarely included in the administrative or political visions of lowland state officials based in Rangoon, despite the flourishing of smuggling routes often mediated by insurgents who used profits to escalate their ongoing struggles for independence and autonomy from the central state. The 1987 economic crisis and 1988 uprising challenged the economic and spatial logics that had governed Burma's post-colonial politics and prompted the new junta to seek military and administrative control over the black market and restive borderlands.

Dominant narratives of the 1990s and 2000s thus suggest that redistributive ideals which had defined post-colonial Burma until that point largely evaporated with the demise of Ne Win and his BSPP regime. Existing accounts of the subsequent SLORC/SPDC period suggest that "the 'sons of Ne Win' completely abandoned socialism" (Skidmore 2004: 85), and instead sought legitimacy "as a regime that… would revive good old traditions, promote Buddhism" (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2001: 272), construct the coercive and logistical infrastructure of the state – especially in the periphery – and improve the economy. Concerns about the distributive inequities generated by capitalism which for decades had legitimised nationalisation of businesses and state control of the economy are seen to have disappeared, replaced by a rigid

commitment to transforming borderlands into partially governable nodes of economic extraction. This dominant narrative fails to convincingly account for how friction between redistributive ideals and bankrupt, military-dominated state institutions generated norms and practices of private redistribution following the critical juncture of 1988. How did the new military junta assuage concerns many officers and civil servants held regarding the inequities that may be generated by unregulated capitalism? What was the relationship between the proliferation of non-state mechanisms of reciprocity and redistribution and the process of marketisation?

In the context of significant constraints on in-depth research during the 1990s and 2000s these questions were largely beyond the scope of scholarly attention. However, the failure to account for how junta-mediated marketisation privatised social expenditure and redistributive functions elides the origins of the 'rules of the game' (North 1990) which are now being entrenched and foreclosing the potential for progressive democratic distributive politics in civilian-led Myanmar. Reconsidering the post-1988 period as a period of institutional and ideational friction may thus allow us to see how SLORC/SPDC rule produced informal institutions of private redistribution not by accident but, at least partly, by design. Drawing on in-depth archival and interview research focused on this period in lowland areas of provincial central Myanmar, Part Two of the dissertation exposes the informal redistributive institutions generated during the transition to capitalism. Enlisting the concept of the 'hidden welfare state' (see Howard 1999) it recounts how sub-national junta officials off-put distributive obligations previously assumed by the BSPP to private actors, communities and households, substituting the collection of formal tax revenue for an authoritarian form of welfare capitalism.

PART TWO: AUTHORITARIAN WELFARE CAPITALISM

Chapter Three: Uncovering Authoritarian Welfare Capitalism

On the final morning of Thingyan in 2016, the festival of water celebrated to ring in the Burmese New Year, Taungoo's local charitable aged home on the east-side of the city's historical moat was bustling with people preparing for an event. I already knew the residents well and when some friends mentioned that people often pay homage to the elderly to celebrate the New Year I decided to make an impromptu visit to the facility.

Riding into the compound on my motorbike, I encountered far more hustle-bustle in the sleepy complex than on any of my previous visits. Three dark-green, military pickup-trucks were parked in the dusty yard of the compound, along with several four-wheel drives. A group of men in white shirts with holstered side arms and red-and-white striped Military Police helmets were standing in the shade alongside the main building, chatting casually. I parked my motorbike under a tree not far from the office of the manager, whom I knew well from earlier interactions. As I dismounted and walked towards the main building, the officers caught my eye, smiling and nodding, seemingly unperturbed by a foreigner entering the compound during whatever ritual they were about to begin.

Inside the meditation hall, boxes of cooking oil and sacks of rice were stacked up along one side of the room. Meanwhile a group of people in formal *lungyis* (Burmese sarongs) and shirts, including one prominent local entrepreneur, buzzed around preparing for the event. The manager of the aged home came to greet me, followed a few minutes later by another entrepreneur and 'town elder' (B: *myo mi myo pah*), a rice-miller. We chatted and joked for a few minutes about the antics and heat of the past few days of New Year celebrations. I told them that I was researching welfare and charity in Myanmar and had heard there might be a ritual of giving (B: *ahlubwe*) today to celebrate Thingyan. The entrepreneur smiled widely, responding that he was a member of the management committee of the aged care home, and that a donation celebration was about to be held by personnel from the local military garrison, gesturing to the piles of goods stacked up inside.

A few minutes later, a convoy of seven dark green four-wheel drives and pick-up trucks arrived, and the entire compound leapt into action. As a military police officer opened the door to the

vehicle in the middle of the convoy, the more senior of the two entrepreneurs rushed to the front of the building, enthusiastically greeting the top-brass and their wives from the largest military installation in central-east Myanmar. They all walked to the prayer hall, and after a few minutes, with a wink of affirmation from the rice miller, I was invited to attend the donation celebration.

The elderly members of the village proceeded on to a slightly elevated platform at the front of the room, above the officers, their families and the local entrepreneurs who were seated on the floor. After an introduction from the manager of the facility and some short speeches, the event culminated with the handing of a stack of 5000 *kyat* notes (c. US$4 each) from the commander to the oldest resident, an elderly woman in her 80s whose long grey hair was pinned up gracefully. She slowly chanted a ritual blessing of recognition for the various gifts and financial aid given by the military officers, specifically citing the rice and oil which surrounded them. After a few minutes, she concluded by chanting the words '*Thadu Thadu Thadu'* – a Pali-derived phrase uttered by monks and laity to recognise meritorious deeds which roughly translates as 'Well done, well done, well done'.

The spectacle of military officers donating to a charitable aged-care facility run by local commercial elites offered an insight into the strength of local donations practices and the role they play in providing social welfare to some of Myanmar's most vulnerable people. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the logics embedded in charitable also reveal how anxieties about unregulated capitalism which had pervaded Burma's post-colonial social governance until 1988 were addressed during marketisation. Much of the existing literature on social and economic administration during the 1990s and 2000s has focused on the role of nationally-prominent businesspeople in fulfilling national junta objectives (Jones 2014; Ford et al. 2016). The limitations on research in lowland provincial areas during this period occludes the highly decentralised nature of licensing and taxation through which provincial commercial elites accrued fortunes and evaded taxation in return for assuming social obligations previously fulfilled, ideologically if not functionally, by the BSPP. As a result, existing scholarly literature largely fails to account for the informal redistributive institutions generated during this period which are now being entrenched amid political transition and are likely to shape the trajectory of democratic distributive politics. This chapter thus addresses how the 'friction' between socialist ideals and institutions (see Lieberman 2002) was resolved after the dissolution of the

BSPP in 1988 by focusing on how sub-national junta officials attempted to offset the social inequities generated by marketisation during the 1990s and 2000s.

Drawing on primary archival, ethnographic and survey fieldwork conducted in central-east Myanmar throughout 2015 and 2016, this chapter outlines how provincial junta officials used their power to grant commercial licences as well as grant tax remissions to outsource responsibility for social expenditure to emergent entrepreneurs and charitable mechanisms of redistribution and reciprocity. In so doing it exposes an authoritarian form of welfare capitalism which, though it entrenched insecurity and delivered the worst social outcomes in the region, also produced mechanisms of informal redistribution that supplemented the junta's paltry *direct* social expenditures. The short and long-run trade-offs of this informal and indirect approach to social expenditure are significant, however. Indeed, formal tax revenue collapsed during this period as businesspeople negotiated remissions and concessions with provincial junta officials. Informal practices and norms of redistribution were thus generated during this period which, as Part Three of the dissertation demonstrates, are now shaping the distributive potential of democracy independent of constraints imposed by formal political institutions.

The chapter proceeds in four sections. Section One focuses on the mediated nature of marketisation, examining how regional military commanders were granted considerable scope to disburse commercial licences and tax remissions to civilian clients who performed redistributive and social governance functions at their implicit and explicit urging. It focuses on key social expenditure and governance roles that businesspeople performed on behalf of junta officials, and how sub-national dynamics of patronage-based licensing encouraged compliance with these obligations.

Section Two explores how the junta combined mediated marketisation and the liberalisation of ostensibly 'apolitical' civil society to encourage a form of 'government by community' (see Rose 1999) in which emergent commercial elites were expected to assume significant informal governance roles. Drawing on state propaganda from this period, it shows how Buddhism was used to encourage commercial elites to assume roles as local elders, effectively outsourcing and privatising social governance functions previously assumed by the state. Through case-studies of welfare groups in central-east Myanmar which emerged during this period it then shows how entrepreneurs were often able to accrue capital and evade formal taxation through the patronage of social initiatives. Informed by these dynamics it then proposes the concept of

social licensing and uses it to explain the commercial ascendency of businessmen who cultivated social, moral and commercial bonds with junta officials and performed private redistributive and social governance functions at their urging.

Section Three examines how the social scope of meritorious Buddhist 'charity' expanded during this period of mediated marketisation. Drawing on ethnographic work with welfare groups and self-help initiatives in 2015 and 2016 it shows how actors at various levels make conscious efforts to elide the involvement of state officials in these mechanisms, focusing instead on the free and intentional nature of financial, labour or in-kind contributions. The section argues that redistributive functions funded through social expenditures by private and charitable actors were essential not just to the junta's strategy of social outsourcing but also to contingent and non-comprehensive systems of risk-pooling and social protection in the context of state retrenchment.

Section Four assesses the social outcomes and trade-offs of authoritarian welfare capitalism. It highlights how donations have come to constitute a far larger proportion of average household financial burden than formal taxation, with many people seeing these contributions as far more spiritually meritorious and socially effective than formal taxation. It then outlines how this system of private social expenditure delivered social outcomes which, despite being the worst in the region, were better than what might be expected from the junta's paltry direct social expenditures.

Section One: Marketisation and provincial licensing

Military-mediated marketisation

The transition to a market-oriented economy in Myanmar took a highly mediated and selective form which reinforced the dominance of the military and encouraged the development of extensive patronage networks linked to it. In order to maintain control, the junta's preferred tool to encourage private sector development during the 1990s was the issuing of licences, permits, leases, contracts and tax remissions to trusted contacts and businesspeople. Many of the licences, approvals and contracts issued during the 1990s required annual renewals and the payment of fees. Meanwhile, the wide discretion of government officials in levying corporate tax meant significant variation in how much tax was paid by different types of businesses during this period (Cook 1994: 132). Both were key mechanisms through which military officials maintained loyalty and compliance from civilian businesspeople during this period

(World Bank 1990 in Cook 1994: 132). Previous studies of the logic underpinning these patronage relationships have focused on nationally-prominent businesspeople and the licences or contracts they received in exchange for assisting the junta with infrastructure development, circumventing the Western arms embargo, brokering ceasefires with insurgent groups or providing disaster assistance (Jones 2014: 151). However, the modalities of licensing and marketisation were actually highly decentralised throughout the SLORC/SPDC period. Significant *de facto* control over day-to-day affairs, including commercial licensing, taxation and administration, was handed to regional military commanders during the 1990s and 2000s.

Initially this autonomy derived from the fact that some regional commanders held more senior ranks than a number of military officers who led the 1988 coup, a major contradiction to the highly hierarchical logic which governed the military during the socialist period (Nakanishi 2013). While junta members were summarily promoted soon after deposing Ne Win, Mary Callahan argues that the discrepancy in earned rank between the junta and regional commanders resulted in "extraordinary authority [being granted] to the more senior regional commanders" to ensure the stability of the new regime (Callahan 2001: 38). The commanders of Myanmar's twelve military regional commands thus possessed considerable autonomy over administration, economic management and 'law and order' in their territories throughout the period of marketisation. These administrative powers included the ability to issue licences to operate rice-mills or heavy machinery essential to extracting gem stones, as well as receive tenders to perform key functions for state economic enterprises (Kudo 2001: 12). Those who did not hold appropriate permits could have merchandise or machinery seized and could face fines or jail terms (World Bank 1990 in Cook 1994: 132, Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007b: 222). As with national dynamics of junta-mediation described by Jones (2014) and Ford et al. (2016), these powers of mediation were used by regional military officials and their subordinates to maintain oversight and influence over commercial elites and assets they thought could be useful in implementing junta objectives. The powers accrued by provincial junta officials drove what Mary Callahan (2001: 38) refers to as an "unambiguous rise in power and status" of regional commanders, especially in border areas such as Kachin, Shan and Rakhine States, where opportunities for natural resource extraction were immense.

Accompanying the elevated status of regional commanders was a shift in the logic of battalion and civilian administration.[66] During the socialist period, the BSPP had assumed a significant role in disbursing quotas for basic household goods and foodstuffs in service of the party state's notion of distributive justice. However, in the post-socialist 1990s and 2000s an attitude of practicality and 'doing what is necessary' to achieve objectives began to characterise the management of battalions by regional commanders. A civil servant familiar with military administration during this period recounted that military officials adopted a practical, less ideological approach to governance than the BSPP, often urging their subordinates that "It doesn't matter what the vessel is, all I want is water!" (Interview, 6 September 2016).[67] From the early 1990s, both internal military social life as well as 'public engagement' (B: *siiyoneye*) by soldiers and their families began to be directed towards practical activities that aimed to create bonds between battalion personnel and civilians. Junta officials particularly encouraged merit-making and meditation as well as engaging in social work with local children (Interview, 6 September 2016). Powers over commercial licensing and taxation began to be used by regional commanders to achieve national or regional junta objectives and manage civilian affairs more broadly. As my fieldwork in lowland provincial areas of Myanmar suggests, from the early-1990s civilian entrepreneurs who received licences and permits to operate businesses were encouraged by military commanders to assist with surveillance and mediation of civilian populations, as well as lead welfare and public goods provision.

The outsourcing of these key functions to private actors reflected an administrative and ideological shift from Ne Win's BSPP rule. As discussed in Chapter Two, throughout that period formal party structures penetrated to the village level, non-state civil society was censored or suppressed, and private enterprise were ideologically conflated with imperialism. However, the post-colonial tensions about profiteering and self-interest that had shaped political development throughout much of the 20th century did not evaporate. Instead, these tensions were resolved through informal institutions or 'rules of the game' (see North 1990) that outsourced state social and moral obligations to private business and societal actors more broadly. At a provincial level, the process of devolving state social responsibilities to emergent businesspeople and local populations was achieved through two inter-related roles aspiring

[66] As Schober (1997) recounts, Myanmar's military commanders and officers engaged in wide-spread merit-making through donations ceremonies at pagodas and monasteries around the country throughout the 1990s, a practice she argued was aimed both at building a form of Buddhist-based legitimacy in the absence of popular sovereignty and lubricating military social life.

[67] B: ရေဗူးပေါက်တာမလိုချင်ဘူး။ ရေပါတာဘဲလိုချင်တယ်။

commercial actors were encouraged by regional commanders to play: providing on a transactional basis the resources essential to achieving short-term military priorities; and fulfilling redistributive functions within the community through patronage of welfare groups or other social initiatives. In the eyes of provincial junta officials, engaging in these transactional and redistributive functions accrued commercial elites a more durable social licence than their competitors and thereby enabled them to accrue capital and expand their commercial fortunes ahead of others.

Transactional roles of commercial elites

Commercial licencing and joint-venture arrangements between military commanders and local elites created patronage relationships that were enlisted in the service of local or national junta regime priorities. Previous studies of the logic underpinning commercial patronage relationships in post-socialist Myanmar have focused on the crucial assistance nationally-prominent businesspeople provided to the junta. Various studies of state-business relations highlight how commercial aspirants helped fund or construct national infrastructure such as bus terminals or highways, funded junta-led Buddhist festivals and construction activities, assisted in circumvention of the Western arms embargo, brokered ceasefires with insurgent groups or provided disaster assistance (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2001, Taylor 2009: 456-457, Jones 2014: 151)**.** In addition to junta mediation of licences, compliance with regime or 'national causes' was also seen to have been solicited through selective prosecutions for corruption or money laundering for those who had been perceived as disloyal to regime priorities or their military patrons (Jones 2014: 150). Despite the clear dominance of junta officials in these relationships of patronage, researchers also suggest that these state-business ties were "not entirely one-sided but rather symbiotic" (Jones 2014: 151). Kyaw Yin Hlaing's (2001: 261-262) study of state-business relations in the late 1990s highlights how financial or in-kind support provided by commercial actors were in many cases reciprocated with material support such as the allocation of plots of land in rural areas of satellite towns. Similar dynamics of transactional patronage were also observed by other scholars conducting research during this period, albeit predominantly in borderland areas that were sporadically under ceasefire during the early 1990s (Callahan 2007, MacLean 2010, Woods 2015, Jones 2014, Ford et al. 2016).

In lowland central Myanmar, local junta officials maintained relations of unequal transactional reciprocity with traders, entrepreneurs and bureaucrats who had been awarded government tenders and licences to operate commercially. In the face of often intense competition between

entrepreneurs, businesspeople had a strong incentive to comply when requested by military commanders or their officers to lend support to the various schemes and initiatives of regional military commanders. These transactions sometimes flowed one-way, relying on the threat of coercion levied by military officials or the "peer pressure" wielded by groups such as USDA or Maternal and Child Welfare Association (Turnell 2011: 142). However, over favours provided were reciprocated by junta officials who felt a sense of indebtedness to entrepreneurs who responded willingly to their requests for assistance. State officials felt legitimately entitled to the land and produce cultivated by rural peasants unlike urban-based trade and commerce.[68] As a township official stated to Kyaw Yin Hlaing in 1998:

> We can order peasants to sell their rice to us but we cannot *order* businessmen to donate their money. We have to *request* them to donate. We had to return their favour in ways we could, so that we would be able to solicit more donations from them whenever we needed to raise funds for state functions (in Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007b: 253, emphasis in original).

Repeating local BSPP officials' reliance on black market traders, inspection visits by senior SLORC/SPDC ministers and military officials often required regional commanders and subordinates to enlist the support of local businesspeople. These visits would usually be managed by military officers who were embedded throughout the bureaucracy.[69] Failure by local officers and their regional commanders to provide adequate transportation, lodgings or entertainment for junta officials could result in a formal or informal reprimand or demotion. Inversely, hosting a successful ministerial visit could result in a significant elevation in status for local bureaucrats or military officials, and could lead to more favourable treatment of that region or office in subsequent dispersion of state funds. Indeed, at the end of each trip the visiting minister or general would generally make a 'donation' in recognition of the effort of their subordinates in coordinating logistics, banquets and ceremonies (Farrelly 2008). The amount of these donations would vary depending on how well the visit was managed, an

[68] BSPP notions of state ownership of all rural land continued to be reflected in the junta's ongoing land confiscation as well as continued collection of rural agricultural quotas during the 1990s and 2000s. A battalion commander interviewed in the 1990s by Kyaw Yin Hlaing, for instance, claimed that he "had the right to do what he wanted with the land since it belonged to the state" (2007: 253). The resilience of this ideational understanding of land reinforces the contrast with the approach taken to the social regulation of commerce.

[69] This pattern has proved durable at the time of writing despite the civilianisation of government since 2010, with the General Administration Department under the formal control of the military-appointed Minister of Home Affairs and staffed at provincial level by large proportions of former military officers (Arnold, D. 2014. 'Administering the State: The General Administration Department'. Asia Foundation. Yangon.).

incentive which encouraged considerable one-upmanship among bureaucrats and military officers. In the context of visits considered to be 'poorly organised', however, the cost of hosting a visit was often not recouped by the 'donation' provided by visiting officials (Mya Maung 1991, Farrelly 2008).

Businesspeople who complied willingly with requests for material aid from military officials would thus be rewarded via material assistance, licensing support or public recognition. One interviewee described how traders with cars or trucks were enlisted (B: *chaw swe*) by civil servants to help with logistics during local inspection visits by senior ministers and military officials. According to businesspeople to whom such demands were made throughout the 1990s and 2000s, their assistance would sometimes be repaid in the form of a measurable reciprocation such as full tank of petrol for a week using their vehicle, a valued commodity in the context of fuel quotas during the 1990s. For more significant aid such as construction of a road or school, military officials might provide an official letter supporting a commercial licence or permit application (Interview with trader, 3 August 2015). Transactional relations between local state officials and businesspeople thus exhibited a degree of mutual benefit. These relations of unequal transactional reciprocity were central to how local junta officials devolved the distributive obligations previously assumed by the socialist state to commercial elites and the broader 'community', reinforcing a system of governance highly reliant on indirect social expenditures by market actors.

Section Two: Outsourcing redistributive justice

Junta officials used their role in mediating marketisation to encourage private actors to assume social roles the state was no longer ideologically committed to fulfilling. Through ideological and transactional means the junta adopted an approach to social governance which relied on commercial elites partnering with religious authorities and ordinary people to lead ostensibly 'apolitical' welfare and reciprocity groups. As discussed in Chapter Two, the 1990s saw the establishment of thousands of community-based mechanisms of reciprocity across Myanmar. Though a mentality of 'self-help' certainly imbued the work of groups which proliferated during this period, the rapid nature of their emergence and the clear links of many groups to local commercial elites suggests they are also indicative of a shift in post-socialist junta social policy towards a strategy that political theorist Nikolas Rose (1999) has elsewhere termed 'government by community'.

Rose argued that the social domain of 'community' emerged as a key locus of public policy in many industrialised democracies amid the market-oriented reforms of the 1970s and 1980s. As governments moved away from the notion that they had a responsibility to shape the citizenry or deliver the 'good life' according to an overall plan, 'community' increasingly became the locus for responsibilities and moral cultivation previously assumed by the state (Rose 1999: 135). Widely used to refer to specific 'local' geographies or social spaces of identity such as ethnicity, religion and language, 'communities' in the ascendant neoliberal ideology of the 1980s were "assumed to regulate the behaviour of their members according to their own values" far more effectively than state officials ever could (Li 2011: 101). Social problems viewed through the prism of 'community' were thus "problematized in terms of features of communities and their strengths, cultures, pathologies" (Rose 1999: 136). As anthropologist Tania Li notes, the task of government shifted from cultivating citizens that serve the common good to enabling, animating and facilitating 'community' as "a self-generating formation capable of governing itself" (Li 2011: 101-102). Solutions to problems imagined as rooted in community are seen to require interventions that "encourage and harness active practices of self-management and identity construction, of personal ethics and collective allegiances" (Rose 1999: 176). Viewed through this lens, 'community' came to constitute a moral field "whose vectors and forces can be mobilised, enrolled, deployed" (Rose 1999: 176).[70]

As this section shows, junta officials in post-socialist Myanmar enlisted a combination of ideological and transactional mechanisms to devolve and privatise social governance to the locus of 'community' led by commercial elites. This approach proved pivotal to securing a degree of 'quasi-voluntary compliance' with the demands for financial, labour and in-kind contributions made by informal mechanisms of social welfare from both affluent and ordinary members of community. Political scientist Margaret Levi (1988) developed the concept of 'quasi-voluntary compliance' to theorise the relationship between state formation, fiscal capacity and representative institutions. Levi theorised that a degree of 'quasi-voluntary compliance' with demands for revenue can be achieved if rulers introduce representative and redistributive institutions which return some proportion of revenue raised via taxation to subject populations in the form of service delivery or governance functions that at least partly satisfy the needs of the rulers' subjects. Threats of fines or other penalties associated with non-

[70] Though strategies of intervention often create and evoke something entirely new, Li (2011: 101) argues that interveners commonly situate the 'perfected community' as the restoration of an historical or 'natural' state, a theme which recurs in part three of the dissertation.

compliance still remain significant motivators for compliance in Levi's theory of taxation. However, they are complemented by a broader sense of (imbalanced) reciprocity between ruler and ruled that encourages a degree of willing tax payment, thereby reducing the administrative cost of revenue raising and enabling expansion of the state through warfare. In the discussion that follows I apply Margaret Levi's concept of 'quasi-voluntary compliance' to demands for donations made by welfare groups who the SLORC/SPDC tacitly and explicitly encouraged to address welfare crises during the 1990s and 2000s. Focusing on dual logics of reciprocity and social pressure, I show how welfare groups and risk-sharing mechanisms were able to sustain the significant resource burden they imposed on affluent and ordinary people alike amid the scarcity of the post-socialist period by combining ideological and practical returns to members of the 'community'.

State ideology off-put social obligations

As Myanmar's post-socialist junta retrenched the BSPP system of food stores and led a rapid transition to marketised agriculture and trade, state propaganda sought to popularise a "nationalist interpretation of Buddhist ethics" which rendered businesspeople and ordinary people responsible for the needy (Schober 1997: 238). Alongside mechanisms of social licensing, regime propaganda and discourse throughout the 1990s outsourced redistributive obligations from the state to commercial elites and citizens. One book, disseminated widely during the 1990s by the Department for Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana and used in training for the regime-linked social welfare group Union Solidarity and Development Association, connected Buddhist notions of charity (B: *dana)* to the "building of an ideal state" (Kyaw Htut 1994: xi). Emphasising the duties of 'good citizens' it specifically examined the Mangala Sutta, one of the sermons the Buddha delivered after enlightenment that contains the Thirty-Eight Blessings including paying respect to elders and practicing a 'pure life' seen as essential to realising Nibbana (B: *neikban*).[71] The junta-endorsed guide depicts the Mangala Sutta as the Buddha's attempt to translate "signs and omens" into "modes of conduct, family responsibilities, social obligations and training of self" (Kyaw Htut 1994: x-xi). In a striking echo of U Nu's promotion of the welfare capitalist ideology of the Pyidawtha Plan during the 1950s, the manuscript argues that "any gift or donation given for the welfare of the country is

[71] Political scientist Matthew Walton (2012: 63) notes that the Mangala Sutta "probably enjoys the widest circulation of any of the Buddha's teachings in Myanmar", often being the subject of monastic and lay books, sermons, speeches and comics.

dana mangala, an act of charity" (Kyaw Htut 1994: 36).[72] According to this interpretation, the Sutta obliges Buddhists to "do business which is free from complications and… if there is still some surplus of what you have earned, do not consume or use up all by yourself" (Kyaw Htut 1994: 35). It also reflected nostalgically on the earlier reign of kings when "the people" followed the obligations of the Mangala Sutta and "built monasteries, dug wells and tanks, built roads and bridges on their own initiative and at their own expense… out of their own free will and generosity" so that "government had to spend very little on such works" (Kyaw Htut 1994: 35-36).[73]

During the 1990s, the junta formed a number of welfare-oriented government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) which often enlisted Buddhist moral discourses. These groups, such as the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) and Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), delivered health and education services to 'trusted' populations while serving regime functions of surveillance and mobilisation (see Steinberg 1997; Schober 1997, James 2005). The organisations drew on Buddhist idioms to encourage members, especially local businesspeople, to assume roles in social redistribution and welfare provision within their communities both through and beyond the organisation. Official training materials of the USDA, for instance, fused Buddhist virtues, welfare work and the strength of the 'nation' (Houtman 1999).[74] Similarly echoing the vision of an 'associative state' which underpinned U Nu's Pyidawtha Plan, state-endorsed Buddhist ideology also propagated through GONGOs and other regime-linked groups framed moral and political order as deriving from "the aggregate and held-in-common views and practices of its citizens" (Jordt 2007: 106). Capitalism, meritorious donations and the moral state of the country were intimately intertwined within post-socialist state ideology. The ideal of welfare capitalism underpinned the manner in which local junta officials mediated commercial licensing and taxation.

[72] The guide also places particular emphasis on the admonishments in the Sutta to "perform acts of charity, righteous living… and blameless action" claiming these will bring "peace, prosperity and well-being to all mankind" regardless of state action (Kyaw Htut 1994: 85).
[73] During the time of kings, the tract claims that "there were no poor people" as they "would be given the necessary help out of the treasury of the king" (Kyaw Htut 1994: 35).
[74] Throughout the 1990s and 2000s awards were also given for contributions to various religious and social causes, with titles issued to prominent businesspeople which reflected similar recognition issued during the time of Burmese kings (Jordt 2007: 135).

Junta required 'donations' from commercial elites

Being seen by junta officials to embrace the social and moral responsibilities of wealth was essential to the accumulation of both financial and symbolic capital by the emergent entrepreneurial class. Renewal of licences to engage in private production, extraction and trade was partly determined by whether licencees pro-actively assumed the obligations of redistribution, social welfare and other legitimating activities which the state no longer lacked the finance and will to directly deliver itself. A prominent rice-merchant described how assuming partial responsibility for local social affairs – at either the explicit or implicit urging of military patrons – was essential to accruing and maintaining capital during this period:

> If you wanted to get permission to run a rice-mill or another business then you needed to be involved in the community… If you had a good name/reputation then the military would be more likely to cooperate with you… Why? Because wealthier people in the community must provide for those who are suffering. If you did this kind of work [welfare/religious groups] then you and the government would have a good reputation (Interview with Trader, 6 May 2016).

'Donating' an 'appropriate' proportion of profits to support GONGOs and other junta initiatives became a requirement for commercial success. Businesspeople would frequently feature in state newspapers or TV broadcasts during the 1990s and 2000s making 'donations' to junta official at public ceremonies for various SLORC initiatives and schemes. Researchers at Mandalay University collated data on these ceremonies reported in government newspapers and found more than 1 billion kyat (c. US$17 million at late 1990s official exchange rate) was reportedly contributed between 1988 and 1998 (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007b: 221). Anthropologist Ingrid Jordt (2007: 132) described the networks evinced at these ceremonies as a donation 'pyramid' as senior government and military officials would collect and then present donations 'on behalf of' their military and civilian subordinates. Military commanders would always be listed as the 'foremost' donors at these events regardless of the amount they personally donated, suggesting they sought both public recognition as well as spiritual merit for donations of their subordinates (Schober 1997: 230-231; Jordt 2007: 132). Donations received were then directed to specific initiatives, particularly the patronage and propagation of Buddhism, allowing the junta to publicly depict itself as a "charismatic magnet capable of drawing together people and resources" (Jordt 2007: 132-133).

In addition to performing their claim as Buddhist 'just rulers' (see Schober 1997), the contributions of commercial elites at these ceremonies also signalled the junta's enforcement of its ideology of authoritarian welfare capitalism. As the SLORC no longer saw the state as responsible for social redistribution, businesspeople were required to assume the vast majority of the financial burden for 'socially' oriented initiatives funded at these ceremonies. The state thus focused more on donations for religious rather than more 'social' initiatives. The Mandalay University data on reported donations ceremonies records the junta's more religious focus. When researchers analysed donations by their thematic focus they found that businesspeople donated between 80 percent and 90 percent of the funds for social, cultural and sports initiatives between 1988 and 1998, compared with around 60 percent for religious activities (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007b: 221).[75] The junta thus comprised around 40 percent of reported donations for Buddhist merit-making activities yet less than 20 percent of funds for social initiatives, highlighting a clear skew in state priorities during this period. It is important to note that only a portion of funds donated by businesspeople to 'social' initiatives during this period were contributed at state giving ceremonies reported in government newspapers, however. Anthropologist Julianne Schober, for instance, recounts that some businesspeople were reluctant to legitimise the junta by participating in these spectacles as they saw the solicitation of donations "as a form of taxation" or had doubts about "how the donations will be used" (Schober 1997: 240). While most businesspeople did contribute funds to state initiatives, some entrepreneurs would make only "perfunctory donations" to junta fundraising appeals and avoid participating in the public rituals, preferring instead to render more generous offerings to "sources of merit that reflect[ed] a personal choice" (Schober 1997: 240). Though some businesspeople felt coerced to 'donate' to state initiatives, the symbiotic relationship between political and moral economies extended beyond junta-endorsed projects and groups to more localised mechanisms of redistribution and risk-sharing which emerged during this period.

Buddhist welfare groups emerge from local coalitions

Beyond financing GONGOs and state-initiatives, the local entrepreneurial and bureaucratic class linked to military officials also founded, managed and partly financed many of the more

[75] Julianne Schober (1997: 238) similarly notes the "enormous expenditures" donated by private individuals and junta-linked groups to support "religiously motivated social welfare programs - such as hospitals and homes for the elderly" during the 1990s.

'independent' welfare groups established in the 1990s and 2000s.[76] Though leaders of these groups also solicited contributions from military patrons, as well as civilians, they often closely aligned themselves with monks and consciously crafted administrative distance from junta officials. In central-east Myanmar, these groups emerged as commercial elites formed alliances with monks and other influential civilians who recognised that informal, kin-based practices of reciprocity at times of 'grief and joy' (B: *tha yay na yay*) were materially as well as ritually inadequate to provide for the magnitude of local need. Many of the welfare groups and local improvement initiatives formed at ward, village and township level in the 1990s and 2000s in central-east Myanmar subsequently emerged as a result of these societal partnerships which often received the endorsement of junta authorities.

Price-gouging by alleged funeral racketeers provided the initial impulses for the formation of the earliest non-GONGOs township welfare group in Taungoo, Bago Region. Committee members of a number of groups formed during this period claimed that local businesspeople were inflating the cost of funerals and burial beyond the reach of many poor households. In Myanmar's tropical climate, failure to properly bury corpses could result in pollution of groundwater or the outbreak of epidemics (Lorch 2008b: 32). Unaffordable funerals thus posed a serious public health risk. Responding to what was termed as the 'selfish' (B: *atta*) behaviour of businesspeople who ran funeral or car rental businesses, junta officials, entrepreneurs and local monks came together in 2002 to form a local chapter of *Byama-so,* a funeral organisation which had earlier been established by monks in Mandalay in 1998 (Tosa 2018). The abbot (B: *sayadaw*) of an urban monastery in the southern part of Taungoo was instrumental in establishing the local chapter, as was the case with many of the groups which emerged in other government-controlled areas during the 1990s and 2000s.[77] The *sayadaw* provided a small plot of land adjacent to a meditation hall to house the office, store supplies and safely park ambulances and funeral vans. However, founding committee members recounted that the abbot rarely played an active role in the day-to-day administration of the group due to monastic rules on renunciation of worldly-affairs such as handling and managing money. Instead, donations records from the early 2000s highlight that the administration of the group was managed by a

[76] Civil servants were also involved in the management of religious and welfare groups. According to records seen by the author, the founding committee of a charitable funeral and welfare association in Taungoo included a senior civil servant from the Department of Railroads along with the local Rice Merchants Association and the owners of numerous local restaurants, hotels and other small businesses.
[77] Similar dynamics of abbots serving as patrons of largely lay-run organisations was also noted in a study of 35 welfare groups in Sagaing Region (Griffiths 2017:8).

'who's who' of prominent businesspeople and local civil servants. For instance, blackboards prominently posted on the walls of the office listed the names, occupations and amounts donated to the 2002 formation of the group and construction of the crematorium. As demonstrated in Figure 5 the list was organised according to hierarchies of social rank. Two military generals top the list with donations of 100,000 kyat each (c. US$16,666 at official exchange rate, c. US$100 on black market), echoing the same logic of junta officials being listed as the 'foremost' contributors at public donations ceremonies. Listed third on the list is the chairman of CB Bank whose donation of 1,000,000 kyat (c. US$166,666 at official exchange rate, c. US$1000 on black market) – ten times the amount of the regional commanders – is prominently bolded. Other noteworthy individuals and industry groups such as the Rice Traders Association made cash or in-kind contributions to support the purchase of vans, employment of drivers as well as the construction of a crematorium on the fringe of the township. Despite the dominance of Buddhists within the organisation, prominent local Karen Baptist leaders also contributed funds to support the purchase of the funeral van, highlighting the role such welfare groups may have played in inter-ethnic socialization during this period.[78]

[78] Dynamics of religiously-mediated welfare were also encountered amongst Karen Christians as well as Muslims, though Buddhist groups did claim to service all religious communities. Many of these churches, especially the Paku Baptist, Catholic and Anglican dominations, provided assistance to parishioners with medical bills, education costs and loans and also played a role in preserving sub-ethnic Karen languages such as Paku, Bweh, Gehko and Gehpa through language classes. Many members of these Karen church networks have close kin links to Karen National Union-administered areas in northern Karen State, with some having family members serving in the armed wing of the KNU, the Karen National Liberation Army. Karen Christian churches are thus linked in complex and sometimes contradictory ways to Karen ethno-nationalism, a common dynamic of non-state welfare provision in other contexts (see Cammett & MacLean 2010).

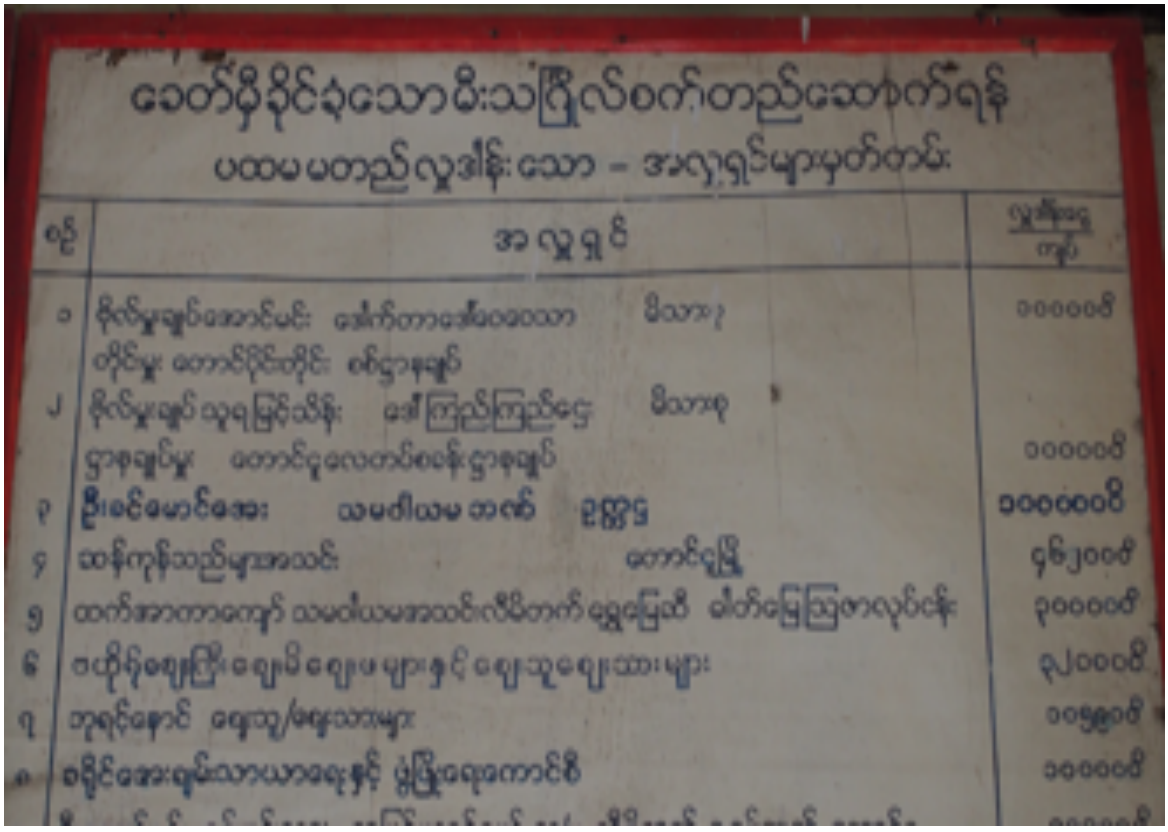

Figure 5 Record of donations to welfare group, central Myanmar. Source: Author

Within months of establishing the local chapter of *Byama-so*, the cost of basic funeral services dropped from US$100-150 to US$20, with the families of the deceased paying some small expenses including fuel and a processing fee.[79] In 2006 the organisation established an offshoot chapter adjacent to the General Hospital with the support of an elderly cigar manufacturer, enabling it to expand into local and inter-city ambulance services as well as management of a blood bank with over 4000 donors. The group also provided sale of discounted oxygen tanks for patients at the city hospital. By the time of my fieldwork in 2015 and 2016 hundreds of volunteers offered help weekly to deliver a suite of support services including funeral and ambulance transportation, assistance with paper work for the sick or deceased as well as coordination of blood donations for patients at the General Hospital. In addition to township-level groups such as *Byama-so*, dozens of smaller ward and village associations were also established in the late 1990s and 2000s, often based on the support of monasteries, mosques or churches.

[79] Though these expenses are waved entirely for families who are unable to afford them. Interview with local representative of 'Byama-so' in Taungoo, 30 April 2015.

Junta officials made small recurrent contributions to support the work of some of these welfare groups. For instance, most of the funding to support the elderly home, which featured in the opening vignette to this chapter, derived from donations by local entrepreneurs and civil servants. However, according to the administrator of the home, since the 1990s the facility also received a small monthly grant as well as in-kind assistance in the form of rice and cooking oil from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (Interview, 22 January 2016). Additionally, military patrons hosted '*ahlu bwe'* or donation celebrations such as the one described in the opening vignette two or three times a year throughout the 1990s, donating cooking oil, rice and money that was publicly gifted to local business elites who administered these centres.[80] Regional military commanders rarely initiated nor administered donation appeals on behalf of these welfare groups. Instead, businesspeople were expected to lead the day-to-day management of these groups and ensure their financial viability through fundraising or contributions of their own. The leadership role of businesspeople endured well beyond the establishment of these welfare groups in the 1990s and 2000s. The secretary of a township funeral group explained in 2015: "We do not have regular donations or a large group of donors. But if we are low on funds we let the 'town elder' [the chairman of the organisation] know and he gets donations from the big men or women (B: *lu gyi*) to make sure there is enough" (Interview, 2 May 2015). Probed about the meaning of 'big men', he responded that both the local Tatmadaw commander and some businesspeople were *lu gyi*, highlighting the logic of co-administration which characterised this period.

Being a 'big man' also implied obligations to help provide or maintain public goods such as roads. Interviewees in a downtown area of Taungoo described the construction of roads in the 1990s as the outcome of 'cooperation' between local entrepreneurs, state administrators, social or religious authorities and local residents. According to key participants in the project, the military administrator for the ward met with a group of local traders and shop-keepers and directed them to lead the resurfacing of a number of degraded arterial roads in the ward (Interview with ward 'elders', 20 Feb 2016). Specific roles including chairman and treasurer were allocated to entrepreneurs as well as local civil servants by the military administrator, and military trucks were provided for use in transporting required stone and materials. The project

[80] A former civil servant with intimate knowledge of military battalion administration in the 1990s suggested that these 'donations' would usually derive from contributions made by local military families as well as goods sourced from military food stores, which until 2003 derived from compulsory procurement from nearby farmers (Interview, 6 September 2016; see also Okamoto 2009).

committee then coordinated a ward fundraising and construction campaign with 'volunteer' labour from their employees as well as various religious and welfare groups in which the entrepreneurs were involved. In return, the committee members were able to solicit endorsement letters from the military commander and his officers in bids for licences or permits from other parts of the Myanmar state apparatus. Unable to rely solely on brute force, regional military commanders thus actively used transactional incentives to encourage businesspeople to take responsibility for local improvement initiatives.

Earning a 'social licence' enabled capital accumulation

Under SLORC/SPDC rule, businesspeople had clear economic incentives to lead local welfare and improvements projects as these activities could allow them to expand their commercial operations and accumulate capital. In contrast to the form of welfare capitalism institutionalised in U Nu's Pyidawtha Plan of the 1950s, corporate welfare obligations during this period were not limited to employees and their families. Rather, the provincial modalities of authoritarian welfare capitalism encouraged businesspeople to extend their sphere of obligation beyond the workplace to the larger communities in which they operated commercially. Businesspeople who took fundraising and administrative responsibility for community welfare and local social affairs in ways that were visible and helpful to local junta officials were then permitted to expand their businesses. In addition to acquiring short-term commercial licences by entering into joint-ventures or profit-sharing arrangements with junta officials, earning what I term a '*social licence'* was thus equally essential to business success during the 1990s and 2000s.[81] Being seen to possess a social licence shaped how local junta officials responded to requests for commercial licence renewal or business expansion, and also effected determinations of how much formal tax businesspeople were expected to pay. Beyond the transactional dimensions of marketisation, social licensing allowed regional junta officials to ensure that some form of redistribution and social expenditure was occurring within their zone of territorial control during a period of rapid retrenchment in state social functions.

[81] Here I appropriate the concept of the 'social licence to operate' coined initially by researchers of extractive industries to refer to the degree to which business operations which had been granted a legal commercial licence by governmental authorities also had the endorsement of the 'public' or 'community' from which resources were extracted. Business ethics scholars Demuijnck and Fasterling (2016: 675-676) define a 'social licence' as a "contractarian basis for the legitimacy of a company's specific activity or project… [which justifies] an institution or a moral or political rule by referring to the consent of all persons concerned with it." My use of the concept to describe state-business relations in post-socialist Myanmar is not meant to suggest that the public at large perceived commercial operators as necessarily 'legitimate'. Rather, I aim to highlight that social criteria stood alongside rent-seeking and other objectives in attempts by junta officials to shape the behaviour of emergent business elites.

Proactively assuming responsibility for informal governance of 'community' was a central means of accruing a more durable *social licence*. Many businesspeople who entered into initial patron-client relations with regional military commanders and founded welfare groups in the early 1990s, for instance, were gradually requested either by junta officials or by local administrators to assume positions as village, ward or town 'elders' (B: *myo mi myo pah*). This informal role did not technically exist within the formal administrative system during this period. However, it allowed them and the larger network of civilians to which they served as patrons to liaise with regional military commanders and their subordinates on the implementation of local junta objectives and schemes. The business-men who greeted military officers at the aged care home described in the opening vignette of this chapter both gained local prominence throughout the 1990s by mediating directly between military commanders and the local populace. According to other members of the local commercial elites active during this period, these 'elders' were able to exercise considerable agency in fundraising and organisational management of social and religious organisations, which may otherwise have been perceived as a threat by regional military commanders. Many 'town elders' were allocated large land concessions by military commanders during the 1990s and 2000s, often in areas officially designated as 'virgin' but long cultivated by farmers. Some favoured businesspeople were also able to secure local monopolies in popular and essential products and services or operate unlicenced or illegal businesses with bureaucratic impunity (Kudo 2005; Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007b; Woods 2015: 8). Their wealth, ability to lend capital to smaller commercial aspirants and role in informal social administration allowed these emergent commercial elites to exercise considerable social and economic power during junta rule. Indeed, many of Myanmar's now nationally prominent tycoons accrued their wealth and social standing through artful navigation of provincial dynamics of commercial and social licensing. However, even emergent 'cronies' as they came to be known were ultimately reliant upon their regional – or in some cases national – junta patrons for continued status and commercial success. These hierarchies of power and obligation may be usefully conceived as a pyramid of patronage descending from national and regional junta commanders via processes of marketisation and social licensing to civilian businesspeople, their clients and finally the broader 'community' (see Figure 6).

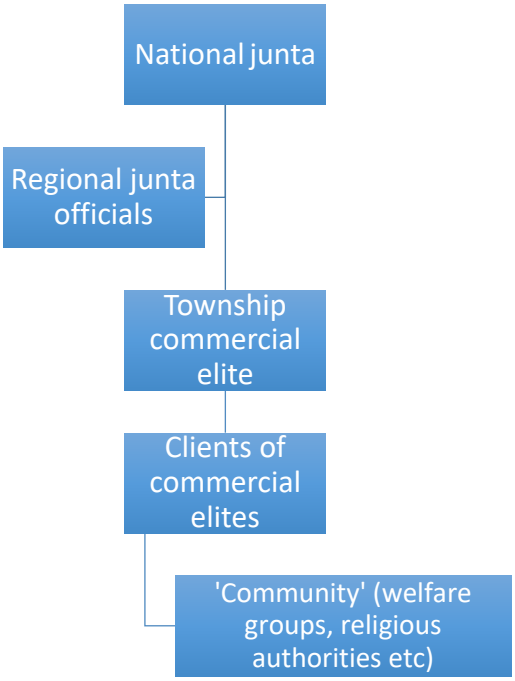

Figure 6: Ideal-type of social hierarchy and governance during junta rule.

The career trajectory of Khin Maung Aye, the donor listed third in the donation records in Figure 5, highlights dynamics of patronage, *social licencing* and commercial success during the 1990s and 2000s. Khin Maung Aye hailed from relatively humble beginnings in Taungoo, attending a local state high school and then university as a science student in the late 1980s. Interlocutors recounted how he became actively involved in the 1988 protests against Ne Win's regime, and was appointed treasurer of the student movement protesting the economic mismanagement and moral bankruptcy of the BSPP. During this period Khin Maung Aye coordinated fundraising and donations for the protesters who had set up camps in late July and early August 1988 around the entrance to the largest pagoda in Taungoo, the Shwe San Daw, and two other locations around the town. On August 7 or 8, these camps were attacked by military police, who refused to negotiate with protesters. Between 10 and 20 people were killed on the steps of the pagoda, and hundreds more injured. It is not clear if Khin Maung Aye was arrested during this time or if he was personally wounded when the protests were suppressed by authorities.[82]

[82] Information for this paragraph was sourced from interviews with various unconnected contacts involved in the local events of the 1988 protests (Fieldnotes, June 2015, November 2015, April 2016).

In the years that followed 1988, Khin Maung Aye formed his own company, Kaung Myanmar Aung Group,[83] and began to bid for licences from local representatives of the new military regime. The nature of Khin Maung Aye's early dealings with government are difficult to ascertain. Yet it is clear that Khin Maung Aye's operations increasingly shifted away from Taungoo as he established new patrons in more senior ranks of the junta. With the privatization of the banking sector in 1992, Khin Maung Aye became involved in the management of Cooperative Bank – the financial arm of the Ministry of Cooperatives which provided loans to farmers during the Ne Win period. In 1997 he became Chairman and Chief Executive of CB Bank, and in 2002 was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Central Cooperative Society. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s he contributed to major national strategic projects including the financing and construction of parts of Naypyitaw and received various licences and permissions to expand his company KMA Group into mining, logging, construction, hotels, aviation and shipping. [84] Throughout his emergence as a national-prominent 'crony' he built close ties to members of the regime including Thein Sein. In late 2010 competition between Khin Maung Aye, Asia World's Steven Law and Kanbawza Bank chairman Aung Ko Win over government contracts and the privatization of national carrier Myanmar Airways International provoked a dispute with other senior junta officials. According to reports by The Irrawaddy at the time, the dispute resulted in panicked customers withdrawing their cash deposits from accounts in CB Bank. The crisis brought the bank to the brink of bankruptcy until then-Prime Minister Thein Sein personally intervened on behalf of Khin Maung Aye.[85] Thein Sein soon thereafter ascended to the Presidency and later appointed him to a number of advisory roles in the new civilian government. Perhaps reflecting his close ties with President Thein Sein, Khin Maung Aye was a major financier of the USDP nationally and locally at the November 2010 elections according to my interlocutors. In 2015, however, he supported the NLD's election campaign, as discussed in greater depth in Chapter Seven.

Khin Maung Aye maintained local practices of social philanthropy throughout his ascendency from provincial business-man to 'crony' of Myanmar's most prominent junta officials. Despite spending very little of his time in Taungoo through the 1990s and 2000s, records of pagoda

[83] The company name translates as 'Good Myanmar Victory', though the acronym of the company also mirrors his English initials (KMA).
[84] For an official biography of Khin Maung Aye from the ASEAN Bankers website see http://www.aseanbankers.org/ABAWeb/index.php/regional-updates/myanmar/61-president-2022 [accessed 29-01-2017].
[85] The result of this dispute was the formation of Myanmar's second international airline, Golden Myanmar Airways, of which Khin Maung Aye is also chairman.

construction and renovation from the early 1990s show that he donated to the construction of several major monasteries in Taungoo as well as the 2002 formation and 2007 expansion of the local chapter of funeral and welfare association *Byama-So* (Fieldnotes 6 August 2015, 9 September 2015). He also took a leading role in rejuvenating the local memory of the Taungoo Dynasty. The kingdom conquered parts of Myanmar and Southeast Asia between the 14th and 16th centuries, and formed a key element of the SLORC/SPDCs nationalist education in state schools. To commemorate the historical lineage of the town Khin Maung Aye donated large golden gates alongside two towering twenty-foot statues of the Taungoo Dynasty's Kings Tabinshwethi and Bayinnaung at the entrance to the city. His patronage of the junta's historical imaginary provides an insight into contemporary Burmese 'philanthronationalism', a form of business praxis previously theorised in Sri Lanka under Mahinda Rajapaksa when state-sanctioned nationalist rhetoric and ideology was extended and diffused by market actors (cf Widger 2016). In the context of 1990s Myanmar, these kinds of philanthropic practices allowed businesspeople such as Khin Maung Aye to generate a reputation for generosity among officials and a narrow slice of the public, thereby generating the *'social licence'* necessary to secure support of junta members to facilitate his commercial success for mutual gain throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Philanthropic and symbolic contributions which demonstrated acceptance of the moral and social obligations of wealth whilst diffusing the junta's nationalist ideology thus offered a path from provincial obscurity to national commercial dominance trodden by many of Myanmar's now prominent tycoons.

Avoiding social obligations, maintaining modest wealth

Not all businesspeople were willing to assume the social obligations of the junta's configuration of welfare capitalism. Some commercial operators rejected the legitimacy of the junta and refused to contribute more than was strictly necessary to state appeals or to lead junta-endorsed welfare groups during this period. Those who were able to resist or avoid symbiotic relations with military commanders tended to be independently wealthy, and in many cases had inherited their capital from earlier family commercial success. Importantly, they also tended to have more modest commercial aspirations, as failure to obtain and maintain a social licence meant that they received far fewer business concessions from junta officials throughout the 1990s and 2000s. A case study of a relatively modest entrepreneur, Dr. Than Zin*, provides an insight into the commercial limits imposed on those who failed to cultivate the moral bonds with junta officials necessary to earn themselves a social licence.

Dr. Than Zin inherited land from his father who had engaged in trade during the late socialist period. After winning a prestigious position in medical school and practicing as a doctor, he then left the practice of medicine to open a small guest-house with capital accrued earlier by his parents. A degree of interaction with junta officials was inevitable in order to receive the required licences to host foreigners and have these permits renewed. Yet his reliance on inherited wealth and contentment with a largely locally-oriented business meant he had little incentive to join committees and contribute more than was strictly necessary to the welfare groups or Buddhist appeals made by other businesspeople in the region in partnership with junta officials. A sense of obligation to render aid to others, however, was reflected in his provision of free medical aid directly to villages he visited with the occasional visits of foreign tourists to Taungoo. This approach allowed him to by-pass the intermediation of assistance by welfare groups patronised by more regime-aligned businesspeople while still fulfilling what he perceived as the moral obligations of wealth. Other members of the local commercial class such as Khin Maung Aye founded or administered welfare groups while accruing considerable landholdings and diversified commercial portfolios of mining, construction, hospitality and transport businesses. Some were rewarded with positions of 'town elders', while others such as Khin Maung Aye with grander aspirations and more senior patrons were able to gradually accrue positions as nationally-prominent 'cronies'. Apart from the acquisition of some land elsewhere in the country, in contrast, Dr. Than Zin's business empire retained a largely local focus.

Those able to accrue capital through mass-consumption media such as film or television also engaged in social work independently of the regime. Actor Kyaw Thu, for instance, emerged during the 1980s as the star of a number of prominent films, winning the acclaim of the SLORC in the form of a 1994 Ministry of Culture 'Myanmar Academy Award'. Known for his roguish, abrupt demeanour and alcoholism, he largely eschewed public activism for much of the 1990s and 2000s. In 2001, however, he founded the Free Funeral Service with film director Thukha, apparently after encountering a woman in hospital whose family had abandoned her as they were unable to afford her funeral.[86] After providing aid to monks and other protesters involved in a 2007 uprising against the government he was subsequently banned by the junta from acting

[86] For excerpts from a rare interview with Kyaw Thu see Whiteman. 2013. 'Myanmar movie star buries the dead'. CNN. 8 October https://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/12/world/asia/myanmar-funerals-kyaw-thu/index.html [accessed 26 September 2016].

and directing films.[87] Despite these restrictions, Kyaw Thu expanded the services offered by the Free Funeral Service into ambulance, hospital, disaster relief and education provision, funded by donations from the public as well as contributions from his own fortune. His accrued wealth by the 2000s thus dampened the financial impact of the regime's effective suspension of his film career, allowing Kyaw Thu to continue to engage in social work independent of regime-linked groups despite restrictions on profitable industry roles. A sense of moral obligation to engage in charitable work was thus embraced even by wealthy people whose earlier accrual of wealth or more modest aspirations relative to other commercial elites meant they relied far less on junta-mediated licences to engage in profitable enterprise. It was thus essential for entrepreneurs to secure and generate a *social licence* from junta patrons. In order achieve anything more than modest business success during the post-socialist period emergent commercial elites were required to cultivate bonds with state officials by sharing profits, facilitating junta initiatives and objectives and pro-actively engaging in social 'philanthropy'. Through these mechanisms authoritarian welfare capitalism also facilitated a broader shift in popular notions of obligations to 'community' that are continuing to shape distributive politics in contemporary Myanmar.

Section Three: Governing by moral community

The space for social action provided by welfare groups enabled a shift in the scope of charitable giving. As distain for the junta's direct solicitation of donations intensified, welfare group managers and volunteers began to develop at neighbourhood, village and township level often patronised by monks and local businesspeople that crafted themselves considerable autonomy of direct state involvement. By virtue of their rhetorical emphasis on Buddhist idioms and role in religious rituals, these groups were able to secure 'quasi-voluntary compliance' (see Levi 1988) with materially bounded claims on the money, time and resources of 'community' members in order to address local social crises. The interpretive shifts brought about as regional junta officials permitted localised mechanisms of redistribution to flourish served to facilitate the broader objective of devolving and outsourcing responsibility for social governance to the locus of market-oriented 'community'.

[87] The September 2007 uprising, labelled as the 'Saffron Revolution' by some observers due to the involvement of thousands of monks, was the largest demonstration against the junta since 1988. See McCarthy (2008) for a useful overview of the context to the uprising and the political implications of the junta's violent response.

Monks and political elites reinterpreted scope of 'charity'

Monastic authorities and political elites played a central role in reimagining the boundaries of meritorious charitable giving and social obligation during the 1990s and 2000s. *Dana* or charity is considered one of the central mundane practices through which lay Buddhists can seek to achieve *nibbana* (B: *neikban*), the end of cycles of rebirth and suffering (see Jordt 2007: 100; Schober 1996). Research on charitable practices among Burmese Buddhists in the 1950s and 1960s previously suggested that the scope of meritorious giving (B: *dana)* was tightly bound to the supra-mundane 'religious' rather than social or 'this worldly' domain. In an interpretation still held by many Burmese Buddhists people, anthropologist Milford Spiro concluded from fieldwork in the 1950s and 1960s that "merit [accrued] is proportional to the sanctity of the recipient" (Spiro 1982 [1970]: 463). Consequently, constructing religious buildings such as pagodas as well as donating food or other material support to monks was seen by many Burmese people to draw the most merit (Spiro 1982 [1970]: 104). The scope provided by the junta for businesspeople and 'trusted' local authorities such as monks to establish or patronise welfare-oriented organisations throughout the 1990s and 2000s began to dramatically shift the social boundaries of Buddhist charity.

Soon after the dissolution of the BSPP and the commencement of marketisation, monks around Myanmar began to position themselves "as both recipients and distributors of donations" (Walton 2016: 154). The most prominent abbots to enlist monastic hierarchy to serve religious and socially redistributive outcomes were the Thamanya and Sitagu Sayadaws. Sitagu Sayadaw, also known as U Nyanissara, gained particular renown across Myanmar after returning from exile following his involvement in the 1988 protests to establish a network of charitable health facilities and educational institution in Sagaing and Yangon in the mid-1990s (Walton 2016: 33, 142). Lay people from around the country including entrepreneurs and senior members of the junta were increasingly drawn to offer money and time at Sitagu's facilities, where he provided sick patients free treatment often of a higher standard than many government hospitals during this period.[88] Thamanya Sayadaw also developed a major compound outside Hpa-an in Karen State which was visited by millions of Buddhists across Myanmar in the mid-1990s, including Aung San Suu Kyi (see Rozenberg 2010, chapter four).

[88] The necessity and feasibility of private networks of aid and redistribution was demonstrated through Sitagu's significant role in coordinating assistance following the devastation of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, as discussed further in Chapter Four.

Sitagu and other prominent monks increasingly began to refer to their social initiatives using the Pali-derived concept of *parahita* (social work).[89] The concept previously had a fairly strict religious scope, having been enlisted most prominently by Burmese nationalists in the decades prior to independence to encourage lay involvement in propagating nation-wide religious institutions (Pali: *sasana*, B: *thathana)* (Turner 2014: 19).[90] From the mid-1990s, however, prominent monks endorsed *parahita* as a form of *byama-so taya* or meritorious practices of moral conduct or truth seen to bridge the mundane (B: *lawki*) and supra-mundane (B: *lawkouttara*) realms (Houtman 1999: 308). Sitagu and other abbots often dedicated lengthy public sermons to detailing their *parahita* activities and encourage welfare work by the laity (Walton 2016: 153). By lending their support to local social initiatives which responded to suffering, misfortune or inequality within the community, monks challenged the logic that merit accrued on the basis of the moral status of the end recipient – suggesting it was also "in part contingent on the *need* of the recipient" (Walton 2016: 60, emphasis in original).

Monks also began redistributing religious donations (B: *dana*) they received at events such as meditation festivals (B: *tayabwes*) organised by lay Buddhists to achieve social objectives. *Tayabwes* are large, frequently multi-day events usually held in a public space where a single or multiple monks will be invited to give sermons and recite sutras from the early evening through to the early hours of the morning. In both rural and urban contexts they are taken to be an expression of communal morality and are often one of the highlights of the annual village or neighbourhood calendar. Specially-established *tayabwe* groups emerged throughout Myanmar in the 1990s, often at state encouragement, to raise funds from local entrepreneurs and ordinary people necessary to invite monks to travel across the country to participate in preaching events. Entire city streets are often blocked off in urban areas for a *tayabwe*, and village fields will be covered in mats to accommodate the faithful from near and far. It is common for tens of thousands of US dollars equivalent to be donated to monks who participate in a major urban *tayabwe*. From the early 1990s researchers noted that monks who accepted invitations to preach at these events would often do so with the plan to redistribute funds

[89] Para – others - is the inverse concept of atta – self, and is here conjoined with the concept of benefit (hita). Thus 'for the benefit of others' or 'work for others'.

[90] Mingun Sayadaw similarly used donations to support construction of a university and a range of social service organisations in the decades following independence (Walton 2016: 152). A more expansive concept of *parahita,* however, appears to have lost traction with the tight constraints on civil society and state dominance over the licit economy during the BSPP period.

donated to them to support a range of local or translocal initiatives. The generation of monks that assumed public roles and administrative responsibilities in the post-socialist period and later helped to lead a 2007 uprising against the junta became particularly renowned for using preaching events to achieve redistributive outcomes (Brac de la Perriere 2015: 331-337). A monk in Taungoo, who was proclaimed an abbot in 2014 at the unusually young age of 42, described how accepting invitations to participate in *tayabwes* locally as well as in Yangon and Bago enabled him to raise money that he could then direct back into local community initiatives. Since the mid-2000s his monastery has hosted a weekly Dhamma School to teach Buddhism to children, as well as a free clinic and tutoring for poor local youth, all of which are administered by lay Buddhists. The abbot also contributed the largest amount for the retarring of a major thoroughfare on which his monastery is located. He framed these social objectives as an essential part of the broader mission of Buddhism: "We cannot do meditation without dealing with these other problems… It is such a major obstacle to rejuvenating morality here" (Interview, 1 August 2015). Social work activities served to expand the lay following of a generation of monks who emerged during the 1990s and 2000s, many of whom encouraged their followers to extend the social scope of their own charitable giving into a range of health, education and welfare initiatives. While overtly 'political' actions such as the 2007 uprising were violently suppressed by the junta, ostensibly 'apolitical' social activities commonly affiliated with monks were often encouraged and supported by regional junta officials. Over time, however, even these less 'contentious' forms of redistributive social action began to accrue a 'political' connotation for many who gave their time and money to support these initiatives.

Critique of the junta's solicitation of 'donations' intensified

By the mid-1990s many lay Buddhists, especially emergent entrepreneurs, had come to view junta demands for 'donations' as morally circumspect. The commercial and political motives of donors, as well as the threat of coercion from military authorities, led many people to question whether it was possible to make these 'donations' with the detached, volitional and compassionate intentions (B: *cedana*) necessary to accrue good merit. Anthropologists who conducted fieldwork during this period frequently encountered debates about merit. Both Ingrid Jordt and Naoko Kumada recounted that the state of mind of the donor, the state of mind of the recipient, the type of gift, its value as well as appropriateness of the gift to the recipient were essential in determining the meritorious nature of a gift (Jordt 2007 101-102; Kumada 2004: 5). Jordt, for instance, recounts participants in state-linked lay meditation groups

critiquing contributions they felt donors had made to monks or monasteries with an expectation of material return as "inferior to those acts motivated by the aspiration to cultivate a proper disposition towards material circumstances" – that is, of willing detachment from worldly possessions (Jordt 2007: 100; Kumada 2004: 5). These moral critiques also extended to participants in state-coordinated donation rituals. Jordt notes that rumours often circulated within meditation networks questioning whether funds pledged by military officials or their civilian business clients to GONGOs and other regime-aligned welfare groups were gifted with the requisite 'sincerity' to be considered meritorious (Jordt 2007: 137). When the USDA was transformed into a junta-aligned political party and enlisted its networks of material aid and reliance to persuade voters at the 2010 elections, many lay Buddhists became outright disdainful of 'donations' to welfare-oriented GONGOs and state-endorsed initiatives. Despite these critiques, a welfare volunteer who worked for a prominent businessman throughout the 1990s and 2000s argued that the work of the USDA was central to the emergence of lay-led social charity beyond the organisation:

> People only got involved in USDA because it was a social welfare group. That is why people developed *parahita seit* (social consciousness), because they use to work for USDA. But when it became a political party [in 2010], people withdrew their support as they couldn't accept it. So now *lu-mu-yay seit* (social welfare mindset) has spread into other groups (Interview, 9 July 2015).

Throughout this period democracy activists including Aung San Suu Kyi also critiqued the coercion and social pressure enlisted by state GONGOs and junta officials while simultaneously encouraging supporters of 'democracy' to engage in volitional charitable work. Held under house arrest for much of the 1990s and 2000s, Suu Kyi's writings and occasional speeches during this period enlisted Buddhist concepts by accusing officials of possessing power without *myitta* (loving kindness), a criteria commonly cited as necessary for actions such as donations to draw beneficial merit.[91] Rather than contributing to the junta's GONGOs and initiatives, Suu Kyi encouraged people to "concentrate on cultivating loving kindness and compassion" by engaging in charity work, emphasising it would lead to "the emergence of

[91] Suu Kyi framed the concept of *myitta* as the central criteria for evaluating the junta after 1988. She argues that during the pre-colonial monarchical periods, *myitta* was considered an attribute of 'good' power, becoming a key part of King Mindon's coronation ceremony: "O King… love compassionately everyone… treasure their lives as though your own… Look after everyone as though after yourself. Guard their welfare as though your own… Deign to watch over the country's inhabitants' welfare…" (quoted in Houtman 1999: 325). Suu Kyi also repeatedly referred to her father Aung San's approach of governing "on the basis of loving kindness and truth", placing herself and the NLD within a regal lineage of just rule (quoted in Houtman 1999: 325).

feelings of solidarity and the formation of a society" required both to achieve political freedom and individual liberation from cycles of rebirth (Suu Kyi quoted in Houtman 1999: 314, 322). Aforementioned actor, director and social worker Kyaw Thu was one of the most prominent lay activists to enact these broader notions of social work. He appeared in public and in the media driving funeral hearses and ambulances for sick patients, including after the 2007 uprising, and became a paragon of humanitarian and democratic virtue which other celebrities and many ordinary Buddhist people sought to emulate (San San Oo 2018).[92] Elite re-interpretation of key Buddhist concepts laid the normative ground for a broader shift in popular notions of meritorious actions and donations (see Tosa 2018). At village, ward and township levels, locally-oriented *parahita* groups often established by monks and businesspeople provided essential site to conduct socially impactful meritorious action beyond the direct oversight of junta officials.

Lay mediation of rituals finances social initiatives

Critique of the junta's solicitation of 'donations' to support its initiatives led many lay people, especially entrepreneurs, to support welfare groups and social projects less directly linked to regional officials. In Taungoo, many businesspeople supported lay-managed groups patronised by monastic authorities such as *Byama-so* as well as local ward-based and village initiatives which they often helped to establish with large donations. In addition to supporting these initiatives from their profits, some businesspeople also sought out roles in religious events such as *tayabwes* to finance welfare groups. This was a common activity of wealthy businesspeople encountered throughout my fieldwork.

Visiting a ward clinic in mid-2015 I met a middle-aged business-woman Daw Kyi*, who ran a stone quarry on the fringe of Taungoo. She explained that the clinic was a collaboration between the ward administrator who provided the office, a volunteer doctor who provided free treatment three days a week, and her own donations for medical supplies and pharmaceuticals. The clinic had also received an early injection of financial support and social legitimacy from a prominent Mandalay-based monk who she had invited to lead a meditation event in Taungoo. During the three-night event she claimed to have donated around US$2000 to the monk, a sizable proportion of her monthly profit. The community around the *tayabwe* also gave

[92] Chapters of the Free Funeral Service subsequently opened in Mandalay and then in provincial areas across Myanmar in the mid to late 2000s. For more background on the growth of the initiative see Zon Pann Pwint, 2013, 'Kyat Thu: from actor to funeral director', Myanmar Times, 2 December.

generously, with over US$2000 donated through collections at the entrance to the event as well as in envelopes given to the monks' assistants. In addition, 180 women ritually shaved and donated their hair to the abbot, a form of worldly renunciation common in Myanmar and India which delivers a major source of revenue for monasteries who sell the hair to wig-makers for profit.[93] On the third night of the preaching event, the monk donated US$1000 to the local clinic patronised by Daw Kyi and housed out of the ward administrators' office. As of mid-2015 the clinic, recognised by ward administrators as a project she had founded and led, offered free medical treatment three days a week as well as discounted rental of breathing assistance machines to local residents. The form of monastic-lay coordination evinced at the event provided an insight into how private redistribution with minimal direct junta involvement lent a spiritual connotation to donations.

Similar redistributive logics were integrated into 'giving rituals' (B: *ahlu bwes*) hosted by lay patrons. *Ahlu bwes* are major moments of financial redistribution within the community, with funds historically being directed to support monks and monastic establishments. Earlier researchers recounted how giving rituals create hierarchies of social and spiritual status as well as ties of mutual obligation between attendees (Schober 1989: 72-74, 122-123; Jordt 2007, Ch 3). In addition to these hierarchical dynamics, social concerns for the needy within the 'community' were also central elements of *ahlubwe* encountered throughout my fieldwork. Hosts of numerous events I attended explicitly told their guests that donations given at the event would be directed to local welfare activities, often based out of local monasteries, including ambulance services, health clinics or elderly care. Similar dynamics were observed by researchers in the mid-1990s. Fieldwork conducted by anthropologist Naoko Kumada between 1994 and 1999 highlights how donations categories and donor intentionality became increasingly blurry at a local level. Kumada recounted various instances where meritorious donations were "bound with worldly elements", including the use of the idiom of *dana* and specifically meritorious giving (B: *hlu*) in a range of contexts including gifts to neighbours, the elderly, poor or needy, as well as donation of wells and planting of trees in rural areas (Kumada 2004: 4, 6-7). [94]

[93] Research on Hindu religious charities in neighbouring India suggests that sale of hair donated by lay renouncers delivers millions of dollars US in revenue for some temples and shrines (Bornstein 2012: 54-55).
[94] Naoko Kumada similarly described how an *ahlu* held by "a successful broker" in the mid-1990s for the monastic initiation of his grandsons was hosted not in his town of residence "but in his native village because the village was poor and they wanted to feed the villagers", as well as residents from the surrounding area (Kumada 2004: 7).

The role that welfare groups play in performing Buddhist rituals encourages compliance with the financial appeals made at 'giving ceremonies'.[95] Ceremonies to 'pay homage' to elders (B: *bu zaw kadaw bwe)*, usually over the age of 70, such as that featured in the opening vignette of this chapter provide a vivid demonstration of how ritual and redistributive function coincide. Materially supporting the elderly, considered one of the 'Five Jewels' worthy of veneration in Buddhism (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, parents and teachers) and a core component of what many people perceive by one's social obligations to the family unit. Supporting the elderly has also become a key focus of welfare groups throughout Myanmar. Respect for the elderly in post-socialist Myanmar is often materialised through gifts such as cash, soap, toothbrushes, clothing, slippers, blankets and food.[96] A symbolically rich notion of obligation beyond family emerged as these mechanisms began to make demands on the 'community' as a whole, facilitating the junta's aim of devolving responsibility for distributive justice to profit-oriented and non-state actors. Indeed, these systems of redistribution to elders and other needy categories of people which have emerged, often with the financial support of businesspeople and the administrative facilitation of the junta, serve to blur categorical distinctions between meritorious charity (B: *dana)* and the more familial, obligatory and thus less meritorious sphere of social affairs (B: *lu-mu-yay*).

Contributing to social initiatives generates notion of 'community'

The provision of material aid at times of crisis and need often shape people's understanding of relatedness and obligation. As anthropologist James Ferguson notes from research in southern Africa, for instance, obligations to others emerge not simply from biological kinship but from "long processes of building social ties and reciprocal obligation" through aid which is publicly and privately recognised or compelled (Ferguson 2015: 108). Indeed, decades of fieldwork in contexts of conflict, displacement, scarcity and insecurity has shown that idioms of kinship and

[95] For instance, many welfare groups organise female chanting troupes (B: *dhamma seh gya*) on behalf of the families of the deceased in addition to subsidising the financial costs of funerals and cremation. These troupes accompany funeral processions and recite blessings for the deceased as per Burmese funeral customs. The secretary of a township-level group formed in the early 2000s emphasised that satisfying both the material *and* ritual needs of the deceased was essential to "helping the spirit to reach a better place" (Interview, 3 August 2015).
[96] Contributions to 'honouring ceremonies' comprised nearly one-third of all reported expenditure by 36 *parahita* organisations surveyed by Griffiths in Sagaing Region (Griffiths 2016a in Griffiths 2017). A HelpAge International report by anthropologist Jennifer Leehey recounts elderly care groups in Magwe Region led largely by local youths which hosted 'honouring ceremonies' twice a year. At each of these, all local elderly received 10,000 *kyat* in cash along with gifts such as blankets, salt, sugar, Ovaltine, medicines and *lungyis* (sarongs) (Leehey 2016).

relatedness become "aspirational and negotiable" (McGovern 2012: 739) modes through which hosts and strangers, wealthy and poor cooperate and reciprocate at times of scarcity (see also Englund 2008, Stasch 2009). Kinship or relatedness, from this perspective, is "not really something you *have* - it is something you *do"* by enacting, and responding to, distributive claims upon finite resources (Ferguson 2015: 134, emphasis added). As Erica Bornstein notes in her ethnography of humanitarianism in New Delhi, however, the magnitude of material obligation that welfare groups claim from donors must be carefully bounded in the context of extreme scarcity. Despite generating a degree of intimacy by including the needy within the vision of a supposedly equitable 'community', a careful social distance must be maintained between donor and recipient to prevent opening the giver "up to unlimited demand[s]" on already scarce family resources (Bornstein 2012: 150).

Welfare groups which emerged in the 1990s and 2000s in Myanmar fostered a materially limited and ostensibly voluntary system of social insurance which drew heavily on Buddhist-imbued notions of obligation beyond intimate kin. Reflecting the expanding social interpretation of charity among elites, idioms of *parahita* (work for others), *myitta* (loving kindness), *karuna* (charity) and *cedana* (compassion) played central roles within many of these localised welfare groups. In many cases these Buddhists concepts became what social researcher Mike Griffiths (2017: 8) terms the "organising 'idea'" of welfare groups, lending moral legitimacy to the solicitation of funds, labour or in-kind contributions from community members. For instance, the aforementioned group *Byama-so*, founded in Mandalay in 1998 and in Taungoo in 2002, references the *byama-so taya*, this-worldly spiritual truths widely seen by democracy activists and ordinary Buddhists as helping to:

> … bridge the mundane and the supra-mundane… collective and personal aspirations… permit[ing] vision of the unconditioned emptiness of *nibbana* upon which can be projected ultimate ideals of freedom and fulfilment (Houtman 1999: 308, 311).

Grand claims of 'social' transformation and charitable obligation were often made by volunteers and donors involved with welfare groups I followed throughout 2015 and 2016 in Taungoo. Managers and volunteers carefully intermediated transactions of money, time or other aid in order to emphasise the larger spiritual and collective stakes of supposedly voluntary charitable giving. A careful balance must be struck between soliciting material assistance and ensuring that aid provided is perceived as free and collectively meaningful. The art of

solicitation was evident in June 2015 when I followed an entourage of local university students to the blood bank at the Taungoo General Hospital. In the donation room, we were joined by a volunteer from *Byama-so* who had coordinated blood donations from a range of networks including university student groups since the mid-2000s. Throughout the 45 minutes of their donation, the volunteer – a commercial trader who took the morning off work to meet the students and provide encouragement – played an important rhetorical role, helping to support the students and frame their experience of blood giving. "What does it feel like to give blood?", I asked one of the students. The volunteer quickly interjected:

> It feels fantastic! It is essential that they give blood… People need blood to continue their lives. By giving blood, your happiness is limitless because you save lives! (Fieldnotes, 4 June 2015).

The students donating nodded weakly as 450 mLs of their rare AB blood slowly trickled into bags propped up on wooden blocks on the floor. Similar encouragement came from another student who donated the week prior and sat beaming at the foot of the bed, loading photos of the students to their group's newly formed Facebook page. The volunteer from *Byama-So* pulled me to the side of the room and quietly explained the importance of his role. "If they come alone", he told me, "they get a bit scared and decide not to donate." He then returned to encouraging them, stressing the contribution they were making not just to patients in need of their blood, but also to spreading what he and many other volunteers referred to as '*parahita seit*' – 'mind for others', or more figuratively 'social consciousness'.[97] Volunteers and coordinators of welfare groups often seek to use charitable transactions as a pedagogical experience in this way, seeking to cultivate within the donor a moral imagination where his or her action contribute to reducing suffering not just within the recipient but also 'society' more broadly. Buddhist idioms form a central part of the 'gifting' process, reinforcing the meritorious nature of the act of giving while cultivating a sense of shared collective identity between donor and recipient. Through framing and intermediation of transactions of physical or monetary aid, volunteers and managers of welfare groups encourage donors to see their contribution of blood as generative of a notion of 'community' of reciprocity and compassion.

[97] Thanks to Mee Mee Zaw for helping to clarify this terminology. See Mee Mee Zaw (2018) for a useful discussion of similar *parahita* practices and ideals amongst Yangon Buddhist youth networks prior to liberalisation.

Figure 7 Photos of blood donors loaded to Facebook by a student welfare group. Source: Facebook page of township welfare group.

A retired nurse, Daw Khin Nwe*, I met during the visit of Aung San Suu Kyi to Taungoo in August 2015 evoked similar social stakes when recounting her provision of free treatment to impoverished villagers during the 1990s. She described her charitable work as simultaneously improving the lives of the needy, transforming herself and catalysing change in Myanmar's social and political system:

> It is important to balance working for my family and friends, working for others and meditating for myself. I used to work in a free clinic in a village, giving blood tests and vaccinations. There were patients who could not afford even the trishaw ride to the clinic. When I saw that people were not equal, I wanted them to live to some standard… Just like Aung San Suu Kyi said at the rally: 'Everything you do is somehow connected with politics'… So doing *parahita* is politics as well as social work. This kind of work can start something much bigger, be the catalyst or the seed for something that is a force for democracy (Interview, 17 August 2015).

Many donors and welfare volunteers encountered throughout fieldwork framed their charitable work in a similar manner as Daw Khin Nwe and the trader who encouraged the students in the blood-bank. The symbolic framing of welfare work using reinterpreted Buddhist idioms such as *parahita* allowed tensions around potential material imbalances in reciprocity relationships

to be resolved by an appeal to the abstract mutuality of shared 'community' cultivated and deepened through volitional acts of giving and service. Similar symbolic discourse was used by risk-pooling groups which developed at neighbourhood and village level in the 1990s and 2000s to provide a base-line of informal social insurance for local residents. Often funded with foundational donations from monks, local businesspeople or migrants who moved elsewhere in the country in search of work, these communal risk sharing mechanisms help to alleviate the significant out-of-pocket expenses associated with family deaths, medical emergencies, aged care, education and so on.[98]

In Taungoo communal risk-sharing groups operated both on a reactive and periodic basis. Some collected small amounts from a diffuse group of local residents only when an accident or medical emergency occurred, whilst others collected funds on a monthly basis in a highly organised manner. These funds could be dispensed in the case of a medical emergency or death, but were also commonly used to finance elderly honouring ceremonies and other social initiatives. Neighbourhood funeral groups were the most common mechanisms encountered during fieldwork. In an urban context they often had several hundred members, which represented around 30 to 50 percent of households in the wards in which they operated. Each household which participated in funeral groups donated between 300 and 500 *kyat* (c. US 20 to 40 cents) when a death occurred within the ward, with contributions varying based on the affluence and generosity of the donor. Higher rates of participation of around 80 percent of households were encountered in rural villages, though smaller monetary donations were often supplemented in these contexts with a cup of dry rice from each household. In more formalised schemes encountered donors received a customised receipt for each contribution inscribing the name of the deceased alongside venerations which emphasised the meritorious nature of the donations, including the Buddhist idiom of *myitta* (loving kindness).

[98] The 1990s and 2000s saw significant internal migration, both within Bamar-majority areas of central Myanmar as well as from lowland areas to ethnic minority regions in a process labelled by some scholars as 'Burmanization' (see Boutry 2016). Migrants experience of exclusion from kin-based mechanisms of reciprocity in their host communities may have been one of the driving forces behind the proliferation of welfare groups in government-controlled areas of the country during the post-socialist period. In addition to encountering new ideas and practices in their host communities, the social isolation often experienced upon migration elsewhere in the country might help explain why migrants are, according to survey research, disproportionately likely to "remit funds for religious and social activities" to their home communities (LIFT/QSEM 2016). Indeed, a survey exploring 'social remittances' in Myanmar similarly found that villages with high levels of out-migration were over 20 percent more likely to have local social organisations than those with lower levels of migration (Ito and Griffiths 2016).

Depending on the size and affluence of the neighbourhood or village, between 70,000 *kyat* (c. US$50) and 150,000 *kyat* (c. US$120) would often be raised from these collections.[99] These contributions from the 'community' defrayed a portion of the cost of funeral rituals, cremation or burials, which regularly added up more than three months of average household income.[100] The manager of the rotating scheme, usually a local business-person but sometimes the ward administrator, donated these funds to the family of the deceased to supplement donations from more intimate family and friends who generally make larger monetary donations in the context of a death or medical emergency. In order to financially support administrative costs or enable provision of other social support for local residents, some village or neighbourhood welfare groups withhold a portion of funds collected from appeals or use capital donated by businesspeople to issue loans to villagers at a rate competitive to commercial money-lenders. As credit from welfare groups satisfies immediate financial needs of loan recipients and contributes to the social insurance of the 'community', anthropologist Jennifer Leehey (2016: 34-35) notes that many people who take loans from welfare groups see themselves as 'drawing good merit'.

Rather than operating according to the logic of perfectly 'balanced' reciprocity, not all recipients of risk-pooling funds were regular contributors to the welfare schemes from which they benefited. Need and residency within 'community' were instead the primary basis for determining eligibility to receive aid. A member of one neighbourhood funeral group explained the flexibility of the mechanism in his ward: "If we hear about a death, we alert the network and then we all come together to raise money". He suggested that some residents complain about including non-members, recent migrants to the neighbourhood or non-Buddhists in risk-pooling mechanisms. In these cases, he explained, the managers of the welfare group would appeal to a shared 'communal' identity based on Buddhist concepts such as 'loving kindness'

[99] Similar amounts were raised by groups which collected funds for medical emergencies such as motor-bike accidents.

[100] These costs are often additional to the catastrophic debt families assume to extend the life of a sick, injured or elderly relative. Average individual income in provincial Myanmar at the time of writing ranged between US$100-$250 per month for a day-labourer and around US$200-$300 for a school teacher or civil servant. Income was more seasonal for agricultural households, with many relying on urban remittances from children as well as windfalls from harvests which varied considerably depending on the size of seasonally cultivated land. Total costs for funeral rituals and ceremonies attended by the author, including amount expended on food, gifts for guests, donations to monks, costs of coffin, cremation, ritual adherence etc ranged between US$300-500 for rural and poor households and upwards of US$1000 for wealthier trading households.

(*myitta*) and 'work for others' (*parahita*).[101] As scholars of relatedness and obligation in others contexts have observed, elevating points of similarity between residents in this way serves to incorporate as "sources of power and potential" people and groups whose mutuality may be materially and relationally beneficial in the future (Goldfarb & Schuster 2016: 9).

By sharing risk across the diffuse locus of 'community' a form of patchy social insurance emerged in many contexts of lowland areas under government administration, even in the absence of substantive direct state social expenditure. Over the long term, these systems established flexible and sustainable mechanisms which helped to insulate people from financial shock of specific tragedies or misfortunes. For people with rare blood types, for instance, the register of willing blood donors managed by township-level welfare groups since the mid-2000s simplified the process of sourcing blood donors in the event of an emergency or chronic illness. As hospitals no longer covered the costs of medicine, bandages, sterilising alcohol and other medical supplies after 1988, risk-pooling mechanisms provided by welfare groups also reduce out-of-pocket expenses for costs associated with family medical emergencies.[102] The abstract mutuality of 'community' welfare groups thus helped achieve the junta's objective of devolving social governance by encouraging at least 'quasi-voluntary' contributions (see Levi 1988) to finance or staff systems of social redistribution beyond the state. The extent of dire need amid marketisation and socialist state retrenchment, combined with importance of free intention in these flows of charitable aid, mean that material demands made by and of 'community' were sustainable and did not result in donor fatigue.

Limiting demands by and of 'community'

The art of simultaneously bridging and maintaining social distance is essential to the sustainability of welfare and risk-sharing mechanisms. Many township, ward and neighbourhood *parahita* groups encountered during fieldwork carefully limited the demands people could make on their financial and social resources by drawing formal or informal thresholds to eligibility. Though no explicit means-test was imposed by any welfare groups encountered during fieldwork, ceilings on aid were imposed when patients requested or were

[101] Social researcher Mike Griffiths (2017: 9) recounts how managers of groups justify inclusion of recent arrivals or non-Buddhists with reference to the "'Bamar' ethnicity's compassionate attitude (*cedana*)" which they suggest is, or at least should be, shared by all residents.

[102] After 1988, government hospitals continued to function but the costs for most supplies were shifted onto patients, resulting in considerable increase in out-of-pocket expenses for families of sick or elderly (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007: 163).

in need of significant or ongoing support, such as regular transfusions of multiple litres of blood or ongoing and costly pharmaceuticals.[103] Strict financial and categorical limits were placed on which pharmaceuticals welfare groups were willing to cover for patients, with costly medicines for chronic diseases or cancer explicitly excluded from free pharmaceutical schemes managed by many welfare groups.[104]

Demands made on less affluent residents by welfare groups were also calibrated so as to retain the volitional veneer of donations while maintaining a degree of social distance with recipients. Freedom and intentionality are central to the motivation of donors and volunteers. Welfare activists thus must work to shield donors from the magnitude of need that may be faced by the beneficiaries of their 'gift' in order to minimise social pressure to give more than is financially possible or freely chosen. Despite the importance placed by welfare volunteers on an abstract notion of communal and social compassion, donors to neighbourhood funeral or medical emergency groups are not expected to have any direct contact with the family of the deceased after making a donation. Instead, their funds are collected by a manager who makes the collective donation to the head of the household on behalf of the 'community' commonly defined as ward, village or the group itself. Charitable blood donations are also highly intermediated. Though welfare group volunteers who coordinate these transactions emphasise that donors are 'saving lives' and transforming society, they were often reluctant to introduce blood donors and recipients – even when some donors requested such contact.[105] The intermediating role played by welfare group volunteers allowed donors to make specific

[103] In rare cases encountered such as catastrophic motorcycle accidents or dengue fever treatment, large amounts of blood and thus multiple donations would be required by a patient. In these cases, welfare group managers or volunteers would politely suggest the family of the patient supplement charitable blood donations with remunerated contributions from acquaintances so as to manage the administrative demand of the group and prevent donor fatigue.

[104] One township welfare group established after 2012 with close connections to the NLD issued a small note-book to patients who approached them for assistance, which they were required to take to a chemist with whom the group had a formal supply arrangement. The chemist then used the book to record the type and cost of each drug as they were purchased, allowing the patient to track how much they had claimed from the scheme and thus how much that remained in the 75,000 kyat financial limit imposed by the group. No explicit means-test was imposed by any welfare groups encountered by the author, however. Indeed, many volunteers would emphasise that they would render aid to the needy 'without regard' to their economic, racial or religious background. In practise, however, many wealthier households encountered who used the services of welfare groups such as free ambulances or discounted coffins often made sizable donations for the support provided which was far larger than that given by poorer households.

[105] These generalisations describe non-remunerated blood donations coordinated by *parahita* groups witnessed by the author. A sizable proportion of blood donations are also made by the family or close friends of patients, in which case the donors proceed directly to the blood bank without the intermediation of *parahita* groups. In these cases more intimate interaction between donors and recipients prior to and after the donation does occur, reinforcing far stronger bonds of 'relational empathy' (see Bornstein 2012) than the flows of charitable aid intermediated by welfare groups.

contributions of time, money or bodily fluids while foreclosing the social intimacy or relationship with the needy that may pull acts of bounded charity into the less meritorious sphere of coerced or purely familial reciprocity. Mediation of charitable giving by welfare groups thus extends obligation beyond the intimate family while bounding obligation through a rigid focus on volitional acts of service and giving. The result of these carefully attuned systems of obligations are often patchy yet sustainable forms of communal redistribution which measure their success far more on the basis of inputs of money, time and affect rather than the output or consequence of the aid provided.

The impact of assistance rendered to an individual or a family is largely seen as outside the scope of welfare groups. Indeed, my interlocutors involved in welfare groups could provide excellent data on the number of beneficiaries they had assisted yet had little idea how many patients actually recovered following a blood transfusion or receipt of free pharmaceuticals. Reflecting a focus on inputs rather than outputs of aid, during the 16 months I engaged with these groups I did not encountered a single attempt to proactively assess village, ward or township social welfare needs or plans to expand specific services in these areas. When probed about the magnitude of need that many poor families experienced following the death of an adult wage-earner, the manager of a ward welfare group noted that their group could not solve all their financial difficulties: "All we can do is provide small support to [the family of the deceased] from the generosity (B: *cedana*) of the ward residents". The *supply* of bounded empathetic generosity from the community is considered far more important than the *demand* for social aid amid the precarious post-socialist web of debt and livelihood insecurity. The narrow focus on responding to one or two key areas of material support partly reflects the reactive manner in which these groups initially emerged to address specific needs in the community, often at the urging of administrators, entrepreneurs or monks during the 1990s and 2000s. However, they also expose the role played by welfare groups in simultaneously *bridging* and *maintaining* social distance between donors and recipients, generating a notion of bounded reciprocity that retains the volitional and intentional character of the meritorious 'gift'.

Individuals or groups who did extend kin-like care to non-intimate community members saw the welfare net provided by this highly volitional system of charitable giving as patchy and inconsistent. For example, a nun who ran an orphanage for abandoned girls noted that it was difficult to support the needs of the young women from donations alone as these contributions were often given irregularly – commonly on days considered auspicious by donors. The nun

was grateful for the generosity provided by donors yet she commented that the young women were "lucky": most of the costs for their lodging was financed by the sale of timber logs stored in a yard beside the main building, the legacy of a logging licence apparently granted to the orphanage by a minister in U Nu's government in the 1950s. The animating logic of meritorious charity and service for others (B: *parahita*), based as it is on ostensibly free and intentional acts of generosity, brings the donor and recipient socially closer while simultaneously shielding the individual from addressing the broader suffering which endures despite their volitional provision of aid. What emerges is a form of bounded social obligation differentiated from the more expansive obligation owed to intimate family relations yet imbued with Buddhist notions of volitional empathy and material obligation to a malleable notion of 'community'. The bounded social intimacy generated by these materially fixed and ideationally framed demands were able to craft sustainable systems of informal redistribution that played essential protective functions in lieu of direct state social expenditure.

Section Four: Assessing authoritarian welfare capitalism

What were the outcomes of the junta's welfare capitalist approach to redistribution? As with other informal social protection regimes, many people slipped through the inconsistent social welfare safety net which emerged during this period. Some households and individuals managed to achieve a relatively stable livelihood – at least for periods of time – by cultivating ties of dependency with the military commanders and officers who held positions of decision-making power. These mostly military or government-linked patrons were essential to facilitating access to commercial rackets or monopoly arrangements, mediating access to state or non-state sources of welfare and redistribution, and providing reciprocal forms of aid with clients (Brac de la Perriere 2014). However, there was an inherent instability to these ties of patronage as "careers of patrons [were] highly unpredictable, and the fall of a prominent person (a 'great tree') [could] bring down many 'small trees'" (Seekins 2009: 733). People adversely incorporated into networks of commercial or social patronage or excluded from them entirely were forced to turn to diversified coping strategies to survive the 1990s and 2000s. Some sent family elsewhere in Myanmar or internationally to work and remit their wages, placing tremendous strain on family units yet providing a source of stable income during this period (Thawnghmung 2011). Many households also assumed catastrophic debt, often to cover the

costs of health care which some estimates suggest increased by 300 to 400 percent in the years after 1988 (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007b: 162).[106]

At an aggregate level the diverse coping strategies of households in lowland Myanmar did produce a modest though inconsistent improvement in livelihoods in these areas. Studies by Helen James (2005) and Koichi Fujita et al. (2009), as well as less reliable government data on human development, suggest mild advances in household income and life-expectancy indicators during the SLORC/SPDC period.[107] As shown in the human development data presented in Figure 8, these improvements have held since more reliable data has been collected by international agencies since 2011. Importantly, these aggregate improvements, contingent as they were, occurred despite minimal direct junta expenditure on health, education or social protection.

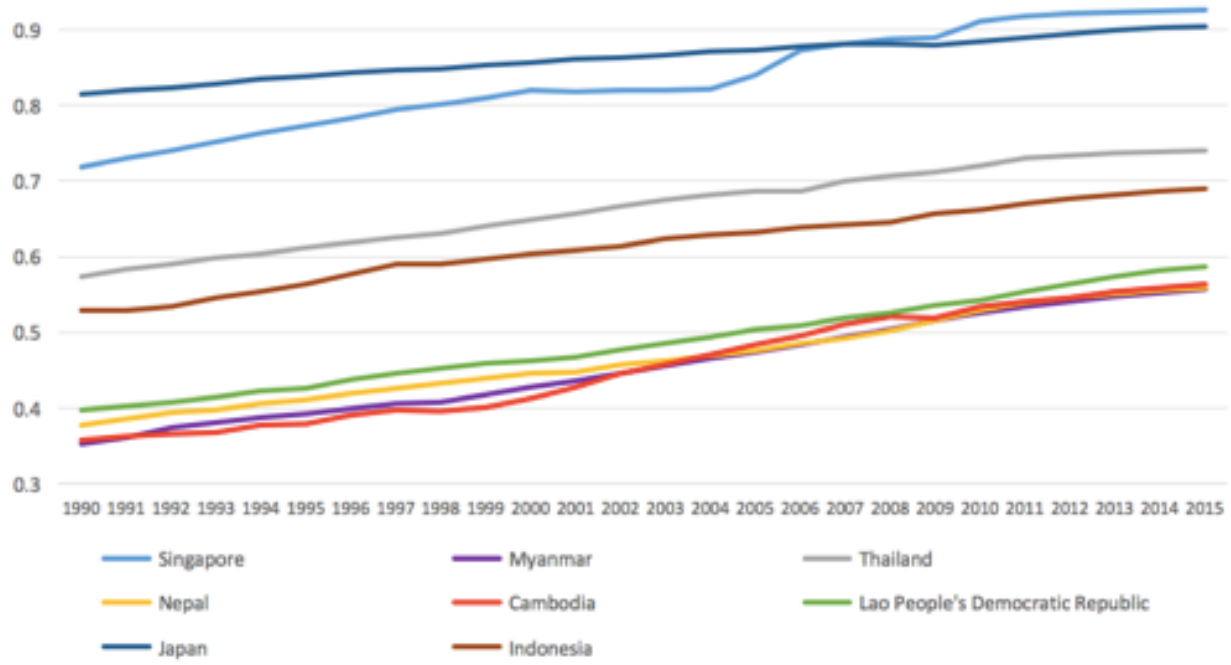

Figure 8 Human development trends across the region. Source: UNDP

[106] Out-of-pocket expenses accounted for 78% of all health care expenditures in Myanmar in 2011, according to The World Bank. For an in-depth study of catastrophic out-of-pocket health expenses in the provincial region of Magway in central Myanmar, see Inn Kynn Khaing et al (2015).

[107] According to UNDP technical notes, HDI measures human development on three dimensions: "a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living" (2016: 2). UNDP creates an index for every year of available data based on four key variables: Life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling; and GNI per capita. Data for each is based on a range of international data-sources, some of which relies on declared data from national governments which, especially during junta rule in Myanmar, was of questionable quality. For technical notes on HDI calculation and data see http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2016_technical_notes.pdf [accessed 3 January 2018].

It is impossible to attribute these improvements to an individual factor. However, what is clear is that data on direct government social expenditures during this period provides only a partial account of social expenditures and redistributive activities during the 1990s and 2000s. Public health expenditures reported by the Myanmar government, for instance, did not rise above 0.3 percent of GDP between 1995 and 2010. This is an allocation considerably below that of any comparable country in the region, including those who performed similarly to Myanmar in human development indicators such as Cambodia, Laos and Nepal.[108] What explains the mild social improvements which a varied of sources suggest occurred, at least in government-controlled areas of Myanmar, during the 1990s and 2000s?

The *indirect* forms of social expenditure made by commercial elites and ordinary people during this period at the instigation or encouragement of junta officials help explain the otherwise puzzling social progress of this period, inconsistent and minimal as it was. It is difficult to tell how large these financial contributions were as robust data on average household contributions to state and communal mechanisms of redistribution were not collected during the 1990s and 2000s. A 1000 household survey conducted as part of my dissertation fieldwork in central-east Myanmar in March 2016 provides one of the few insights on the magnitude of these contributions. The survey found that 'donations' to religious and social institutions by 2016 comprised a significant portion of household expenditures, over and above in-kind contributions such as labour which, if valued as foregone wages, constitute a significant and regressive burden on poor households (see Chapter Six).[109] When 'donations' are considered on their own they add up to a sizable and mildly progressive financial burden for households. When asked about *amounts* of monetary donations made the day prior to the survey more

[108] Data for health expenditure across the region is only available from 1995 onwards. James (2005: 57) observes an increase in health spending in 2000-2001, though notes it was largely spent on infrastructure and human resource development rather than hiring new staff.

[109] A study on differences between subjectively reported and administratively recorded donations to a Dutch health charity found that respondents were generally prone to over-estimating the amounts they contributed (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011). In order to account for this bias, I included questions in the survey both about *specific amounts* donated the day prior as well as *proportional estimates* of donations made by the household as a whole relative to other outlays such as health care, education, food, transport, taxes and so on. The Dutch study found that some sub-groups in their sample were disproportionately likely to *under-estimate* the amounts they had donated, especially lower educated respondents, those with a Protestant religious affiliation and those in higher income households (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011: 1378). The extent to which similarly complex patterns of social desirability and modesty bias are replicated in the Myanmar context is unclear, though certainly donations are highly valorised by all classes and thus overestimation could be expected. The proportionality of donations relative to other household fiscal outlays is thus likely to be a more accurate self-report than the amounts declared to have been donated the day prior to the survey.

affluent households reported donating an average of 770 kyat (C. US$0.62) per day compared with around 500 kyat (c. US$0.4) per day for poorer households. [110] When donations are assessed as a *proportion* of overall household expenditure poorer households were found to contribute an average of 7 percent of total expenditure compared with 10 percent for respondents in the top two wealth quintiles.[111] The informal social safety net which emerged in provincial central Myanmar during the post-socialist period was thus underpinned by significant donations from affluent and destitute people alike.

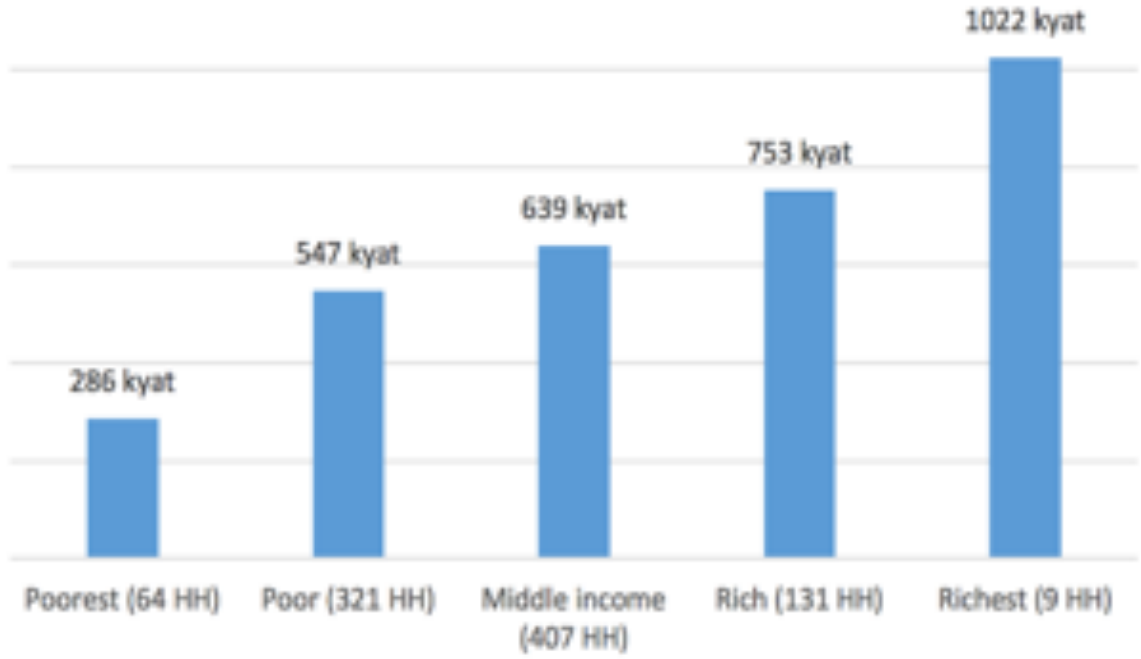

Figure 9 Daily Contributions to religious & social institutions in central-east Myanmar by poverty quintile of households (kyats by poverty quintile).

These ostensibly 'voluntary' social contributions dwarf the financial burden of formal taxes. Research conducted during junta rule suggested that the *formal* state tax burden of most households probably comprised a relatively small amount of expenditures – including the emergent business class (Taylor 2009: 456, Turnell 2011: 142). Formal taxes were instead

[110] Poverty quintiles were constructed based on a multi-variable household-level poverty indicator adapted from Schreiner (2012). See Appendix III for more information.
[111] Respondents were asked to allocate 10 stones to various household expenditures made in the past three months, including donations, formal state taxes and other categories of spending. Each stone reflected 10 percent of expenditure, and thus the total allocation of stones reflected the entirety of the household budget for the preceding three-month period. 'Donations' were defined as the aggregation of all contributions to social and religious groups, as the parameters between these spheres is difficult to organisationally and financially distinguish. Three months was selected as the relevant time-frame both to account for seasonality in income and expenditure as well as to reduce problems with recalling contributions made more than a few months prior.

replaced with what economist Sean Turnell (2011: 142) terms 'implicit' taxes such as financial contributions to GONGOs or village, ward and township social initiatives made by businesspeople seeking to cultivate transactional and moral bonds with regional junta officials. In return for making these indirect social expenditures, military commanders and their subordinates issued these businesspeople commercial licences and granted reprieves from formal taxes. As a consequence of these trade-offs, government-declared tax revenue, as mapped in Figure 10, fell below 6 percent of GDP throughout the 1990s and 2000s. It collapsed to a low of 2 percent in 2002 – compared with an average of around 8 percent for Nepal and 10 percent for Pakistan during this period.

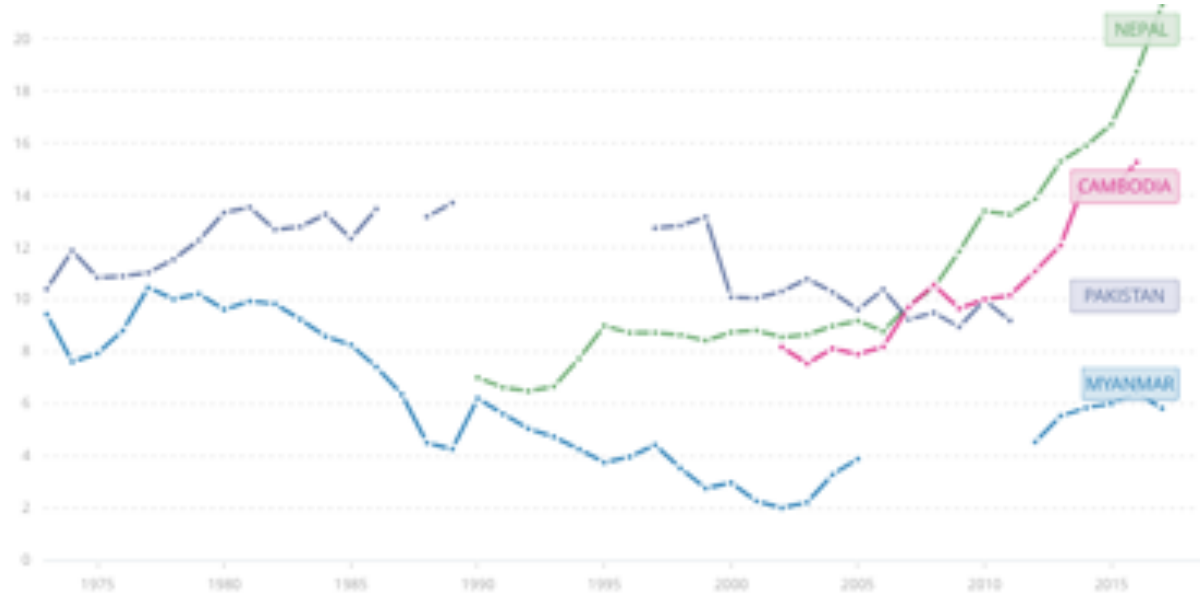

Figure 10 Tax revenue as percentage of GDP for Myanmar and counterparts, 1970s-2016. Source: World Bank

Though regional junta officials imposed levies and user fees on commercial businesspeople and ordinary people in lowland areas, the total burden of formal *monetary* taxation during the 1990s and 2000s was probably less than or around equivalent to the proportion of expenditures they directed to 'donations'.[112] These factors help explain why respondents across poverty

[112] In order to make a direct comparison with financial 'donations', here I am excluding *non-monetary* and *informal* forms of taxation from formal tax burden. Informal forms of taxes during this period included the rural rice quota which continued to be enforced until 2003 as well as forced labour on state infrastructure projects which was ubiquitous until the early 2000s and still continues in some areas of Myanmar. See Chapter Six for a detailed discussion of patterns of involuntary labour and the disproportionate contribution of poor households to ostensibly 'voluntary' contemporary local improvement projects. On arbitrary, corrupt and in some cases financially catastrophic extraction framed as 'taxation' during junta rule, see Vicary (2010).

quintiles in the 2016 survey reported 'taxes' comprising less than 4 percent of household expenditure, around half of the average proportion reportedly given in donations.[113] From the perspective of ordinary people, the privatised systems of social expenditure generated by twenty-five years of authoritarian welfare capitalism thus collects and redistributes more than twice the amount paid to state officials in formal monetary taxation.

A strong contrast can be found with developmental states elsewhere in the region which used social policy during this period as a tool to facilitate economic growth. Since the 1980s regimes in South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore converged to form what political scientist Ian Holliday (2000: 707) termed a "productivist world of welfare capitalism". All made significant direct expenditures on education and health by maintaining formal taxation revenue at over 10 percent of GDP throughout this period, though more socially protective functions such as unemployment aid, pensions and aged care were commonly left to families and private employers. The scope of these state social initiatives were gradually extended to larger segments of the population during the 1990s and 2000s according to the political imperatives of regimes or the electoral incentives generated by democratisation (see Chapter One). Rather than increasing formal tax revenue and focusing direct social expenditures on improving the productivity of existing and future workforces, Myanmar's junta officials instead opted for a locally negotiated system of indirect social expenditure in return for formal tax remissions.

A 'hidden' form of welfare state was thus generated which was invisible in two senses: first, state officials were largely absent from the local administration of informal social protection; and second, the financial costs of the system was born by the state in the form of tax revenue foregone through remissions. Authoritarian welfare capitalism thus relied on what scholars of the American welfare state have conceptualised as 'indirect social expenditure' (see Howard 1999). Viewed in this manner, the privatisation of social expenditure to entrepreneurs and ordinary people via marketisation came at a substantial cost both in foregone tax revenue and in poorer socio-economic outcomes than may have been achieved if the junta had assumed greater direct responsibility for social expenditure. Beyond these outcomes, informal systems of fundraising and redistribution have developed that elicit at least 'quasi-voluntary compliance' with their demands which state officials seeking to collect formal tax revenue will

[113] Along with business, income and land taxes, 'taxes' here include various user fees and charges as these are referred to with same term in Burmese (B: *akun)* and are by far the most ubiquitous form of payment made by people across poverty quintiles to state officials.

prove difficult to supersede or compete with. Privatising social expenditure and creating a 'parastatal' system of welfare provision (see Hacker 2016a) is thus likely to have long-term impacts on the capacity of the Myanmar state to raise formal taxation revenue and deliver more consistent social protection and functional public goods in the contemporary period.

Conclusion

After decades of one-party socialist dictatorship, the SLORC/SPDC significantly reconfigured the role of the Myanmar state in achieving redistributive outcomes. Concerns about injustice associated with capitalism which had underpinned a socialist consensus for much of the independence period did not evaporate with the dissolution of the BSPP. Focused as it was on constructing the 'hard infrastructure' of the state and negotiating ceasefires and control of the periphery, the junta attempted to address concerns about distributive injustice associated with free market capitalism by mediating the process of marketisation through regional military commanders. Unable to rely solely on brute force to require businesspeople to assume social obligations, regional military commanders provided transactional incentives while facilitating the proliferation of welfare groups at neighbourhood, village and township level via the mechanism of social licensing. An informal system of social protection haphazardly emerged as junta officials gave tax relief and commercial licences to business partners who helped facilitate the junta's objective of governing by and through the 'community'. The path to capital accumulation and business success, coupled with the liberalisation of an ostensibly 'apolitical' civil society, generated a system of patchy and contingent informal social insurance. Perhaps as a consequence of the mechanisms and practices of redistribution and risk-pooling which were permitted to emerge, recent studies of economic inequality suggest the gap that developed between rich and poor by the end of junta rule was far narrower than other similar contexts in the region.[114] The combination of marketisation and 'government by community' enabled the junta to maintain a degree of social order and control in lowland areas despite dedicating the bulk of state expenditure to military state-building and expansion in the borderlands. The junta's welfare capitalist approach to post-socialism did not come cheaply though. By granting tax concessions to emergent businesspeople and off-putting social obligations to local welfare groups, the junta forewent considerable formal tax revenue and

[114] For instance, studies by the Asian Development Bank and World Bank on per capita household consumption conducted after liberalisation in 2011 claimed that inequality was "surprisingly low" relative to other countries in the region (ADB 2014: 150). The research also suggested that consumption inequality was much lower in provincial and rural areas of the country than in Yangon where the bulk of Myanmar's nationally-significant commercial class reside.

generated systems of indirect social expenditure over which it now has little direct influence or control.

As civilians mostly manage 'community' welfare groups, often in partnership with local religious authorities, they are able to secure 'quasi-voluntary compliance' (see Levi 1988) with requests for funds or labour far easier than the threat of coercion that local state officials might otherwise impose. The organisational distance between these groups and more coercive junta solicitations also allowed for potentially mundane social relations to accrue metaphysical content as acts of meritorious charity (B: *dana)*. By drawing on Buddhist idioms such as *parahita* (work for others), *myitta* (loving kindness) and *byama-so* (practices that bridge the mundane and supra-mundane domains domains), concerns about recipient worthiness have been supplemented with valorisation of providing specific and materially limited aid to local people in need. However, the notion of 'community' which was mobilised during this period was not limited solely to the ward, village or even township. Rather, the ideal of the 'social' enacted by welfare groups recurrently transcended local networks and practices of redistribution during the SLORC/SPDC period, especially in the wake of disasters, extending post-socialist obligations to the distant stranger in need. Focusing on Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and participant observation with relief groups during Cyclone Komen in 2015, Chapter Four explores how ideals and practices of authoritarian welfare capitalism have underpinned junta business and civil society responses to natural disaster in the post-socialist period. It shows how informal redistributive institutions have played central roles in rendering social protection to many impacted areas at implicit and often explicit urging of junta officials. The idioms of translocal obligation to the destitute and distant potential stranger enlisted by these groups served to extend localised systems of redistribution, generating a notion of the 'social' that is able to contingently include the translocal needy. However, the deep contingency and variability of informal relief efforts can also reinforce pre-existing regional, ethnic and religious exclusion, eroding notions of shared political community necessary for quasi-voluntary compliance with state taxation and redistribution initiatives. These partially inclusive notions of moral and political community defined by non-state actions form the social and spatial imaginary of many contemporary democracy activists. As this thesis demonstrates, the legacies of informal redistributive institutions generated during the post-socialist period are likely to shape the redistributive potential of the state long into the future.

Chapter Four: Disasters and the Social Constitution

In late July 2015 Cyclone Komen and four successive storms made landfall in Myanmar. The deluge and subsequent flooding was the worst the country had seen since the devastation of Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Komen affected more than 1.6 million people, killed 117 people and inundated 800,000 acres of farmland in 12 of Myanmar's 14 states and regions.[115]

In the wake of the floods civilian welfare groups from across the country mobilised locally to raise funds before travelling to affected areas to disperse relief and assist with reconstruction. In August 2015, following a week of fundraising appeals with a number of these groups, I travelled to affected areas of the Ayeyarwaddy delta with a team of businesspeople, civil servants, teachers and university students from central-east Myanmar. Over the space of three days, I helped volunteers with loading, unloading, lugging and distributing rice, oil, clothes and other supplies to flooded communities. We travelled by canoe to remote areas severely affected by the cyclone, visited flooded pagodas and slept alongside each other in monastic compounds in the town of Hinthada.

After the last of our trips to a village in the rushing backwaters of the delta, we returned to the monastery that had been housing and feeding us throughout the week. Before departing to begin our 10-hour drive back to Taungoo, the abbot invited all forty or so volunteers into the meditation hall for a religious ritual recognising our efforts. We all knelt down on the mats set up in front of the abbot, flanked by a few remaining sacks of clothes, food and other supplies still stacked up around the outside of the hall covered by a vinyl banner bearing the details of our appeal. The monk then chanted a blessing for donors and volunteers which emphasised the meritorious nature of our relief efforts:

> You have donated all the aid you can afford to those who are suffering from natural disaster, helping to parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters. These good deeds you have done will help you to achieve Nirvana where no kind of suffering (B: *dukkha*) exists. (Fieldnotes, 12 August 2015).

[115] Four administrative divisions were declared disaster zones: Rakhine State, Chin State, Sagaing Region and Magway Region.

He then gave a short sermon reminding volunteers of their bonds and obligations to those experiencing suffering, regardless of the geographic or social distance that may exist between them:

> Please help people who are in need as if they were your own father, mother, brother or sister, without discrimination against their ethnicity, religion or location. According to Lord Buddha's teachings, everyone is related and they can be your parents or siblings from past lives. So help them as you can with loving kindness (B: *myitta*).

The volunteers assembled, smeared with mud from the day spent dispersing aid, nodded vigorously and bowed to the abbot, affirming the abbot's claim of expansive relatedness and mutuality with distant people experiencing suffering. He then concluded the ritual recognition of our collective efforts by slowly chanting a Buddhist blessing indicating the sharing of merit among all those assembled: "Well done, well done, well done" (B: *thadu, thadu, thadu*) (Fieldnotes, 12 August 2015).

Our group was only one of thousands that mobilised from across Myanmar in the wake of the cyclone to provide aid to people rendered destitute by its landfall and the torrential downpours that followed. These efforts delivered essential material relief to devastated communities in the absence of substantive emergency relief from the state. However, the rituals and rhetorical framing witnessed during those days also powerfully demonstrated how ideals and practices of localised informal redistribution can be stretched to include the translocal needy. A broader imaginary of the 'social' emerged from the ritual in which non-state aid was necessary both as it provided essential material relief and because it enacted familial obligations to the distant stranger imagined as potentially reincarnated kin. As Part Three of the dissertation explores, the notion of the 'social' exposed and popularised in the work of welfare and relief groups now sets the broader parameters of reform advanced by contemporary democracy activists.

This chapter explores how the governance of disasters by successive regimes in Myanmar has had the effect of extending the ideals and practices of private, informal redistribution described in Chapter Three. It argues that governance of disasters since 1988 encouraged and enabled patchy local systems of informal social protection to extend beyond the local to those rendered

destitute by catastrophe. In the process, these groups popularised a contingently inclusive notion of the 'social' in lowland areas in which some distant people could be reimagined as commanding obligations closely resembling that owed to people recognised as belonging to the more localised 'community' discussed in Chapter Three. Visions of the 'nation' evoked and enacted by state officials, as well as ethnic majority and minority activists since the colonial period, have often set strict limits or conditions for inclusion in social and political community (see Walton 2018). This chapter argues that, in the same manner as notions of the 'nation', the translocal work of private and charitable mechanisms of redistribution has helped popularise a contingently inclusive notion of 'the social', which now shapes the broader political imagination of activists in lowland areas of contemporary Myanmar. It shows the work required to achieve 'quasi-voluntary compliance' (see Levi 1988) with demands for the provision of aid to the translocal needy and highlights the significant potential for exclusion of populations that are socially or geographically distant from informal redistributive institutions.

The chapter proceeds in three sections which draw on extant research on the 2008 Cyclone Nargis as well as in-depth ethnographic work with welfare groups from central Myanmar as they responded to the 2015 devastation of Cyclone Komen. Section One provides a brief introduction to literature on belonging and disasters, differentiating between formal and informal dimensions of citizenship and how natural catastrophes may play a role in shaping popular notions of citizenship from and beyond the state. Section Two surveys available literature on the devastation and aftermath of 2008 Cyclone Nargis, focusing on how the ideals and practices of private redistribution popularised during the 1990s and 2000s extended to affected areas and generated a notion of social obligation largely evacuated of direct state role in relief and redistribution. Section Three provides an in-depth case study of civilian assistance rendered seven years later, during Cyclone Komen in 2015. It recounts how a contingently inclusive social imaginary was exposed and popularised as donors, welfare volunteers and religious brokers disbursed material aid to some socially proximate translocal people in need. The chapter concludes that ideals and practices of obligation and redistribution enacted by relief and welfare groups in the wake of disasters exposes and reinscribes a materially and socially bounded notion of the post-socialist 'social' (see Collier 2011) that has become central to contemporary activist imaginings of liberty and political community.

Section One: Disasters and state-society relations

The boundaries of the 'social imaginary' (see Castoriadis 1987, Taylor 2002) and the moral obligations of its participants are often exposed and remade during collective catastrophes such as natural disasters. Outpourings of aid in the wake of destruction reveal quotidian networks of relief, norms of obligation and visions of development which may otherwise be hidden from view. Historian Jacob Remes, for example, argues that disasters "function as cameras whose snapshots in time allow us to see social transactions in a particular moment" (Remes 2015: 4). The 'ties that bind' during typical times for which few records may be kept are exposed during disasters and enshrined both in media and bureaucratic records, helping to "document where people turned in times of trouble or crisis" (Remes 2015: 4). Aid and reconstruction mobilised in the aftermath of catastrophe can thus demonstrate the relative protection offered by the state *vis-a-vis* more horizontal networks of care, offering a prism into the substantive and symbolic meanings of citizenship or belonging during moments of suffering and devastation.

Yet individuals, institutions and ideas of the 'social' and its obligations can also be transformed as a result of catastrophe. Disasters create "large groups of apparently 'deserving' needy who could reasonably make claims on the state and their fellow citizens", in some cases resulting in stronger popular expectations of the state, of civil institutions and of other individuals (Remes 2015: 5). The governance of disaster by the state in some cases lends material substance to *formal* citizenship by creating new categories of entitlement from the state. Political leaders or entire political regimes may gain or lose legitimacy in the eyes of the public as a consequence of state responses to severe disasters (see Shindo 2015). Disasters often present states with new opportunities for governance over, and intervention into, the lives of impacted populations (Remes: 2015: 8, 5). In this sense, disasters have the potential to be "germinal moments" (Remes 2015: 8) in state-society relations which can variously spotlight systematic corruption, social inequality and discrimination or provide the basis on which notions of 'social citizenship' from the welfare state can begin to emerge (see Schneider and Hwang 2014).[116]

Inversely, the governance of disasters may also shape *informal* notions of citizenship and belonging. The often uncodified idioms, practices and logics of communal life, conceptualised

[116] Scholars of America's welfare state development, for instance, trace Roosevelt's New Deal passed in the aftermath of the 'social disaster' of the Great Depression to the language, ideology and legal powers of disaster intervention accrued and used by the Federal government during city fires in the 1910s and 1920s (see Brandes 1976, Dauber 2012).

by political theorists as 'social imaginaries', provide a sense of what political philosopher Charles Taylor terms "moral order… the rights and obligations that individuals have in regard to one another, even prior to or outside of the political bond" (Taylor 2002: 92). For political sociologist Rogers Brubaker, shared ideas of unity and solidarity are administrated "by ordinary people in the course of everyday life, using tacit understandings of who belongs and who does not, of us and them" (Brubaker 2010: 65). These ideals and traditions of "cultural and political belonging at the level of the nation-state" form "idiom[s] of nationhood" which are reflexively understood by a majority or sub-groups of the citizenry (Brubaker 1992: 162). In moments of social rupture such as war or revolution these idioms or *informal* dimensions of citizenship are central to contestations over what nationhood means, who it includes and what is in the interests of the state.

The absence or inefficacy of state aid during times of natural disaster often prompts private and non-state actors to fill the breach. These groups may enlist notions of community and obligation which augment or challenge pre-existing notions of the 'social imaginary', generating new ideas of moral order and the rights and obligations beyond or parallel to legally inscribed notions of political community. Disasters thus have considerable symbolic power (Hoffman 2002). Indeed, they can be viewed as political events in and of themselves with the potential to "expose the authorities' incompetence and neglect" and promote "an intense feeling of national unity and purpose" (Seekins 2009: 731, 718). The transformative impact of disasters upon state-society relations has been exposed repeatedly in post-socialist Myanmar, extending locally-oriented ideals and practices of private, charitable redistribution generated by authoritarian welfare capitalism. The social imaginary that emerges as commercial elites and ordinary people mobilise to render aid to the accessible needy and misfortunate simultaneously inscribes the absence of the state at times of crisis and reinforces the exclusion of people and communities already on the social and geographic fringe of lowland political community. The next section explores the social imaginary exposed during Cyclone Nargis in 2008, before offering a more ethnographic rendering of the ideals and practices of informal citizenship enacted in the wake of Cyclone Komen in 2015.

Section Two: Cyclone Nargis (2008) extended ideals and practices of welfare capitalism

In early 2008, a referendum to ratify Myanmar's military-drafted constitution was announced by the ruling junta for 10 May 2008. The legal constitution was the fourth stage of the junta's

regime-led 'Seven Step Roadmap to Discipline-flourishing Democracy' announced in 2003 by then General Khin Nyunt (Pedersen 2011: 53). It reserved 25 percent of seats in Parliament for the military, enshrined armed forces control of three major ministries essential to governance (Home Affairs, Border Affairs and Defence) and defined the legal, racial basis of formal citizenship (see Cheesman 2017a).

In the days prior to the political spectacle which would lay the legal foundation for the next phase of military-directed governance, Myanmar was devastated by one of the worst natural disasters in modern Asian history. The storm made landfall on 2 May 2008, ripping through much of the Ayeyarwaddy delta and coastal areas of Myanmar on the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. As state officials failed to grasp or heed the severity of the impending disaster, international and domestic meteorological warnings received almost no coverage by government-run media outlets (Howe and Bang 2017: 64). Evacuations did not take place (Htay Htay Lwin and Ko Ko Maung 2011). Uninformed and ill-prepared, an estimated 50,000 people were killed in the initial landfall as houses or structures collapsed around them, buffeted by winds of up to 200 km/hour. The devastation wrought by Cyclone Nargis ultimately took the lives of almost 140,000 people and left irreparable physical, emotional and economic scars on impacted communities.[117]

As with disasters throughout history (see Remes 2015), Cyclone Nargis was both *demonstrative* and *productive* of state-society relations. The response of the state in the days and weeks following landfall was inadequate, prompting non-state actors to fill the breach. In the days following the Cyclone, domestic welfare actors enlisted the ideals and practices of authoritarian welfare capitalism were quickly mobilised to deliver aid to people and communities ravaged by the storm. Traders and companies donated significant aid to relief efforts, monks assumed roles in redistribution and thousands of volunteers flocked to the Ayeyarwaddy delta to deliver aid to those in need. What motivated those leading the outpouring of aid, and how did they understand their obligations to the distant needy? Little ethnographic research was conducted with local aid groups following Nargis, making a detailed understanding of their intentions difficult to glean. Drawing on various studies conducted during and after the disaster, this section explores the notions of social obligation enacted after

[117] The initial report of the Tripartite Core Group comprised of representatives from the UN, the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Myanmar Government cited the official death toll on 24 June 2008 as 84,537 with 53,836 missing and 19,359 injured. The bulk of the missing were later considered deceased, bringing the total number of dead to over 138,000.

Cyclone Nargis as welfare, religious and commercial actors led initial response efforts in the absence of direct state leadership in aid or relief.

Nargis exposed state absence and mismanagement

The response of the state in the immediate wake of Nargis exposed the need for activists to mobilise local community resources in order to survive. In the days and weeks after Cyclone Nargis Myanmar's junta was reluctant to acknowledge the devastation or permit foreign assistance. Pre-occupied with covering the junta's long-planned regime-led transition, state newspapers initially gave limited coverage to the severity of the devastation and its effect on more than 2.4 million people (Seekins 2009: 717). Instead, priority was given to the referendum on the 2008 Constitution scheduled for the days following Cyclone Nargis. State television channels broadcast images of young ladies cheerfully singing songs urging citizens to cast their ballots "with sincerity" for the sake of the nation (Seekins 2009: 726).

Concerned about an influx of foreigners into the country during the run-up to the constitutional referendum, the regime initially rejected more than US$30 million in aid pledged by 24 countries in the week after landfall (Selth 2008: 387). Apparently fearful that foreign powers including the US "might use disaster relief efforts as cover for an invasion" or smuggle in weapons to arm the civilian population, foreign aid was eventually permitted on 6 May "only on the basis that [the junta] could control aid distribution" (Selth 2008: 392, 387). However, for the first two weeks after landfall the responsibility for intermediating aid fell to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR), which had received 0.003 percent of the national budget that year and whose senior leadership were almost entirely on leave or overseas at the time of the cyclone (Howe and Bang 2017: 67). In contrast, the manpower, resources and expertise of the military, Myanmar's most powerful institution, were not effectively enlisted in relief efforts until days after landfall, and even then only in a few isolated cases (Selth 2008: 387). It was not until two weeks after Nargis that responsibility was transferred from the MSWRR to the much better funded and staffed Ministry of Finance (Howe and Bang 2017: 72).

As a result, only a trickle of foreign aid reached Myanmar, mostly by air to Yangon's Mingaladon airport in the days following Nargis, where in some cases it remained for up to a

week without distribution.[118] Decades of chronic underinvestment in road and bridge infrastructure in affected areas, along with significant debris and damage blocking passage, impeded logistical access to many parts of the delta. Delays of up to two weeks in the processing of visas for expatriate disaster workers further slowed the dispersion of aid. The resulting shortages of basic drinking water, food and medicines, especially in remote areas, as well as lack of post-disaster risk-management, significantly increased the death toll in the week after landfall (Shikada, Myint et al. 2012: 186). Welfare and religious groups around the country quickly recognised that the junta was prioritising state security over the survival of its citizens (Seekins 2009: 726). Thousands of Burmese people began to mobilise welfare capitalist ideals and practices to render immediate aid to people in impacted areas.

Notions of local and translocal mutuality

Notions of social obligation which had been enacted locally throughout the 1990s and 2000s played an essential role in mobilising emergency aid in the immediate wake of the cyclone (South 2012: 184-185). The 2008 Tripartite Group report produced by the UN, ASEAN and Myanmar government situated these coping mechanisms as a consequence of weak systems of formal social protection:

> Despite, or perhaps because of, the many challenges of delta life, communities are relatively socially cohesive and have strong capacities for collective problem solving and decision-making… in the absence of a state or employer safety net, community members support each other in times of need, something particularly evident in their response to Nargis (Tripartite Core Group 2008: 2-3).

A 2009 study conducted by the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies in Cambodia and based on hundreds of interviews with local relief workers during the aftermath similarly argued that "the patient building of relationships" within and across communities prior to Nargis "greatly benefited… relief work" (CPCS 2009: 21). The report quotes a 60-year old leader of a local

[118] Some of it was confiscated and placed in storage by the authorities, but later released. Aid workers were subjected to long visa application processes at the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok and elsewhere, planes waited at airports in neighbouring countries for permission to deliver their supplies and relief personnel already in the country were given little or no assistance by the government in getting to the worst hit areas. See Seekins 2009: 726.

welfare group in the delta who described helping to coordinate the efforts through his local networks:

> I used my own money to buy 10 bags of rice, pack them and start distribution. Being in civil society, many people contacted me to assist with distribution of food and non-food items (blankets etc.). Slowly other donations started coming in apart from rice including tin food, canned fish, and cooking oil. We started distributing to the delta area first… We could only start work with INGOs [international non-governmental organisations] after one and a half months (Interview in CPCS 2009: 169).

The relative absence of state aid after Nargis only reinforced the need for communities to cultivate what political scientist Donald Seekins termed "horizontal solidarity as a survival strategy" (Seekins 2009: 732). New local community-based organisations were formed throughout affected areas in order to ensure effective distribution of relief to areas most severely devastated and coordinate longer-term reconstruction efforts. Scepticism of the state's capacity to redistribute fairly played a key role in the formation of many of these local groups, with the leader of a welfare team interviewed for the CPCS report concluding:

> We cannot guarantee that if the government becomes involved in distribution and construction that the donor funds will go to the most needy. The government ones will get priority (CPCS 2009).

Networks of charity outside the delta also mobilised to assist in reconstruction efforts after Nargis. Anthropologist Benedicte Brac de La Perriere recounts that Yangon middle class groups were some of the first private welfare organisations to respond, collecting in-kind donations via neighbourhood and corporate appeals before driving to the delta in convoys of cars filled with aid to disburse the relief to survivors (Brac de la Perriere 2010). Though state-controlled media provided little coverage of the devastation and aftermath of the cyclone, groups who had travelled to affected areas returned to Yangon and shared images and stories of the devastation and their meritorious attempts at relief.[119] Reflecting the political connotations that had accrued to social work with the work of democracy activists such as Kyaw Thu since the 1990s, some expressed grievances during the disaster which could not be

[119] Videos from some of these trips were even being sold at traffic lights in Yangon in the weeks following landfall (see Brac de la Perriere 2010).

otherwise uttered openly in public without fear of retribution. Indeed, lay activists and entrepreneurs engaged in relief work openly criticised the junta's failure to inform the people of impending catastrophe (Perriere 2010). Activists who had not cultivated transactional or ongoing relationships with local officials, or were perceived as politically linked to the NLD by the junta, had their work suppressed by authorities and in some cases were arrested and imprisoned (Seekins 2009: 731).

The expansive role monks had been playing in redistribution of wealth at a local level since the 1990s was also extended to the translocal needy in the wake of Nargis. Religious authorities acted as nodes of information and material redistribution throughout the country. They also played an interpretive role in referring to relief work using Buddhist notions of 'work for others' (B: *parahita*) and meritorious 'giving' (B: *hlu*) which had been enlisted by local welfare and religious groups throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Prominent monks such as Sitagu Sayadaw (see Chapter Three) gave public sermons emphasising that compassion towards cyclone-ravaged communities was meaningless without tangible action:

> Meditating in a room with the doors shut won't help the [cyclone] victims suffering over there. But most Burmese who traditionally believe in Theravada [Buddhism] don't appreciate the need for compassionate action. That is why I am talking about it to people every day. It is essential to make social merit [parahita] stronger.[120]

While acknowledging that the state response was abysmal, Sitagu argued that the disaster exposed the need for Buddhists to extend and strengthen notions of the 'common good' achieved through individual moral action. "We can't blame the government alone," he told a journalist a few months after Nargis in 2008:

> People need to think about what others need and what they can do for them. Only then can they work together for the common good… The suffering in Burma, the killing in Iraq and Afghanistan, the killing fields in Cambodia—all of these have come from selfishness. All man-made disasters are driven by that

[120] Quoted in Kyaw Zwa Moe (2008). "Putting Compassion into Action". The Irrawaddy. 16.9. https://www.irrawaddy.com/from-the-archive/putting-compassion-action.html [accessed 10 Sept 2016]. Parentheses added.

selfishness [atta seit].[121]

The appeals to moral obligation made by religious actors, especially monks, were essential in stretching the localised idioms and mechanisms of authoritarian welfare capitalism to the translocal needy. Indeed, the need for lay selflessness in the absence of other sources of aid played a central role in the collection and dispersion of cash and in-kind donations. Jaquet and Walton's (2013: 7) interlocutors, for example, emphasised that their "primary concern was to alleviate the suffering of people affected by the storm" in the absence of state aid. Reflecting discourses evoked by Sitagu Sayadaw and other monks, volunteers framed their assistance as a "Buddhist duty, citing practices of *myitta* (loving-kindness) and *karuna* (compassion)" as well as a natural response to encountering the intense suffering of flood victims (Jaquet and Walton 2013: 7). Notions of social obligation which had formed the basis for localised reciprocity since the 1990s were thus enlisted to bridge the social distance between disaster-impacted communities and those less devastated by Nargis who could mobilise to render aid.[122]

Similarities between Christian and Buddhist concepts of 'grace' and 'merit' as well as mutual valorisation of 'charity' were emphasised by religious authorities and lay activists. These convergences provided the philosophical foundation for partnership between Buddhist organisations and local and international Christian NGOs (Jaquet & Walton 2013: 6). Many local appeals and aid groups also included volunteers from a range of religious and ethnic backgrounds. As the head of one group commented: "We worked with all groups from a diversity of religious and ethnic backgrounds. We are human beings and assist on that basis" (CPCS 2009: 170). Others described how faith communities began to collaborate at a grass-roots level following the cyclone:

> Before Nargis… monasteries stuck to themselves, churches etc. did their own thing. They would live in the same villages but carry out their own separate activities. The mind says work together but the spirit says stay as a family… For Cyclone Nargis, people went to the monasteries and the churches. As a result of the different religions of those affected, the spiritually formed civil

[121] Quoted in Kyaw Zwa Moe (2008). "Putting Compassion into Action". The Irrawaddy. 16.9. https://www.irrawaddy.com/from-the-archive/putting-compassion-action.html [accessed 10 Sept 2016]. Parentheses added.

[122] Perriere (2010) recounts groups using the language of 'meritorious donation' (B: *hlu*) and 'misfortune' (B: *dukkha*), but notes that some teams enlisted more neutral discourse which did not carry the Buddhist moral connotations of blame and responsibility - potentially in an attempt to avoid confrontation with junta officials.

society came to assist (CPCS 2009: 152).

By imbuing claims to translocal obligations with religiously-derived concepts of abstract mutuality, welfare activists and religious leaders helped to bridge social distance and secure willing contributions to relief efforts from people and groups across ethnic, class and religious divides.

Entrepreneurs and welfare capitalism

Though little acknowledged in scholarly accounts of Nargis, Myanmar's commercial class played a significant role in religious, lay and state relief efforts. Even when access to impacted areas was restricted to most welfare groups, transactional and social bonds between provincial businesspeople and junta officials developed over decades meant commercial elites were often able to "work constructively with the military authorities" to secure permission to disperse relief.[123] (Htet Aung 2009: 20). According to a report by Irish NGO Trocaire based on interviews with more than 60 businesspeople involved in disaster relief efforts, donors saw their contributions as an extension of more localised patronage they had been providing to funeral associations, orphanages, religious institutions and other social organisations since the 1990s (Trocaire 2011: 20).[124]

Moral encouragement by religious authorities played a central role in stretching the obligations of the wealthy to distant strangers in disaster areas. Numerous businesspeople stated that they had "decided to donate after hearing appeals to do so by one of several Sayadaw", or abbots, who were encouraging a stronger emphasis on the 'common good' such as Sitagu Sayadaw and his Sitagu Association (Trocaire 2011: 19-20). Some contributed to initiatives led by businesspeople or associations while many others donated to the Sitagu Sayadaw and other monastic organisations which acted as mechanisms of translocal redistribution (Jaquet and Walton 2013: 10). In addition to these religious networks, ethnic or religious minority businesspeople reported donating directly to identity-based groups with which they already had philanthropic ties (Trocaire 2011: 20).

[123] Htet Aung (2009). "Distrust and Division in the Delta". The Irrawaddy 17(3). http://www2.irrawaddy.com/article.php?art_id=15774 [accessed 3-09-2016].

[124] A number of large international companies operating in Myanmar during this period also provided donations of fuel as well as transportation and distribution of aid to impacted communities, framing this aid as a form 'corporate social responsibility' (Trocaire 2011: 25-26).

Complementing ties of identity and obligation were transactional dynamics of social licensing through which saw junta officials enlisted businesspeople into relief efforts. According to a former director general in the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, senior members of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) allocated "duties and responsibilities" to companies and businesspeople "with capability to perform relief operations" efforts, acknowledging the limited "financial and technical capacities of the State" (Interview with MSWRR DG in Trocaire 2011: 21). The Minister of Forestry, for example, instructed companies with which his ministry had a working relation to support the relief operation in Bogale Township, a Nargis-affected region which senior members of the junta had made him responsible for. Professional associations which emerged with junta support during the 1990s (see Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007a: 161-162) were also enlisted by relevant Ministers into state relief and reconstruction efforts.

A degree of organisational distance was maintained between relief appeals and junta officials in order to mitigate perceptions that donations were being given under implicit or explicit threat of financial or physical harm. National and provincial Chambers of Commerce as well as pharmaceutical and agricultural industry groups, for instance, led appeals themselves by establishing committees and assigning roles to specific companies "based on their respective competences" (Trocaire 2011: 22). Consequentially, analysis of civilian relief after Nargis emphasised that the vast bulk of translocal aid was mobilised in a largely "organic manner due to well established trust, long term relations and social networks" connecting religious, business and local administrative spheres (Trocaire 2011: 6). Despite the minimal formal role of the junta within these appeals, some domestic businesspeople expressed frustration at needing to prop-up the junta's ill-preparedness. A business-person interviewed for the Trocaire study, for instance, argued: "The government should have money ready for disasters, and not ask businessmen for it when a catastrophe happens!" (Interview in Trocaire 2011: 22). Despite this critique he still donated to a flood appeal led by a monk, suggesting that even those critical of the junta's inaction felt socially and morally obliged to contribute to mechanisms of disaster relief (Trocaire 2011: 22). Echoing the ideal of private, volitional redistribution discussed in Chapter Three, even entrepreneurs who contributed to junta-initiated appeals emphasised that their donations were free acts of generosity as they were given "under no influence, just to help" those impacted by the disaster (Interview in Trocaire 2011: 22). Though interpretations of intentionality and merit appear from extant literature to have varied among donors, the role of Myanmar's commercial class in financing and facilitating disaster relief after Nargis was

telling. It exposed how moral and transactional dimensions of welfare capitalism facilitated the extension of ideals and practices of mutuality and reciprocity from the local to the translocal needy.

Cyclone Nargis and state-society relations

Despite the devastation caused by the cyclone, in the week after Nargis Myanmar's military junta proceeded to hold a referendum on the legal constitution it had spent more than two decades drafting. Officials stated that 26 million out of an eligible 27 million voters cast ballots in the referendum on the constitution, an absurd claim given the extent of devastation as well as the number of voters who perished in the initial wake of the cyclone. More ridiculous still was the regime's announcement that 92.4 percent of voters approved of the constitution, an assertion that Burmese civil society and diaspora groups as well as international observers dismissed in the absence of any domestic or international observer missions.[125] Despite such condemnations of the referendum, the political spectacle of the fraudulent poll resulted in the formation of 'rigged' legal political institutions which continue to set the formal parameters of political possibility in contemporary Myanmar.

Alongside the ratification of the legal constitution, however, the mobilisation of relief efforts in the wake of Nargis also demonstrated and helped to popularise an *informal* conception of citizenship that reflects the terms of post-socialist 'social' obligation. The junta's flawed response to Cyclone Nargis encouraged, and in some cases compelled, the ideals and practices of authoritarian welfare capitalism that had been largely locally-oriented up until that point to extend themselves to lend relief and protection to the translocal needy. The lack of in-depth ethnographic accounts of relief work during Nargis, however, occludes understanding of the how these informal redistributive institutions encapsulate the distant needy and the ways they challenge or entrench existing hierarchies of social inclusion and exclusion. In the following section I provide an ethnographic study of relief efforts in the weeks following Cyclone Komen in 2015, exposing the terms on which the post-socialist 'social' was stretched to include some, but certainly not all, people rendered destitute by disaster.

[125] For a useful account of the referendum results in the context of Nargis and the larger regime-led political transition, see Mathieson, D. 2010. 'Burma: A Disastrous Taste of Democracy'. Human Rights Watch. 2 May. https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/05/02/burma-disastrous-taste-democracy [accessed 4 September 2017].

Section Three: Cyclone Komen (2015) reinforced the post-socialist 'social'

Between 2008 and 2015, Myanmar's former junta rulers led significant social and political change. Consistent with the military's 'Seven Step Roadmap to Discipline-flourishing Democracy', after the 2008 Constitution was 'ratified' and the fraudulent November 2010 elections were held, a civilian government led by former junta officers was formed in 2011 (Pedersen 2011). Aung San Suu Kyi was freed from house arrest ahead of elections planned for November 2010. After the USDP won a majority of the seats in parliament President Thein Sein subsequently commenced a process of liberalisation, including lifting restrictions on Suu Kyi's party, the NLD. The Thein Sein government introduced economic reforms which reduced the military's formal mediating role in the economy, with competitive tenders and auctions introduced for most major commercial licences and state construction projects. New space was also granted for civilian activism, and Suu Kyi and other activists were permitted to enter parliament in by-elections held in 2012. These institutional reforms and gestures of goodwill generated hope among some international analysts that a regime-led 'Burma Spring' was occurring, possibly heralding a more representative and democratic form of governance (see Della-Giacoma 2011). Despite these changes, the logics and modalities of welfare capitalism and notions of translocal social relatedness exposed most prominently in the wake of Cyclone Nargis proved to be essential in recovery efforts following Cyclone Komen in 2015.

From late July until mid-August 2015, Cyclone Komen and four subsequent storms produced the worst flooding and landslides in Myanmar since 2008. The initial cyclone tore through the delta and Magway Region, dumping heavy rains in upper Myanmar and causing severe flooding and landslides which impacted more than 1.6 million people (Howe and Bang 2017: 73). Twelve of fourteen states and regions were affected and four were declared disaster zones by government officials. The United Nations attributed more than 117 people dead and over 800,000 acres of farmland destroyed as a result of the cyclone.[126]

In contrast to Cyclone Nargis, the government and the military quickly recognised the scale of the devastation. It immediately requested international aid and deployed civilian and military

[126] Rochanakorn and Clayton. 2015. "More than one month after Cyclone Komen, some impacted people remain homeless. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees". 21 September 2015. http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/news/latest/2015/9/55ffd4c56/month-cyclone-komen-impacted-people-remain-homeless.html [accessed 26 September 2016].

resources to assist in aid distribution. Building on inter-agency disaster risk reduction planning and coordination that was established following Nargis, government agencies and international partners led 24-hour situational monitoring throughout the period to support relief efforts (Howe and Bang 2017: 73). In contrast to Nargis, officials delegated greater decision-making powers to local responders and promptly approved the vast bulk of international visas within 24 hours. Emergency response teams comprised of technical specialists were also deployed by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as twelve UN agencies and American, Australian and Japanese governments (Howe and Bang 2017: 73).

Despite increased resourcing and coordination, the response was labelled by the Minister for Information at the time as "weak".[127] Evacuation efforts were undermined by miscommunication and aid often failed to reach impacted communities.[128] In a rare public acknowledgment of fault, Commander of the Myanmar Armed Forces Min Aung Hlaing also issued an apology after rations were dropped from military helicopters into muddy flood waters.[129] Cyclone Komen was thus demonstrative of the shift to civilianised rule and more representative state-society relations between 2008 and 2015. However, in the context of the immense scale of devastation, the ideals and practices of informal redistribution developed after 1988 and extended translocally during Nargis were mobilised again to raise funds and redistribute food, water and basic supplies to impacted communities. In July and August 2015 I followed these appeals from the street-side performances in Taungoo to the ritualised dispersion of relief in the delta. The following sections describe how notions of social obligation and intimacy with disaster 'victims' was evoked and maintained throughout our fundraising and aid dispersion efforts before discussing the hierarchies of belonging exposed by the limits of mobilisation for landslide affected upland regions.

Social obligation can be extended to translocal needy

Emotive engagement with the suffering inflicted by the cyclone was central to the outpouring of charitable assistance mobilised during the 2015 floods. The precipitous drop in the price of sim-cards to 1500 kyat (c. US$1.2), as well as improved 3G coverage following the

[127] McLaughlin, T. Hnin Yadana Zaw. 2015. "Myanmar government, military win pre-vote plaudits for flood response". 10 August 2015. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-floods/myanmar-government-military-win-pre-vote-plaudits-for-flood-response-idUSKCN0QF1BQ20150810 [accessed 27 Nov 2016].
[128] See Ye Htut in "Myanmar admits 'weak' floods response as disaster spreads". 5 August 2015. Straits Times. http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/myanmar-govt-admits-weak-action-on-floods [accessed 3 January 2017]
[129] Mclaughlin, T. Hnin Yadana Zaw. Ibid.

deregulation of the telecommunications sector in 2014, prompted many people to action far quicker than in 2008. Whereas word of the devastation of Nargis spread slowly via word-of-mouth and religious authorities, by mid-2015 millions of Burmese people had web-enabled smartphones. Images of collapsed houses and rushing stormwaters thus disseminated rapidly across the country as well as throughout the region and around the world via diaspora networks (see McCarthy 2018b).

As reports and images of the flooding and devastation circulated on Facebook, thousands of people in Yangon, Mandalay and provincial towns across the country began local fundraising and relief efforts. Many joined roadside appeals through the traffic of Yangon, in some cases taking leave from work to lead the efforts and provide assistance directly to flood affected communities.[130] The Minster for Information, Ye Htut regularly shared photos from disaster zones to his official Facebook account, becoming a central node of information about the floods and relief efforts. Community organisations in affected areas also used Facebook to source donations from Yangon and overseas as well as inform relations abroad about the progress of recovery efforts (Pursch, Woodhouse et al. 2018: 38).

In Taungoo, exposure to images of the devastation and subsequent fundraising efforts in Yangon on Facebook inspired provincial welfare groups to commence relief campaigns of their own. Within days of Cyclone Komen making landfall in late-July 2015, many of my interlocutors changed their profile pictures to images of flooded villages or of themselves with the Burmese or English words 'Save Myanmar' superimposed over the top (Fieldnotes, 30 July 2015). Motley crews of students, civil servants, traders and unemployed young people began travelling to markets, highway rest stops and small towns around Taungoo to raise funds for flooded communities.

Many volunteers recounted seeing images on Facebook of the flooding or relief efforts elsewhere in the country and feeling a sense of obligation to support the distant victims of the floods. One 19-year-old university student who coordinated a fundraising group said he was moved to action after seeing photos of a student from Chin State weeping over her soaked

[130] For analysis of the civilian flood response see Chambers, J. & McCarthy, G. 2015, 'Amid the deluge, solidarity and leadership emerge', *The Myanmar Times*, 18 August.

schoolbooks on Facebook. “We all live in the same country,” he said. “They are suffering from the flood, while we are not ... We have to give them help” (Interview, 3 August 2015).

Moved by these images, university students and welfare groups led sporadic appeals through markets, singing songs emphasising the suffering wrought by the deluge and their shared kinship with the flood ‘victims’. Students gathered in front of a vinyl banner bearing an ominous image of a hand clutching for help out of murky waters. A local musician lay a *lungyi* out on the ground for donations and then proclaimed: “We all came here because we cannot look at our brothers and sisters and see them hurting. So we wrote these songs for them” (Fieldnotes, 3 August 2015). As shopkeepers and passers-by began to congregate, they broke into a song titled “Give a Lift Up” which the students had written together the night before, accompanied by guitars and a tambourine:

> Help each other, give a helping hand.
> They are our friends who are living with hope of a helping hand.
> Waiting by gazing for people who will help them with pure intentions (*cedana*).
> Brother and sister, give a helping hand by having a sympathetic heart from seeing the other human beings.
> Beautify your history!
> Sacred brother with a wonderful heart, help the flood victim as much as you can!

Figure 11 A group of artists, students and musicians raise funds for flood relief. Photo by author.

Relational discourses of brother, sister, mother and so on were interspersed with evocative depictions of the suffering endured by people impacted by the floods. The Pali-derived term 'sufferer' (B: *dukkhatheh*) recurred in these performances and appeals, evoking the notion of 'misery' or 'unsatisfactoriness' (B: *dukkha*) used widely by both Buddhist monks and ordinary people. The concept is commonly deployed in everyday life to describe grave suffering over which an individual has little or no agency, reflecting a notion of misery intimately tied to Buddhist notions of lack of control (B: *anatta*), as well as the impermanence and finitude of this world (B: *aneitsa*) (see Walton 2016: 40-42). [131] The usage of the term *dukkha* in the context of the floods thus depicted the suffering experienced in deluged communities as the consequence of brute bad luck or misfortune inherent in worldly existence, a framing which obliged those less effected to render aid. Here we see how notions of culpability within the post-socialist moral imaginary create thresholds of obligation: the moral imperative to render aid to social kin – local and translocal – is far stronger for individuals or communities who

[131] The term *dukkhatheh* is also used in Burmese discourse to refer to people displaced internally or to border areas of Thailand or China as a result of Myanmar's ongoing civil conflicts, and carries connotation of 'suffering' as a result of misfortune devoid of agency. 'Victims' of these kinds of circumstances are not generally considered to be responsible for their suffering. The usage of the same term in relation to the floods thus implicitly drew equivalences in suffering between conflict 'refugees' and the scale of displacement and damage caused by the floods.

cannot be held responsible for their own suffering than for those seen to have caused their own misery by act or omission.[132]

The evocative framing of the flood sufferer and the familial obligation by those more fortunate to render aid was reflected in another song, 'Grasp Strongly', performed in the week of the fundraising efforts at Myanmar's busiest reststop, 115 Mile on the Yangon-Mandalay Highway (Fieldnotes, 3 August 2015). The song evoked images of a family slowly drowning in the floodwaters, pleading for assistance.

> A mother gazes at the water, wondering where her son is.
> Beside is her hungry daughter crying, looking for someone who is a saviour with a kind heart.
> The mother hopes her son will return, and tells her daughter not to cry – though the mother is crying.
> Still gazing at the water, beside her are many others who are suffering.
> The fire of worry is burning inside, family life is broken into pieces.
> For the people who are hungry and looking for peace, whose hope is destroyed, let's help them!
> Don't be doubtful with your decision; with strong hands we can lift them as a force.

Familial symbolism of women and children drowning in flood waters and waiting for a "saviour with a kind heart" to outstretch "strong hands" and "lift them as a force" were far more emotive than any language encountered in the quotidian work of local welfare groups discussed in Chapter Three. Echoing the symbolic mechanisms of what Erica Bornstein (2012: 148) terms 'liberal altruism', the evocative depiction of distant sufferers as blameless social kin thus sought to inspire and obligate passers-by to support relief efforts. One of the volunteers who helped lead the appeal was a civil servant in a local government department. She explained that these emotive appeals helped to remind local people of their ties to others: "Compared to Yangon, in Taungoo people feel distant and ignorant from the crisis. But only if it is really serious will the government take responsibility. So small charity groups and government departments like mine need to help raise money and provide assistance" (Interview, 3 August

[132] As will be discussed in Chapter Six, a similar configuration of obligations imbues conceptualizations of entitlement from the state. Communities not recognised as 'taking responsibility' for themselves through initiatives of 'self-reliance' are seen as morally culpable and thus legitimately less worthy of state development assistance.

2015). The symbolic intimacy with victims cultivated through songs, speeches and images of the devastation thus served to extend obligations beyond the local to the translocal needy, conjuring an empathetic moral imaginary of reciprocity with misfortunate social kin.

Personal virtue achieves social transformation

Emotively imbued sympathy for strangers imagined as family was intertwined with a belief in the transformative potential of 'social consciousness' (B: *parahita seit*). A sense of energy, excitement and even joy permeated discussions and songs as volunteers sat on lengthy rides together in the back of crowded light-trucks during fundraising. Many volunteers openly acknowledged the failure of the state to provide for citizens, frequently mentioning the paucity of government relief efforts during Cyclone Nargis as the reason why virtuous action was needed now. Some emphasised the state's role in exacerbating the disaster, showing me diagrams they had shared on their Facebook pages suggesting that widespread logging by military-linked companies in Chin State had caused landslides that had devastated the mountainous western region of the country (Fieldnotes, 4 August 2015).

Figure 12 Flood appeal in a market in Yedeshae, Bago Region. Photo by author.

However, the appeals also valorised the entrepreneurs and ordinary people who responded to the expansive obligations of post-socialist mutuality. A speech repeatedly recited by a local activist, who earlier that year had helped lead a march by students for education reform, struck a contentious yet deeply empathetic tone.

> They are our family, living in the highlands in Magway. They are flooded near the ocean in Ayeyarwaddy… They are like our brother and sisters, they are our relatives. If something is happening in our family, it is happening in our hearts. Our government doesn't give any help, so we are like fatherless children who need to help each other. We need to help them! (Fieldnotes, 4 August 2015)

Despite reciting the same speech half a dozen times in two days of fundraising, each time his voice would crack with emotion and passion as he yelled it across markets and highways. After one performance he was visibly agitated, and needed comforting by other volunteers. Few activists who joined those days of fundraising suggested that victims were 'orphaned children' due to the minimal commitment of the state. However, the notion of obligations to the distant stranger in the absence of adequate government aid certainly recurred throughout appeals those days.

For many volunteers, enacting these obligations by engaging in disaster relief was seen to foster both personal and societal transformation. An experienced volunteer who was leading an appeal recounted how he became involved in *parahita* work two years before at the encouragement of a university tutor. Through social work he hoped to help the needy and transform his own mindset so as to be directed towards the needs of others. "Now I am doing this to raise funds for the flood victims, and also for myself as I have social consciousness (B: *parahita seit*)", he explained, enlisting the same concept cited by activists and politicians discussed in Chapter Three (Interview, 4 August 2015). Many of those engaging in social work for the first time during Cyclone Komen also said that they saw new possibilities for social action after organising appeals and liaising with authorities.

The transformative effect of relief efforts upon personal social outlook was evident during the second day of fundraising in small towns around Taungoo. After a few exhausting hours of performances in local markets and along the old Yangon-Mandalay highway, we were directed by more senior volunteers down some side alleys to an old teak house in a compound marked by a large 'National League for Democracy' signboard at the entrance. I sat with students from Taungoo University at low tables, lunching at the compound of a local trader who explained he wanted to "donate (B: *ahlu*) to sustain the volunteers" in their efforts. "This is my first ever time doing *parahita*, and I feel happy that we can help", one of the students began explaining to me as we sat together and ate warm Burmese soup (B: *mohinga*) served from huge buckets

by the trader's grinning wife and family. The students recounted how they had to cajole university administrators for permission to engage in fundraising, eventually receiving authorisation to raise funds only outside the university campus. "Then on the first day we raised 17 *lakh* (c. US$1360) at the gates of campus and then 7 *lakh* (c. US$560) walking around town", one of the other students recounted proudly. "We didn't get permission to skip class today", the female student explained, nodding towards the rest of the students gorging on the salty soup. "But we did it anyway!" another interjected to giggling and clapping from the other students (Fieldnotes, 4 August 2015). For the students, the institutional wrangling involved with the trip, as much as the performances itself represented a rebellious act of virtue and solidarity which was transforming them as well as the flood victims to whom they were rendering aid.

After a few more hours fundraising amid torrential rain-showers, volunteers cradled each other in exhaustion as they returned to Taungoo in the back of a light-truck. One began to strum a Justin Bieber song on a guitar, and they slowly roused from one-another's arms, before beginning a Burmese song, 'Friend!' (B: *thu-ngegyin*), about success achieved through comradery. Volunteers navigating or disregarding authorities in order to enact a vision of 'social consciousness' by aiding distant others who experienced unfortunate bad-luck did not lose these memories or institutional knowledge. Rather, for many volunteers the companionship of those days extended the boundaries of social relatedness and understanding of their own moral obligations, and was referenced by a number of students a few weeks later when they mobilised to support a performance during Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to Taungoo (Fieldnotes, 7 August 2015).

Welfare capitalist critiques of appeals

Some welfare activists disagreed with seeking small donations from provincial people. A prominent local welfare activist, Ko Tin Win*, claimed that the town's *parahita* groups were already stretched dealing with local problems.[133] He argued that the fundraising effort would be more efficient if they collected less from "grass-roots people" and more from wealthy "cronies" in Yangon:

[133] He argued that helping flood victims on the other side of the country should not be the priority. "Our obligation as volunteers is to help people in the community first. We have enough to do organising blood donors, free funerals and helping the sick here!" (Interview, 1 August 2015)

> What they are doing now is all wrong. It is strange for 10 people to drive to Kawlin or Pathein and deliver only US$6500 worth of stuff. The area is huge, so you are not going to make much impact…. In Yangon there are cronies and rich people who donate in one day what we raise in one month here. In Taungoo, people are collecting money for the floods but I think it is useless because the money we are raising is nothing! We should send people from the village to help [distribute and rebuild], but only raise money from the wealthy people, that is the most effective way. (Interview, 1 August 2015)

Embedded within the critique of 'inefficient' fundraising and disaster response was an expansive vision of the social obligations of the wealthy. His critique did not reject the emotive framing of obligations to flood 'victims' envisioned in these appeals. Nor did he present an alternative framing of the distant stranger in need: for example, as the 'bearer of rights' to whom the state had an obligation to render aid, or as the 'victims' of landslides caused by excessive commercial logging authorised by the military, as posts which circulated on Facebook had suggested (Fieldnotes, 4 August 2015; 9 September 2015). Rather, the preference for approaching the wealthy reflected a particular interpretation of the moral logics of welfare capitalism discussed in Chapter Three. Ko Tin Win explained that the leaders of small-scale appeals were only interested in their own reputation, and that it would be more efficient to take advantage of the willingness of wealthy patrons to donate.

> People are doing *parahita* because they want to be popular and they want a nice image/face. They have never done *parahita* before in their lives, they are just starting to do it now to be popular in the town! If a crony helps it can make a bigger impact. (Interview, 1 August 2015)

Despite claiming that some people were doing *parahita* for their own 'image', the critique shared the same expansive vision of a translocal moral community as the appeals on street-sides and in markets. Yet for Ko Tin Win, the wealthy rightly possessed a disproportionate obligation to contribute to circuits of 'the social', a commitment he said was enacted by numerous companies and tycoons following Cyclone Nargis in 2008. He argued that businesses and tycoons such as Aung Ko Win, the chairman of Kanbawza Bank, were now contributing as they had done during Nargis. He listed donations local appeals had received from prominent

businesspeople and Burmese diaspora networks in Singapore.[134] As proof of the ubiquity of this attitude toward corporate responsibility, he then pulled up an announcement on his phone he had seen circulating on Facebook from a mining company which promised to donate around US$500 each to any local welfare group which approached them for assistance (Fieldnotes, 1 August 2015).

A recurring feature of these discussions about efficiency in fundraising and disaster relief was the inefficacy of the state to act as a potential intermediary. The perceived inability or unwillingness of the state to respond meant socially-minded businesspeople and ordinary citizens needed to fill the breach. A few days later when we met again, Ko Tin Win chuckled when he showed me a comment another user had made on a 7 Day Media news article about attempts to build a levy to control flooding in Sagaing Region. The comment struck a nerve, having received over 900 likes, and stated: "People of Monywa, hold on because no government will help you! Even the sand bags were donated by a company!" (Fieldnotes 3 August 2015). As will be discussed in Part Three of the dissertation, perspectives on the responsibility of the state versus ordinary people and commercial elites in rendering aid and providing public goods varies by extent of exposure to other ideals where the state takes a more active role in social protection. In this case, the critique by Ko Tin Win and many other activists of both provincial and state relief efforts exposed the centrality of commercial interests to post-socialist ideals and practices of redistribution and relief.

Moral recognition determines permissible intermediaries

When elite and street donations were combined, the appeals in Taungoo raised over US$30,000 in the week following the worst of the deluge.[135] Half of the meditation hall at the largest pagoda in town was also filled with in-kind contributions from across the township including second-hand clothing, pots and pans. Activist concerns about recognising the intentionality of both donors and volunteers deeply shaped how they dispersed relief, especially in regards to their scepticism towards intermediaries. Sending volunteers from Taungoo to flooded regions to disperse aid was seen as the only conceivable means of disbursing aid among the bulk of

[134] Aung Ko Win was sanctioned by the US until October 2016 for links to the SLORC/SPDC junta. Media reports named him as the "top donor" during the 2015 floods, claiming he had contributed more than US$3.6 million to relief efforts in the form of flight services and donations from his charity group, the Brighter Future Myanmar Foundation. See 'Aung Ko Win's KBZ Charity Tops $3.6m in Flood Aid'. The Irrawaddy. 7 August 2015. https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/aung-ko-wins-kbz-charity-tops-3-6m-in-flood-aid.html [accessed 4 September 2015].

[135] Estimate based on records of donations received by groups and seen by author, and stated by the senior abbot coordinating relief efforts. Fieldnotes, 7 August 2015.

groups encountered. Indeed, most relief effort leaders did not consider relying on local intermediaries to disperse their assistance, or assess the possibility of transferring funds raised directly to activists in the impacted areas.[136]

There were practical reasons for travelling direct to impacted areas as it ensured that material aid reached the needy in the midst of the logistical challenges of the floods. Numerous volunteers critiqued other groups who simply dropped their assistance in the most accessible town nearby flooded areas but made no attempt to distribute it directly to 'victims'. They claimed that this 'lazy' approach created more work for already over-burdened volunteers, religious institutions and government administrators in disaster zones, and thus created doubt as to whether donations ever reached their intended beneficiaries. The practical need for directness was also asserted by a prominent abbot at a meeting of local welfare groups: "We need to go directly to the area that needs helps. If you fill a water glass that is full [by dropping aid all in one place] it is useless. In the same way, we need to make sure it is really helping, so we cannot just drop the aid and leave" (Fieldnotes, 7 August 2015). Reflecting these logistical concerns, the bulk of appeals organised trucks and buses to travel to the flooded areas directly to ensure that the funds and material assistance contributed by their donors reached families in need. The concern about directness did not extend to a scepticism of religious intermediaries, however. In order to prevent duplication of efforts, for example, the leaders of over thirty local appeals attended a meeting chaired by the *Sayadaw* (abbot) of a prominent pagoda complex where they coordinated their efforts across the country. Some groups subsequently dispatched to the delta while others left for Magway and Sagaing Region, demonstrating the role religious authorities played both in selecting areas of Myanmar to travel to and in mediating the dispersion of aid.

Leaders of relief efforts had a strong preference for delivering aid directly to sufferers, by-passing non-religious intermediaries where possible. These concerns had practical dimensions as well as moral imperatives and were directly linked to the need for recognition as well as personal transformation sought by volunteers. The leader of one of the groups I followed during the weeks of the floods recounted cautionary rumours that local teams in some parts of

[136] Only one of the groups encountered, a township meditation network, electronically wired funds raised to the bank account of a monk in an impacted area who had previously studied together with the Taungoo abbot in Mandalay. This kind of arrangement was rare, however, and appeared to reflect the significant trust the leaders of the appeal placed in the ability of the local abbot and the monk in the impacted area to effectively redistribute relief funds. Fieldnotes 4 August 2015.

Myanmar had put their own names on aid from external networks, claiming credit and thus good merit for the relief they had intermediated. "So we will go to Monywa and give help directly", he concluded, emphasising that donors should be recognised for their contributions (Fieldnotes, 4 August 2015). The moral outrage expressed by volunteers towards intermediaries who claimed merit instead of original donors was particularly acute when images of sacks of rice contributed by international donors circulated on Facebook during the floods. An entire pile of sacks had been crudely rebranded with a single piece of A4 paper bearing the English and Myanmar text "Donated by Myanmar Government". The image became a point of ridicule on local Facebook groups and among welfare activists. Numerous volunteers I interviewed cited the image as indicative of why they would not cooperate with the government to distribute aid and assistance: "They are trying to claim merit from the donations of others!" (Fieldnotes, 6 August 2015).[137]

As Erica Bornstein observes in her ethnography of humanitarianism in New Delhi, stories and images which become symbolic of corruption by the government and other charitable groups serve a dual moral function: "they circulate suspicion in attempts to keep corruption at bay, and they express (more indirectly) suspicion of contemporary institutions" (Bornstein 2012: 65). In the context of Myanmar's 2015 floods, rumours and stories questioning the capacity of the government to effectively redistribute aid in a materially and morally effective manner reinforced for activists the need for a direct, relational connection between donors, volunteers and disaster victims. Techniques or technologies of attribution widely used in local practices of charitable giving were subsequently adopted, which ensured that donors were recognised throughout as much of the distribution process as practicable. Bags of material assistance including clothes and rice were clearly branded with the group, business, family or individual who had made the donation. In cases where the contribution filled an entire box or bag, attribution was made to the family or business, for example in Figure 13 (a) and (b) to a trader, his wife and family. In others, the town from which rice and clothes had been collective was recognised collectively, with sacks labelled as having been "meritoriously donated by parents and people of Yedeshae", where they were collected. Notably, the verb to engage in Buddhist meritorious religious charity (B: *hlu*) was used to mark these gifts, reinforcing a far broader social scope of meritorious charity than researchers encountered during the 1950s and 1960s

[137] This suggests a notion of merit as earned only through social recognition, but also a lack of trust in institutions of redistribution – especially of the state, which was perceived as having disrupted or diverted aid to serve its own interests during the devastation of Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (see Jaquet and Walton 2013).

(see Chapter Two). As Figure 13b shows, most of these individual and collective gifts retained their attribution throughout the distribution process in the delta, until they were broken down into individual parcels for gifting to heads of households.

Parahita teams themselves ensured their own social and moral recognition through various signifiers of intentionality and legitimacy. T-shirts emblazoned with the name of our organisation were disbursed to all volunteers prior to our departure to the delta. Coordinators also printed vinyl banners bearing the organisational and geographic details of our appeal in English and Burmese which were affixed to the front of the mini-bus, trucks and other vehicles in our convoy. As we drove the ten or so hours from northern Bago Region to Hinthada, via Yangon and Pathein (the capital of Ayeyarwaddy Region) we encountered hundreds of similar groups – some with more than 10 vehicles in convoy – each bearing the same style of vinyl banner at the front of each vehicle. I photographed vinyl banners from more than 45 appeals from around Myanmar while en route to and from the delta, including a large number from Yangon and Mandalay as well as from mid-sized provincial towns in lowland areas. Given this sample only reflected vehicles encountered on the road at the same time as our own convoy, they were likely a fraction of many hundreds if not thousands of welfare teams rendering aid in the delta during the period. When combined with other disaster contexts such as the Magway and Sagaing Regions, which were the destination for many other relief teams, it is likely that thousands of groups mobilised in the immediate wake of the cyclone.

Figure 13 a and b: Flood contributions collected in Taungoo bearing names of donors who had 'given meritoriously' (B: hlu); same sacks unloaded from trucks in villages outside Hinthada, Ayeyarwaddy Region. Photos by author.

Figure 14 Vinyl of flood response group affiliated with Buddhist revivalist group 969 at pagoda in Pathein, Ayeyarwaddy Region. Photo by author.

Figure 15 A Yangon NLD flood assistance group bus in Pathein, Ayeyarwaddy Region. Photo by author.

The banners attached to each of the vehicles in these convoys served to secure us free passage to the delta, following Facebook announcements from a number of companies which managed road-tolls that they would waive fees to any flood relief teams (Fieldnotes 8 August 2015). Notably, the banners also served to outwardly signify the diverse moral and ideological intentions of these outpourings of civilian aid.[138] The ideological diversity of these groups was exhibited in the carpark of the Shwemokhtaw Pagoda in Pathein, where dozens of teams converged to pay homage while en route to or from more remote areas. Trucks and buses were emblazed with banners detailing their organisational links to a diverse range of groups, from local ward appeals and NLD Youth Teams to the Buddhist chauvinist group 969. The vinyl signage indexed the varied regions and organisational affiliations which were converging those days around a shared ethic of morally imbued obligation to flood victims in need, enabled by the mechanisms and idioms of authoritarian welfare capitalism.

Directness is essential to rituals of verification

In contrast to the maintenance of social distance between donors and recipients in local welfare groups, a direct, affective connection between volunteers and the 'flood victims' deeply shaped the final distribution of aid. Performances of recognition aimed at morally transforming

[138] Our own signage bore the English words 'Peace, Equality, Development' – a distillation of the philosophy that the group's leader claimed they sought to achieve through their work.

volunteers through interaction with beneficiaries were held in each village where assistance was dispersed. On our second day in the delta, for instance, we canoed to a small monastery which was elevated just above the flood waters, surrounded by the highest branches of submerged trees. The umbrella at the top of a nearby *zeti* (small pagoda) poked out from the water, a visual measure of the extent of the deluge. The simple one-room monastery, constructed on high wooden stilts, was elevated such that we were able to enter via the top two wooden steps without wading through the water. As we lugged sacks of aid from the canoes inside, a few small groups of men and women were crowded in the corner, using the only remaining dry space in the village to continue weaving mats for later sale.

Rather than simply unloading the assistance at the monastery and asking the abbot to coordinate dispersion – an approach which would have allowed us to proceed directly to the next village and hasten distribution – we waited as the abbot broadcast an announcement from the loud-system on the roof: "Donors have come. Donors from Taungoo have arrived. Please come and meet the generous minded people and receive their help. One person from each household. Well done, well done, well done [to them]" (Fieldnotes, 8 August 2015). As the message echoed across the floodwaters, the nurse on our trip delicately checked the blood pressure of the monk, who was sitting on a wooden chair in the centre of the room. A few minutes later I glanced out of an open window and saw dozens of small boats slowly emerging out of the rain towards the bustling monastery.

As villagers arrived we opened the sacks of aid – labelled with donors' names until that point – and apportioned handfuls of their contents into individual plastic bags. We placed a mixture of clothes, pots or pans, bottles of cooking oil and drinking water and small bags of rice or noodles in each bag; bare essentials that volunteers thought may have been lost in the flood water and may be costly or unavailable in the market. A ritualised gift exchange then followed, in which the head of every household posed for photos receiving assistance from members of our team. At the abbot's encouragement, each volunteer formed a line and took turns to hand aid over to the flood 'victims', who gathered together as a household to pose for images taken by other volunteers as well as the head monk himself (Fieldnotes, 8 August 2015). The photographs and exchange with more than 30 heads of households continued for almost an hour, with the abbot and the coordinator of the welfare group ensuring that all volunteers including myself had immortalised our efforts through photos with flood victims (B: *dukkhatheh*). The afternoon saw visits to other partially submerged monasteries and schools,

where similar spectacles of direct distribution and ritual exchange were repeated. All households received the same bags of aid, and no attempt was made to customise the contents to specific needs. A deeper interaction occurred between volunteers and recipients in these rituals than occurred in most local welfare initiatives. However, the material demands which recipients could make on donors were delimited both by the brevity of our presence and the potential shame recipients may feel if they were seen to reject the 'free gift' by requesting cash or other kinds of aid instead.

The directness between donor and recipient served other functional purposes beyond bridging social distance. Indeed, these spectacles can be considered what Bornstein terms a "ritual of verification", as they created visual proof that funds raised reached their appropriate beneficiaries in the form of material aid (see Bornstein 2012: 73). Indeed, images of these rituals (see Figure 16, 17 and 18), along with photos of volunteers unloading trucks or floating in canoes were promptly shared on Facebook by leaders of the relief efforts, both to personal and to group pages such as 'Taungoo Hot News', a township-focused page which had more than 3000 followers at the time. For participants in circuits of relief, sharing images of their service on social media propagated a notion of 'social consciousness' (B: *parahita seit*) and potentially inspired others to enact the same expansive ethic of social relatedness to others in need.

Figure 16 A disaster relief team travels through flood waters. Photo by author.

Figure 17 Volunteers disburse aid and pose for photos with flood victims. Photo by author.

Figure 18 A volunteer poses with bags of assistance stacked in a Hinthada monastery. Photo by author.

Charitable action as informal citizenship

It was not just devastated communities in distant areas of the delta with whom new bonds were formed through our relief efforts. Moral ties were also formed among volunteers as our charitable action was linked through ritual and elite Buddhist interpretations of charity to

broader ideals of societal and individual liberation. The stakes of the relief efforts for moral and political community were exposed after our dispersion trip concluded and we began our return home. All the volunteers – over thirty in total – boarded a bus bound for Yangon, where we stayed overnight before completing our journey to Taungoo. As we drove out of the archway of the monastery compound in Hinthada the leader of the team, the principal of a private school, passed the driver a CD to play on the bus stereo-system. A few seconds later a classic Burmese nationalist song, about Aung San and the martyrs who were assassinated soon after independence, blared from the speaker system (Fieldnotes, 12 August 2015). The song praises the valour of Aung San and his comrades in the independence struggle for Myanmar. As we wound our way through the backstreets of Hinthada after days of exhausting relief dispersion efforts and immediately following the Buddhist ritual of moral recognition, the entire bus boisterously joined in the chorus – symbolically connecting our labour of those past days to a lineage of struggle for the good of the nation.

Five hours later we pulled into the grounds of a monastery a street over from the iconic Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. We were met in the yard by a monk, an acquaintance of the school principal leading the trip. He directed us to an elevated timber house where mosquito nets and mats had been set up for us in a large shrine room. After bathing from a concrete well outside, I joined a group of university students who were going to pay homage at the Shwedagon Pagoda. Together we walked the few hundred metres to the eastern entrance, crossing over Martyr's Road (*Azani Lan*) as we ascended the stairs to the top of the complex, symbolically echoing the nationalist song we had sung hours earlier. On the warm mats, still damp from a late-afternoon monsoonal downpour, students joined the crowds giving thanks and paying homage at the glistening pagoda. As I sat cross-legged and watched the spectacle, a second year philosophy student with whom I had a number of discussions on long bus rides grabbed my hand and quietly led me to a small statue of the Buddha in one of the corners of the compound. A number of other students from the trip were gathered, pouring water over the statue. He handed me a small silver cup and I did the same (Fieldnotes, 13 August 2015). Ritually pouring water with others following meritorious action is seen by many Burmese Buddhists as a means of creating bonds between individuals across lifetimes, increasing chances of reincarnation in social proximity in subsequent lives (see Kumada 2015). The pouring of water with other volunteers following days of 'work for others' exposed the multiple layers of sociality and intentionality animating circuits of disaster aid in the wake of Cyclone Komen. Our relief efforts extended post-socialist social obligation from the local to the distant

needy, bridging significant social and geographic distance via the welfare capitalist ideals and institutions generated following the dissolution of Ne Win's BSPP in 1988. From these bonds emerged a larger notion of moral community, defined by practices of meritorious mutuality not just in this world but in subsequent lives as well. Inclusion in these circuits of aid was determined not simply by ties of biological kinship bound to a notion of 'national races' as envisioned by the 2008 Constitution. Rather, access to aid was deeply shaped by the extent to which impacted communities were fully or contingently included in an imaginary of the abstractly reciprocal 'social'. The social and spatial boundaries of belonging were exposed as post-socialist mechanisms reached logistical and affective exhaustion and began to exclude upland regions and minority populations from disaster relief efforts and thus informal citizenship.

Section Four: Mapping the boundaries of the post-socialist 'social'

Exclusion from formal and informal belonging shapes socially redistributive outcomes

Ideals and practices of civilian relief mobilised during disasters in Myanmar expose a social imaginary that runs parallel to the legal definitions of political community embedded in the 2008 Constitution. Myanmar's 2008 Constitution, ratified through a fraudulent referendum in the week following the worst natural disaster experience in Asia for decades, defines formal citizenship on the basis of individuals tracing lineages to 'sons of the soil' (B: *taingyintha*) or recognised as having resided in Myanmar prior to the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1824. In contrast to the 1947 independence constitution which committed to a redistributive political community in which citizenship surpassed the national races designation, legal belonging according to the 2008 Constitution is formally defined with reference to the social, moral and economic trauma wrought upon an imagined Burmese nation by British colonial rule. The legal, state-endorsed notions of belonging formally inscribed by the junta in the Constitution are essential to understanding the legal citizenship regime in Myanmar, especially how the violent expulsion of minorities such as the Rohingya find legitimation in the national races ideology.[139] As Cheesman argues, in the legal language of the 2008 Constitution:

[139] The official schedule of 'sons of the soil' or 'national races' is comprised of groups which the state recognizes as having resided in Myanmar prior to 1823 when British forces first invaded Burma. The list has fluctuated over decades from over 140 down to the present 135. Cheesman conceives of the national races concept as a "trope for Myanmar's many linguistic and cultural groups pulled together in a state-building enterprise" (2017: 470). In the absence of inclusive institutions capable of bridging social distance and generating shared social imaginaries, the notion of national races contentiously frames Myanmar's diversity in "a mythic unity that has never emerged" (Holliday 2014: 410). The discourse that the Rohingya are not a 'national race' and thus do not 'belong' in Myanmar has been repeatedly enlisted by the Tatmadaw to justify withholding legal citizenship from the

> To talk of the political community "Myanmar" is to talk of *taingyintha*, and to talk to that community is above all to address its members not as citizens but as national races (Cheesman 2017a: 470).

Alongside these *formal* notions of social and political community enshrined in the 2008 Constitution, the mobilisation of informal relief efforts during disasters highlights a post-socialist notion of the 'social'. The state is largely absent from this post-socialist imaginary, with religious authorities, commercial elites and welfare activists instead playing pivotal roles in extending mechanisms and idioms of welfare capitalism beyond geographic and social limits. As ideas of empathy and obligation beyond kin are mobilised by businesspeople, welfare activists, religious authorities and even state officials to render aid and relief during disasters, the moral bonds that determine the boundaries of social belonging or *informal* citizenship begin to emerge (see Brubaker 2010: 65). Recognising the distant other as a member of a shared moral or social imaginary to whom one owes obligations, in the absence of the state or not, relies upon the kind of symbolic, affective and physical labour exposed during Myanmar's post-socialist disasters. Resources must be raised from donors who are either predisposed or can be emotively encouraged to see the needy and destitute stranger as a co-participant in moral community to whom one has moral and material obligations. Yet when relief workers or coordinators have few social ties to communities in need, or when the social distance generated by ethnic or religious difference frays these already limited ties, the variable and contingent protection and solidarity offered by informal ideals and practices of private redistribution and aid stretched beyond the local begin to break down.

These dynamics are exposed most dramatically in the frequent exclusion of ethnic or religious minority people, especially in remote areas, from lowland mobilisation during times of disaster in Myanmar. The civilian response to the upland landslides which followed Cyclone Komen in 2015, demonstrated these hierarchies of obligation and belonging and how they serve to further compounded existing inequalities. During meetings I attended in the initial wake of the floods, few of the groups I followed even considered travelling to non-Bamar or non-Buddhist areas which had also been devastated by the deluge such as Chin, Kayah or Rakhine States. The vast majority of flood assistance teams from Taungoo in 2015 instead travelled through

Rohingya and has also featured, since August 2017, in justification for the purge of more than 700,000 Rohingya people to Bangladesh. For an example of the Tatmadaw leaders legitimising anti-Rohingya sentiment with reference to the 'national races' discourse, see Paddock, R. 2017. 'Myanmar General's Purge of Rohingya Lifts His Popular Support'. The New York Times. 26 November.

lowland areas via the Yangon-Mandalay highway to accessible flooded regions of predominantly lowland central Myanmar such as Ayeyarwaddy, Bago, Magway and Sagaing Regions. Decades of internal migration and trade within these areas meant relief coordinators were often able to easily source contacts to assist in local dispersion via family, friendship or religious networks. These ties, and also a shared religious framework of Buddhism, enabled people experiencing 'misery' (B: *dukkha*) in these regions to be easily imagined as co-participants in a wider moral community, or even reincarnated kin. By mobilising resources in these affective ways and coordinating relief through specific religious, business, education or other ties it was relatively easy to bridge the social and geographic distance that remained between Taungoo and flooded regions in lowland predominantly ethnic Bamar areas where we travelled to.

When severe landslides hit adjacent upland areas of already flooded Kayah State in the weeks after returning from the delta, however, the leaders of largely Buddhist welfare groups of Taungoo were already physically, financially and emotionally fatigued. As a result, none expressed much interest in mobilising again for people in the upland region, even after encountering images of the mountainous devastation on social media. There were logistical and social reasons behind their reticence. Much of Kayah State is poorly connected by road to otherwise geographically proximate regions of central Myanmar and there was limited telecommunication coverage in those upland areas at the time of the 2015 floods. However, as Kayah State also has a large Christian population the social distance generated both by religious and ethnic differences between the regions meant there were too few of the linkages between people, communities and institutions in the two areas necessary to coordinate a proper relief effort. In the absence of substantive state aid, the minimal assistance provided by lowland welfare groups to communities in Chin and Kayah States meant that people in these areas instead relied on ethnic diaspora and church-mediated networks of aid. Meanwhile, remote regions of Rakhine State recovered much slower than other comparably impacted areas in the delta in the absence of substantive translocal or international aid in the weeks after the devastation.[140]

[140] Rochanakorn and Clayton. 2015. "More than one month after Cyclone Komen, some impacted people remain homeless. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees". 21 September 2015. http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/news/latest/2015/9/55ffd4c56/month-cyclone-komen-impacted-people-remain-homeless.html [accessed 26 September 2016]. There were some welfare groups from Yangon who travelled to Kayah State in the weeks following the initial landfall of Cyclone Komen. However, no groups mobilised from Taungoo despite the immediate geographic proximity to the flooded areas.

Here we can see most starkly the contingency, inequity and inefficiency inherent in the imaginary of the post-socialist 'social' mobilised by welfare groups, religious actors and businesspeople since the dissolution of the BSPP in 1988. Informal redistributive practices unmediated by the state predominantly rely upon donors and volunteers in non-affected areas seeing distant others as participants in the same imagined 'social' to which they feel an obligation. Pre-existing dynamics of ethnic and spatial inequality and exclusion may thus be compounded by the post-socialist 'social' that is generated by authoritarian welfare capitalism and enacted and extended during moments of catastrophe. Beyond creating unfair variances in access to aid in the wake of the disaster, dynamics of exclusion and or partial integration into moral and political community exposed during Cyclone Komen also reinforced social cleavages that complicate more progressive distributive politics.

Informal relief fragments political community and capacity for taxation

Welfare capitalist ideals and practices of private, non-state redistribution enacted by relief groups offer essential aid and succour to those with whom affective ties exist or can be viably imagined at times of catastrophe. However, the contingently inclusive social imaginary mobilised by civilian welfare groups also effectively absolves the state of obligations to intervene and level out regional or other variances in access to relief and recovery assistance. These dynamics compound the vulnerability of those excluded for logistical or ideational reasons from already contingent systems of aid and relief, entrenching exclusion from post-socialist *informal* citizenship.

By reinforcing the perception that state institutions are unable to deliver social protection or relief either to communities which receive private aid or those largely excluded from it, notions of a 'national' political imaginary essential to development of more progressive and redistributive state capacity are further eroded. As political scientist Evan Lieberman (2001, 2003a) argues in his study of tax states in South Africa and Brazil, the boundaries and cleavages of national political community can play determinative roles in the capacity of states to deliver essential public goods. Much like Albertus and Menaldo (2013), Lieberman studies how founding legal constitutions in both contexts shaped long-run state revenue capacity and redistributive potential. Ideas of political community enshrined in these founding constitutions,

Lieberman argues, shaped the willingness of upper classes to quasi-voluntarily cooperate with the state in paying income and corporate taxes. These dynamics produced vastly different patterns of tax collection and compliance which have shaped the redistributive pathways of both states throughout the 20th century. Similar dynamics are also at play in contemporary Myanmar.

Alongside constitutionally enshrined racial ideas of political community and citizenship, the contingent notions of the 'social', generated as a consequence of tensions between institutions and ideas during the 1990s and 2000s, and recurrently exposed during Myanmar's disasters, are likely to shape long-run political development. As discussed in Chapter Three, systems of local and translocal informal social protection rely on indirect social expenditure made by businesspeople who negotiated tax remissions with local junta officials. These concessions weakened the revenue and direct expenditure capacity of the state and, as will be discussed in Part Three of the dissertation, now limit the potential for more democratically accountable governments to respond directly to the social needs of the median voter. Beyond the fiscal constraints imposed by informal redistributive institutions, however, informal redistributive institutions may also entrench partial notions of 'the social' that inadvertently exacerbate pre-existing exclusion.

The partiality of social and thus political obligation produced by authoritarian welfare capitalism may entrench conceptions of 'national' belonging that exclude or elide populations who are socially distant from the demographic majority. Especially in the absence of substantive state intervention aimed at equalising variations in access to aid and relief, private and non-state institutions of redistribution may thus further fragment ideas of national political community already formally cleaved by the official 'national races' ideology along divides of religion, region or ethnicity. Even if formal legal notions of citizenship were to be altered or reformed, the partial social imaginary embedded in redistributive ideals and practices mobilised during disasters like this are likely to present separate and possibly more durable barriers to raising tax revenue and delivering redistributive social policy. Despite the promise of achieving redistributive action and disaster relief without the involvement of the state, the partiality of the post-socialist 'social' may only further entrench social cleavages and thus foreclose the possibility of a more redistributive and progressive political imaginary.

Conclusion

The governance of disasters by successive post-socialist regimes has played a pivotal role in shaping notions of the 'social' enacted by welfare and political activists in Myanmar. Through mediation of marketisation in the 1990s and 2000s, and the inadequate nature of formal state response efforts, junta and later civilian state officials have institutionalised the role of welfare capitalist mechanisms in translocal disaster relief. As welfare volunteers, religious authorities and businesspeople mobilise ideas of empathy and obligation beyond kin to render aid and relief during disasters, boundaries of obligation and belonging begin to emerge and form the basis of a vernacular 'social constitution' (cf Walker 2008). The outpouring of morally-imbued aid by commercial elites and ordinary people during the 2008 Cyclone Nargis and 2015 Cyclone Komen thus highlights the dramatic reconfiguration of entitlement and 'the social' which has occurred in Myanmar in recent decades. These actions provide insight into quotidian patterns of aid and mutuality that existing literature finds difficult to place into socio-economic and historical context.

Recognising the distant other as a co-participant in moral and political community, or indeed reincarnated kin to whom one owes material obligations, entails the kind of symbolic, affective and physical labour exposed during Myanmar's disasters. The emotional impulse that underpins affectively motivated provision of aid is deeply contingent upon the strength of social and moral ties between donor and recipient. For remote communities with few family, trade or ethno-religious connections to lowland areas, the minimal role played by the state in providing timely and materially substantive aid only exacerbates pre-existing inequities generated by their exclusion from flows of predominantly lowland Bamar Buddhist charitable aid and redistribution. Hierarchies of social belonging are thereby made and unmade through inclusion and exclusion of people and communities in flows of aid and relief, exposing the contingency and inequities inherent in a social imaginary predicated on ideals and practices of private, non-governmental redistribution. Moreover, the entrenchment of a partial and contingent notion of the 'social' upon which informal citizenship in political community is based is likely to weaken the long-run capacity of the Myanmar state to elicit 'quasi-voluntary compliance' (see Levi 1988) with any attempt to collect more tax and finance a more consistent level of social protection to citizens.

The notions of informal citizenship and obligation mobilised by private and charitable institutions of redistribution in the wake of disasters are not fading with the transition to civilian

democratic rule since 2011. Rather, in the context of Myanmar's liberalisation and transition to partial civilian rule, many reformists including Aung San Suu Kyi, have framed the expansive moral obligations of informal citizenship expressed through welfare groups and philanthropy as the basis of a truly 'democratic' political community. As a consequence, welfare capitalist ideals and practices of informal redistribution are being entrenched during political transition, with visions of democratic redistribution mobilised by the NLD relying far more on virtuous citizens and empathetic capitalists to achieve distributive justice than formal institutions of the state. In the next part of this dissertation I explore how informal redistributive ideals and practices shape notions of freedom and liberty among grassroots activists in contemporary Myanmar in ways that are likely to perpetuate rather than erode regressive systems of distribution despite the transition to partial civilian rule.

PART THREE: DEMOCRACY & REDISTRIBUTION

Chapter Five: Democracy, Liberty and Morality

A few weeks after Myanmar's historic November 2015 national elections, images of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi crouching in grass to pick up trash went viral on Facebook. Following high-profile meetings with President Thein Sein, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and former dictator Than Shwe, Suu Kyi made one of her first public appearances since the poll: to collect rubbish in her electorate in Yangon. After fifteen minutes flanked by jostling photographers—who she commanded to "Help pick up the garbage!"—she disappeared back into her car and sped away.[141]

At the Lady's orders, similar clean ups were occurring across the country, led by local NLD members and welfare groups. In Taungoo, volunteers from local welfare groups and private schools collected rubbish from the streets surrounding a government housing project next to the railway tracks which ran through the town. Above an entrance to the housing project, a large green signboard erected prior to the November 2015 election declared this a 'Union Solidarity and Development Party village'. That morning though, an oversized dump truck backed slowly through the gate, driven by a member of a local welfare group wearing a red T-shirt featuring Aung San Suu Kyi's image.

Within the housing project, in a small clearing surrounded by dilapidated wooden houses and filled with decades of accumulated domestic waste, women bathed and washed clothes from a well while chatting about the spectacle surrounding them. As the dump truck reversed into the clearing, incoming NLD parliamentarians fresh from their political clean sweep of the township a few weeks prior helped a squatter move his makeshift bamboo hut out of the path of the incoming vehicle. A few minutes later, a bulldozer driven by an off-duty policeman began to scoop up piles of old rubbish, *lungyis* and even a writhing snake, and dumped everything into the waiting truck.

[141] Fuller, T. 2015. 'After Victory in Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi Quietly Shapes a Transition'. The New York Times. 22 December.

The businessman who donated the industrial vehicles for the day stood proudly alongside the township development officer, watching as decades of accumulated filth was removed. Both took photos on their phones, loading them to Facebook as local residents looked on, bemused yet pleased. “Is this a political campaign?” (B: *siyoneyay*), I asked the businessman, who was wearing a ‘Titleist’ golf cap to keep the sun off his face. “Oh no, this is ‘work for others’/charity!” (B: *parahita*), he responded. “Haven't you seen the photos of Daw Suu collecting rubbish in Yangon? This is the same. This is democracy!”, he insisted.

The mobilisation of political and welfare activists in the name of local improvement and ‘democracy’ that day provided an insight into how ideals and practices of informal redistribution and collective action generated during junta rule endured and evolved in the run up to and following Myanmar’s 2015 election. As this chapter demonstrates, conceptualisations of reform enacted throughout 2015 by my interlocutors envisioned charitable service and philanthropic donations as necessary in the context of state bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption. Beyond the practical appeal of achieving social outcomes with minimal state involvement, however, welfare and political activists also understood their work as enacting an ideal of liberty which generated social and moral bonds necessary to achieve ‘true democracy’. The norms and systems of informal redistribution and obligation generated during junta rule have thus been institutionalised as a form of democratic practice, entrenching a regressive system of redistribution which disproportionately burdens the poor and benefits the rich despite democratic electoral incentives.

The chapter proceeds in three sections. Section One reviews comparative literature on moral conceptions of ‘democracy’ before examining existing research on liberty, moral conduct and politics in Myanmar. It highlights how the idea of democracy enlisted by ethnic Bamar Buddhist political activists emphasises the role of moral conduct as a pre-requisite for the achievement of individual and societal liberation.

Section Two explores conceptualisations of liberty and democracy enlisted by welfare and political activists in their work and campaigns ahead of the 2015 election. It shows how many activists involved in local mechanisms of reciprocity and risk-pooling see their work as generating and restoring the moral and civic bonds necessary to rejuvenate a moral community imagined as having existed prior to colonial rule. *Practical* preferences for redistribution via pre-existing and trusted mechanisms of private charitable and philanthropic aid is thus coupled

with an *ideal* of private, non-state redistribution viewed as essential regardless of the magnitude of direct state social expenditure. Informal redistributive institutions are thus shown to impose constraints on democratic redistribution separate but equally significant to those imposed by formal institutions.

Section Three focuses on attempts to regulate the behaviour of youth and businesspeople, especially Muslims. It shows how small actions of litter collection engaged in by youth become symbolic of broader democratic transformation. Meanwhile, stories depicting Muslim businesspeople as stingy, immoral capitalists reluctant to share their wealth served as a way for activists to socially regulate the immoral behaviour of commercial elites more broadly. The chapter concludes that informal redistributive institutions generated during the 1990s and 2000s deeply shape grassroots conceptualisations of 'democracy' in contemporary Myanmar, popularising a vision of liberation reliant upon ideals and practices of private rather than state-mediated redistribution and welfare provision.

Section One: Compassion and moral democracy in Myanmar

Recent studies of democracy and inequality suggest that 'rigged' formal political institutions such as constitutions play central roles in eroding democratic incentives for redistribution of wealth after regime change. As outlined in the introduction, classic theories of democratic transitions and distributive politics have long suggested that elections create institutional incentives for political elites to implement policies in the interests of the 'median voter' (Meltzer and Richard 1981). However, a growing body of literature highlights that regressive systems of redistribution often endure despite democratic electoral incentives (Shapiro, Swenson et al. 2008, Haggard and Kaufman 2012). Political scientists have increasingly focused on the mechanisms that enable inequality to persist despite democratisation, particularly how authoritarian-era coalitions of economic elites legally protect their assets from redistribution upon transition (Albertus and Menaldo 2013, Ansell and Samuels 2014).

Separate to the constraints on redistribution imposed by formal political institutions, ideals and practices of informal redistribution generated during earlier regimes can also shape the form and function of democratic social policy. Path dependency of informal redistributive institutions during political transition has been little studied in existing literature on regressive

democratic distributive politics, however. This is despite a growing body of political science and anthropological research which highlights how informal redistributive institutions and moral ideals shape the practice and understanding of democracy. Political scientist Frederick Schaffer's research in Senegal, for instance, highlights that the ideal of democracy takes different forms depending on linguistic and cultural context. He argues that many Wolof speaking peasants and poor urbanites understand 'demokaraasi' through their prior experiences of self-help and informal social insurance. These mechanisms are often organised around social hierarchy and play essential roles in pooling the risks of dire poverty. Drawing on ordinary language interviews with Wolof speakers, he argues that these pre-existing ideals and systems shaped their conceptions of 'democracy' (Schaffer 2000: 69-76). For instance, Wolof villagers commonly reached collective agreements to support the same candidate at election time in return for a local public project and to avoid discord, a practice which contrasts with notions of 'democratic' accountability and representation expressed by more educated French-speaking Senegalese (Schaffer 2000: 64-65).

Political ethnographies of democracy activists in Asia have similarly highlighted how moral practices and ideas shape conceptions of democracy. Studies of Tibetan democracy advocates suggest that the emphasis placed in Tibetan Buddhism on leaders possessing an "enlightened mind" generates logics of accountability that diverge from Western liberal forms of governance which emphasise oversight of the electorate over representatives (Frechette 2007: 99). Research among Cambodian political actors and aid organisations similarly highlight an emphasis on the people rather than the ideas and ideologies represented in democratic process. As Mikael Baaz and Mona Lilja (2014: 8) argue, the legitimacy of Cambodian political representatives thus derived from their "personal qualities" and relationship to various communities, lending the practice of party politics a deeply moral dimension arguably inconsistent with liberal notions of democracy. Garry Rodan and Caroline Hughes (2014) similarly emphasise the role that moral ideology plays in accountability over government across Asia. They argue that significant attention is given in these frameworks to the moral virtue of leaders and their capacity to make decisions in the interests of the collective. As a result of weak participation in mechanisms of accountability, less attention is placed on "appropriate political institutions" which may constrain or shape the decision-making of elites (Rodan and Hughes 2014). Consequentially, many democracy activists see corruption as indicative of individual moral failings rather than the inadequacy of institutional frameworks.

These studies highlight how scholars of democracy, representation and redistribution have much to learn from a focus on the underlying 'circumstance-attached' logic from which vernacular connotations of 'democracy' emerge. Frederick Schaffer (2014) argues that thin-descriptive accounts based largely on elite interviews or snapshot surveys often prove of limited utility in revealing ideals which appear to run contrary to liberal conceptions of democracy. These methodologies, he argues, tend to elide the larger contexts and narratives which underpin understandings of 'democracy' in different contexts and thus provide accounts divorced of the social and institutional milieu from which they emerge (Schaffer 2014: 329). Studying the vernacular logics underpinning 'democracy' is particularly vital in new democracies such as Myanmar, where authoritarian suppression of political opposition often bequeaths weakly institutionalized party organisations and thus the practice of democracy is likely to be deeply shaped by the functioning of pre-existing social institutions (see Stokke et al. 2015). In these contexts, qualitative ethnographic and interview methods provide the ideal means of studying the complex and contingent linkages between 'democracy', community and redistribution.

Burmese notions of liberty and democracy emphasise moral conduct

Connotations of 'democracy' among lowland activists in Myanmar are deeply shaped by the legacies of the mass movement against Ne Win's socialist junta in 1988 and the informal institutions of welfare capitalism generated during the post-socialist period. The major opposition party that formed during that uprising, the NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a majority of votes at the subsequent 1990 election. The results were never honoured by the SLORC/SPDC (see Chapter Two). Junta officials subsequently eviscerated NLD party structures though the concerted destruction of ties between local branches, the central executive committee and Suu Kyi, who was placed under house arrest for much of the 1990s and 2000s. Activists labelled as democracy 'agitators' by SLORC/SPDC representative were regularly jailed, and local party branches were violently disbanded and suppressed. As a result, many reformists were deterred from formal affiliation with the party. Despite this, values of 'freedom' and 'democracy' endured under the SLORC/SPDC, with many social activists often enlisting these notions to imbue permissible welfare work.

Constraints on long-term research in provincial areas of Myanmar prior to 2011 made in-depth, ethnographic studies of vernacular understandings of 'democracy' impossible. Existing literature on the political rhetoric of key leaders in the democracy movement, however, emphasise the role of morality in notions of freedom and reform endorsed by elite activists. Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches, writings and interviews throughout this period drew heavily on U Nu's earlier moral discourse of democracy (Wells 2018: 9-10). True 'freedom' in Suu Kyi's formulation implied not just the end of oppression by junta officials but also "liberation from the wheel of *samsara* [cycle of rebirth]" for all individuals (Houtman 1999). The moral inflections of elite Bamar Buddhist conceptions of 'democracy' were perhaps best expressed in an essay *"Freedom from Fear"*, in which Suu Kyi referred to the Buddhist concept of the four 'corruptions', identifying them as desire, anger, ignorance and fear. Fear, she argued, was the worst of these: it destroyed a sense of right and wrong, hindered efforts to reform the other three and, in the case of Myanmar, had led the military to repress citizens and their aspirations for self-transformation and transcendence of this-worldly suffering (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991: 181). Suu Kyi called for a 'revolution of the spirit', framing liberation from the mundane and the concept of 'I' (*atta*) as a prerequisite for "the attainment of democracy in the collective sense" (Walton 2012: 197). Aung San Suu Kyi's notion of democracy thus evoked a notion of freedom as liberation from oppression and from personal mental defilements. Writing in *"Freedom from Fear"*, she notes:

> A people who would build a nation in which strong, democratic institutions are firmly established as a guarantee against state-induced power must first learn to liberate their own minds from apathy and fear… Free men are the oppressed who go on trying and who in the process make themselves fit to bear the responsibilities and to uphold the disciplines which will maintain a free society (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991: 183).

In addition to democratic elites, high-profile monks similarly popularised these understandings of 'democracy' and 'freedom'. Anthropologist Mikael Gravers recounts how monks involved in the 2007 'Saffron Revolution' argued that empowerment through 'study' and 'education' were essential prerequisites for democracy. 'Knowledge' as deployed here was defined in opposition to the actions of the generals who protesters claimed "lacked knowledge" as they contravened the precepts of respect for life and were thus "*a-dhamma*, that is anti-dhamma" or against the teachings of the Buddha (Gravers 2015: 10). Following the liberalisation in 2011

these moral associations of democracy became the subjects of public sermons by prominent monks. Political scientist Matthew Walton quotes Yangon monk Ashin Eindaga as conflating 'democracy' with 'Buddha's doctrine' at a public sermon in Yangon in 2012: "If you have *taya*, you will have democracy… Democracy means acting in accordance with *taya*, having laws. If society is fully endowed with *thila* (morality), won't it also be fully endowed with democracy?" (Eindaga in Walton 2016: 179).[142]

These associations between political reform and moral conduct defined within a Buddhist moral universe proliferated throughout the democracy movement. Political scientist Tamas Wells conducted interviews with fifty democracy and civil society activists between 2012 and 2014. Many framed moral discipline as an essential attribute not just for democratic leaders but for societies more broadly, forming a key component of what Wells terms a 'benevolence narrative' of democratisation. Echoing the notions of moral democracy endorsed by Suu Kyi, numerous activists emphasised that democracy required "the public, community and all parties" to "set aside obsessions and stand together" (Wells 2016). Some activists cast what they framed as the flawed character and 'moral immaturity' of citizens as responsible for authoritarian rule in Myanmar. 88 Generation leader Min Ko Naing, for instance, argued that military rule endured for so long because "we understood that the government needed to go, but we did not understand society also needed to change" (quoted in Wells 2016: 153). In order to achieve true liberation, he argued that citizens needed to set aside their "own desires" and cultivate moral 'discipline' (B: *si kan*) (quoted in Wells 2016: 153).[143] As Wells (2018: 4) notes, 'freedom' was often interpreted and deployed by Bamar democracy activists in ways which emphasised "freedom for moral conduct, freedom to bear moral responsibilities, rather than freedom for the exercise of individual entitlements".

The emphasis placed in elite and religious discourses upon moral conduct as a necessary component of democracy allowed expansive scope in actions which could be considered to contribute to 'democratic' or political reform. As Matthew Walton (2016: 129) notes, a wide range of actions – from "electoral politics to civil society activities to proper moral conduct in

[142] While Eindaga also mentions the need to have laws, the 'taya' referred to here was the Buddhist truth of dhamma which carries with it a particular understanding of cause and effect.

[143] In one of his first public comments following his release from prison, 88 Generation leader and democracy activist Min Ko Naing emphasised that "it is very important to have discipline and unity, we have to show that we deserve democracy" (Voice 2012 in Wells 2016: 168). The discourse of 'discipline' runs back to the colonial period (Walton 2015), and has recurred on NLD sign-boards, campaign materials and in the speeches of senior political leaders since liberalisation in 2011.

daily social interactions" – are commonly considered as forms of political participation by many Burmese Buddhists. Framed in opposition to the junta-aligned USDP, these moral inflections of democracy generated a high degree of coherence within the NLD and democracy movement more broadly. Moralised, selfless connotations of 'democracy' diffused widely in provincial areas of Myanmar, providing the normative basis for re-emergence of the party as an electoral force at the 2012 by-elections even in the absence of an institutionalised party structure (Stokke, Win et al. 2015: 25-27). Little noted in existing literature on the ideology and practice of 'democracy' in Myanmar, however, is how visions of liberty, democracy and reform enacted at a grassroots and elite level are shaped by the ideals and systems of private redistribution generated during junta rule. Drawing on participant observation with self-described 'democracy' activists in Taungoo throughout 2015 and 2016, in the following section I show how notions of liberation enacted ahead of the November 2015 elections framed ideals and institutions of private redistribution as essential to achieving a more democratic political system.

Section Two: Practices of democratic 'work for others'

Partisan welfare provision signals acceptance of social obligation

In the months preceding the November 2015 national elections welfare groups and their private donors sought to balance ostensibly 'apolitical' ideals of communal mutuality and reciprocity with complex partisan affiliations. At an organisational level, township, ward and village-level welfare groups with which I worked in central Myanmar had diverse and sometimes ambiguous ties to political parties, often through their donors. Managers and volunteers of groups formed in the 1990s or early 2000s under the patronage of military-linked businesspeople mostly eschewed any kind of *organisational* affiliation with the NLD. The appearance of impartiality partly reflected the complex political positions of the patrons who remained the primary source of funds for many of these groups (Interview with manager, 30 April 2015; fieldnotes 15 August 2015). As the USDP's 2015 township campaign manager complained, the businesspeople who financed these early initiatives had shown themselves to be flexible political 'animals' after the 2011 liberalisation.[144] Most bankrolled the USDP campaign in 2010, before distancing themselves at the 2012 by-election and then openly supporting other parties in 2015. Businesspeople such as 'Taungoo son' and chairman of CB Bank Khin Maung

[144] He described these businesspeople using an obscene Burmese idiom about 'goat testicles' (B: *seh gweh sii*) while making a hand gesture to evoke them moving from left to right with each step. Fieldnotes, 9 November, 2015.

Aye, who had made contributions throughout the 1990s and 2000s to local social initiatives, financed and seconded staff to the local NLD campaign in 2015 (see Chapter Seven). Meanwhile, other more locally-oriented 'town elders' supported the National Development Party, a political vehicle established by one of President Thein Sein's former political advisers.

Perhaps wary of the evolving partisan affiliations of their donors, I rarely encountered volunteers with these older welfare groups discussing politics within the bounds of their organisations. Beyond concerns about donor relations, this reticence may also have been a strategy of conflict avoidance with other volunteers, as was exposed at a Buddhist merit-making event I attended in September 2015 with volunteers of one of these groups. An otherwise jovial discussion came to a grinding halt at the mere mention of the upcoming election. One of the older men present loudly placed his spoon in the bowl and walked away from the table (Fieldnotes, 20 September 2015). A few weeks later, however, I encountered one of the same men at a teashop. He declared that he "loved Suu Kyi" and was planning to vote for the NLD, though admitted that some of the other volunteers at the group were supporters of either the USDP or the Buddhist chauvinist group Ma Ba Tha, leaders of which had openly criticised Suu Kyi (Fieldnotes, 13 October 2015).[145]

Members of groups which emerged after the liberalisation in 2011, in contrast, were more open in their support of the NLD. One township-level welfare group formed in 2012 and managed by former political prisoners was funded by monthly contributions from a diverse range of donors including traders and civil servants. It also received regular contributions from the local veterans' association. Despite being partly funded by former military personnel, none of the volunteers made a secret of their support for the NLD, often discussing politics during breaks or at teashops after shifts with the group. Throughout 2015 a member of the group ran one of the largest local Facebook groups in the township, sharing photos of welfare activities as well as news articles which were often critical of President Thein Sein, the Tatmadaw and the 2008 Constitution. Once the election campaign started in earnest in late August many volunteers with the group 'gave strength' to the NLD by wearing vintage party t-shirts or covering their motor-bike in stickers bearing the campaign slogan 'Time for Change'. They studiously

[145] Some leaders of Ma Ba Tha, especially firebrand monk Wirathu, claimed that Suu Kyi would empower Muslims and thus her party could not be trusted to protect 'national religion'. Not all Ma Ba Tha-affiliated interlocutors supported the USDP, however. Indeed, the endorsement of the USDP appeared to carry little weight for many of my welfare-group interlocutors, most whom who either proudly voted for the NLD or avoided voting entirely.

differentiated their welfare work from political 'campaigning' (B: *siyoneyay*), however. There were no NLD materials posted in the office or disbursed while on shift, and volunteers with whom I worked were conscious not to wear party clothing or symbols while on duty as they explained that 'work for others' (B: *parahita*) should not be conducted for political benefit. Outside of their work with the welfare group, however, I encountered a number of volunteers playing a diverse range of party roles during the election campaign. One former political prisoner swapped a funeral hearse for a heavy industrial truck in the weeks prior to the election, driving an NLD float decked out with LED lights and a music troupe around the town. Others took on roles as ward or village campaign managers and coordinators helping to organise rallies, run village visits or train polling station observers.

In addition to the partisan affiliations of welfare organisations, political parties themselves also offered a range of social services to potential voters throughout 2015. The USDP, for instance, provided low-interest loans to families in wards and villages around Taungoo, creating a relationship of financial dependence in the months prior to the poll (Fieldnotes 7 September 2015). The nexus between welfare and politics in the USDP reflected the long-running role of the party's predecessor organisation, the Union Solidarity and Development Association, in providing social benefits to card-carrying members throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Despite these authoritarian connotations, democracy activists also began providing their own charitable social services following the 2011 liberalisation. In central Myanmar the most consistently provided form of support linked to Suu Kyi was a programme providing free tutoring to help high-school students pass their matriculation exams. The initiative was linked to the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation, a philanthropic organisation which received international grants to support education improvement since 2012, established and chaired by Aung San Suu Kyi in honour of her mother.[146] The sessions I visited in central Myanmar were delivered by a volunteer teacher in a compound nearby the house of a NLD parliamentarian, and were attended by a dozen or so young people from urban wards of the township.

[146] The Foundation also ran a 'Public Library' project across the country and also delivered relief assistance during the 2015 floods. For background on the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation education project, see Zaw Win Than. 2012. 'NLD targets overhaul for 'ruined' education system'. The Myanmar Times. 15 October. https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/2478-nld-targets-overhaul-for-ruined-education-system.html [accessed 4 September 2016].

Smaller, more informal social services were also coordinated by local party networks, as was demonstrated by the funeral procession of an elderly man who had been a strong supporter of the NLD. The funerary procession to the cemetery included a *Byama-so* hearse, along with six light-trucks and countless motorbikes, many of which sported 'National League for Democracy' stickers or were flying large red fighting peacock flags, the iconic symbol of the NLD. A senior member of the party's township committee explained that the light trucks were provided "free of charge" on an *ad hoc* basis for family and friends of NLD members out of respect for the deceased. Donations were also collected for the family of deceased members by party representatives, in order to help allay the costs of funeral rituals, an adaptation of the same rotating funds structure discussed in Chapter Three (Interview, 4 May 2015). Political loyalty is rarely 'created' or 'bought' in the small gifts and welfare assistance provided by parties such as free tutoring or funeral aid, however. As Javier Auyero (2000) argues in his political ethnography of Peronism in late 20th century Argentina, political loyalty relies upon the discursive and ideational framing of these interactions and the subsequent social reproduction of political identity in everyday life. For the NLD-affiliated social services, loyalty derived from how assistance rendered was rhetorically and symbolically linked to a moral notion of 'democracy' defined in opposition to the 'selfishness' and 'coercion' exhibited by the USDA and junta officials during military rule.

These oppositional moral inflections of democracy were exposed as NLD candidates bustled from village to village introducing themselves to trusted activists in the months prior to the November 2015 election. In central-east Myanmar I attended a number of these events and watched as candidates for office as well as local NLD sympathisers swapped stories about the egregious abuses they had experienced at the hands of state officials and police during the 1990s and 2000s. As candidates and local elders recounted these narratives, a hushed lull would descend on the audience of loyalists and the air of optimism would evaporate from the shrine rooms or living area in which we were all crammed. Juxtaposed with the solemnity of these accounts of suffering, however, was another kind of personal story told by activists. In these stories they or other well-intentioned people managed to circumvent authorities who had tried to suppress or disrupt small acts of kindness or works of local improvement. One female candidate and former school teacher recounted the callousness of being dispatched by her superiors to a rural school without notice, transportation or accommodation – only to meet local villagers with 'goodwill' (B: *cedana*) who offered her food and lodging. The story elicited knowing cheers from assembled supporters, and ended with a comparison between the

immorality of the military junta's Union Solidarity and Development Party and the generosity both of 'the people' (B: *pyithu ludu*) and of the NLD more broadly: "Working only for your own interest is not politics. Politics is working for the interests of all, with loving kindness (B: *myitta*)", she declared at the end of her story. The charitable practices and idioms of obligation through which populations in lowland areas pooled risk during the 1990s and 2000s were here positioned as not just socially virtuous but also reflective of a democratic political ideal. The USDP was not depicted as a 'philanthropic ogre', as political vehicles in one-party regimes which couple coercion with occasionally generous social assistance often are (see Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). Rather, the political identity of democracy activists was defined with reference to the selflessness and 'loving kindness' exhibited by Aung San Suu Kyi and the millions of people who engaged in charitable work during the 1990s and 2000s.

Realising the depth of popular distain for Myanmar's military-linked party, as well as the positive moral connotations of charitable giving generated during the 1990s, local representatives of the USDP personally financed their own social welfare initiatives during the election campaign. Beyond the special benefits offered and promised to members or supporters of the local USDP, throughout 2015 the upper-house member of parliament for Taungoo helped finance a clinic which provided free treatment and vitamins for pregnant women every Monday. The clinic was run from an office at the back of the charitable aged-care home described in Chapter Three, and was staffed through a rotation of six doctors, some of whom had direct ties to the USDP through their partners or family. It also received institutional support from USDP administrative staff who greeted patients on arrival and disbursed various vitamins after their consultation was over.

Staff at the clinic were careful not to overtly exploit ties of material dependence generated through provision of social aid for the electoral benefit of the parliamentarian. During the weeks I attended the clinic between June and November 2015 there was no obvious symbolic or discursive attempt to link treatment and vitamins provided to the generosity of either the MP or the USDP. The iconic USDP lion symbol was nowhere to be seen within the clinic, and most patients interviewed over the weeks I attended had little or no direct contact with party representatives before receiving treatment, most having been referred there by doctors at the General Hospital. In the months preceding the 2015 election I visited the homes of eight of the women I met during visits to the clinic every fortnight or so to learn about welfare and reciprocity practices within their ward or village. None had been contacted by the administrator

of the clinic by the time of the election. Few even knew the clinic was patronised by the USDP parliamentarian when I mentioned the connection after the poll. After the November 2015 election in which the NLD won over 80 percent of seats across Myanmar, I visited the women again – a number of whom had recently given birth. Two had pre-existing ties to the party through their husbands, and reported having voted for the USDP; two said they did not vote as they were travelling and "were not interested" in the election; and the other four voted for the NLD. All recognised the generosity of the 'donor' or 'master of the gift' (B: *ahlushin*) who supported the clinic, even though seven out of eight of the women could not recall his name.

As an electoral strategy the clinic was thus a dismal failure. The NLD won a robust majority in practically every urban ward and rural village in the township at the 2015 election. Rather than serving solely as a mechanism of vote-buying, the clinic must instead be read as an attempt by the patron-parliamentarian to signal his support for a notion of moral and political community defined by ostensibly 'self-less' and charitable provision of aid to the needy or destitute. Ideals and practices of informal wealth redistribution were here associated with a notion of democracy to which the USDP candidate sought to align himself. Similarly, volunteers who offered their time or resources at charitable welfare initiatives linked to political parties including the USDP and NLD did not see their actions as contributing solely to partisan electoral success. Rather, they referred to themselves as engaging volitional acts of service as enacting and cultivating a moral notion of political community essential at a time of reform and social change. The morally performative and ostensibly non-partisan manner in which parties provided aid to voters demonstrated how ideals of private and volitional giving have come to be viewed as democratic practices which parties feel they must enact.

Practical preference for private redistribution

A practical preference for private redistribution via mechanisms generated during junta rule was expressed by many interlocutors in the run-up to and following the 2015 elections. Having experienced decades of informal taxation and minimal direct state social assistance relative to non-governmental and communal providers, few expected a democratically elected government to dramatically expand service or public good provision. Stories about the ineptitude and inefficiency of bureaucracy were a recurring feature of political discussions at betel-nut shops I attended throughout 2015. Attendees would chew betel-nut while sharing video-clips or news articles they had encountered in their Facebook feeds and debating the latest local or national political events. In making meaning of the various stories they

encountered involving government officials, the metaphor of '*thabu-oo'* – a loofa-like gourd which is evocatively translated in Burmese dictionaries as 'Gordian knot' – was frequently used to describe Myanmar's bureaucracy. Municipal and commercial taxation often came in for particular criticism, both because of the concessionary tax rates many claimed were granted to wealthy businesspeople and due to the lack of clarity regarding how government revenues were spent. As a close interlocutor opined after he had paid land tax on his plantation, "I have no idea where the tax goes – it probably goes into the pockets of the Generals!"

Perceptions of government taxation and bureaucracy being circuitous and ineffective were born out in the household survey fielded in the months following the 2015 election, prior to Suu Kyi's NLD taking power. The survey of 1000 households in central-east Myanmar (see Appendix III) asked respondents how confident they were that taxes paid reached where they were needed most. The broad Burmese word for tax or payment to an authority (B: *akun*) was used in order to elicit a general perception of all state-levied payments referred to with this term, including user fees for roads and electricity meter usage. Despite these user fees for services comprising a sizable proportion of overall formal tax burden, around the same number of respondents in lowland areas said that they were unsure (43.4 percent) about whether their taxes reached where they were needed most than those who were confident (43 percent) (see Figure 19). Upland areas which experienced conflict throughout the 1990s and 2000s until a 2012 ceasefire were even more sceptical of the efficacy of taxation.

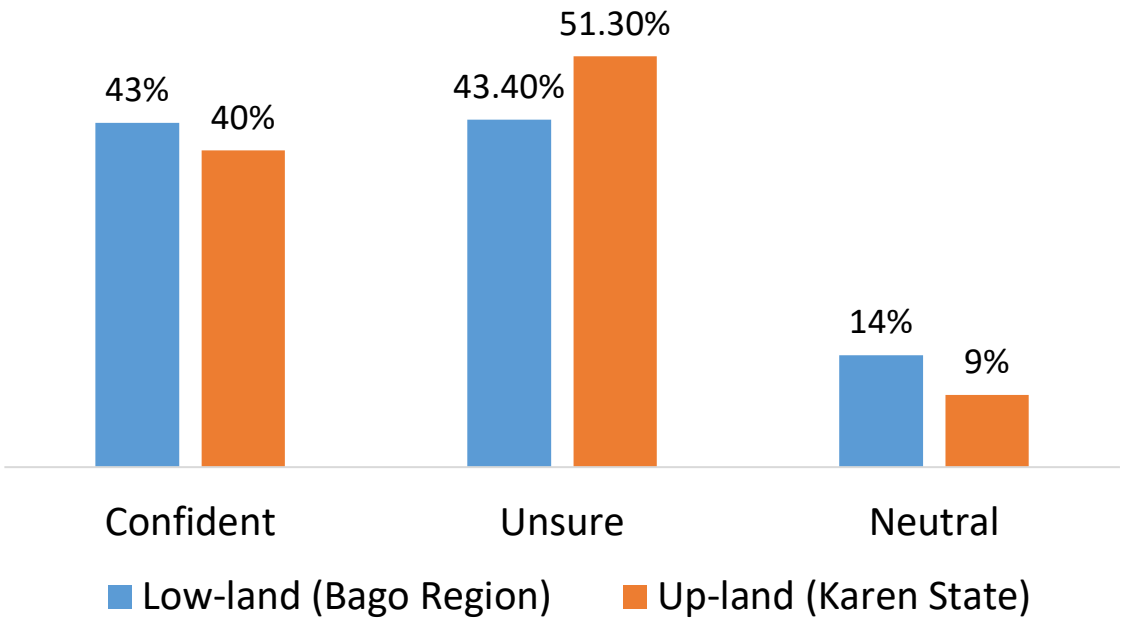

Figure 19 Confidence that taxes reach where they are needed most (percentage by township).

General perceptions of donations stood in stark contrast to taxation (see Figure 20). Compared with the general category of tax, almost double the number of respondents in Taungoo township (81 percent) said they felt confident that their donations reached where they were needed most. In contrast, only 10 percent of respondents said they were 'unsure'. This pattern was clearer in sample areas of Thandaungyi in Karen State, where 89 percent said they were confident about donations redistribution. The role of religious authorities in intermediation, as well as the persistent focus in circuits of aid on intentionality and directness, are reflected in the strong levels of confidence in donation efficacy.[147] The perceived practical efficacy of donations relative to taxation helps explain the extent of willing compliance that managers of informal redistributive mechanisms are able to secure to their solicitation of funds, time or other resources from rich and poor alike (see Chapter Three).

[147] The same level of confidence was also expressed in relation to trans-local redistribution during the 2015 floods, with over 80% of those who donated saying they were confident that their contributions reached 'where it was needed most'.

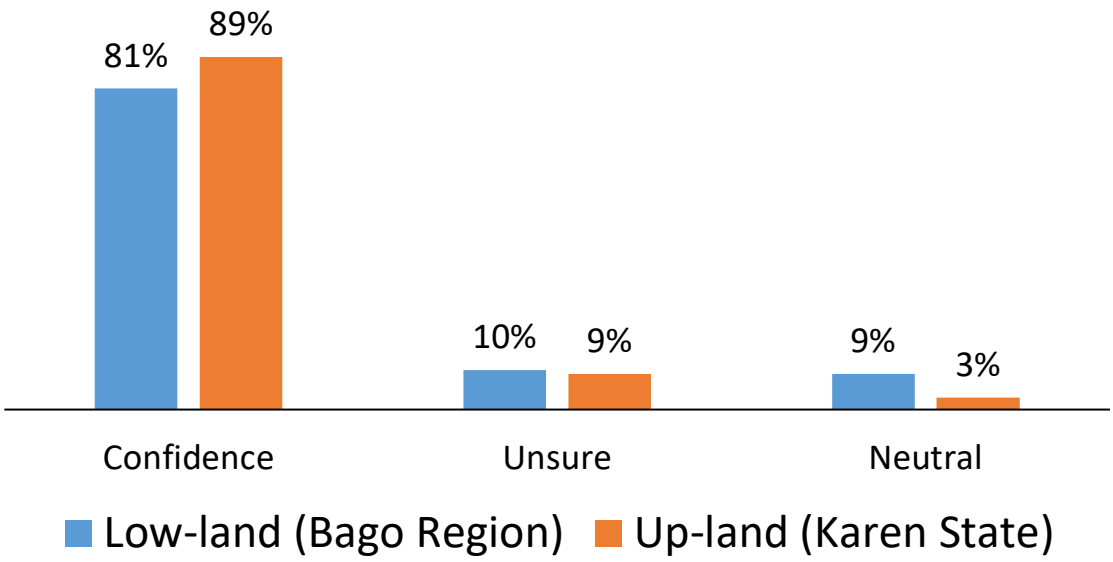

Figure 20 Confidence that donations reach where they are needed most (percentage by township).

The practical efficacy of redistribution via private and charitable networks recurred in the ideals of democracy evoked by the NLD and by welfare groups throughout the 2015 election campaign. Activists often framed the circuits and practices of charitable giving generated during the 1990s as essential to regimes of health, social protection and redistribution more broadly in the absence of an effective and adequately funded social state. However, discussion about the inefficacy and corruption of tax-funded state initiatives relative to informal redistribution often blended with a broader *normative* preference for private charitable and philanthropic provision of welfare. Central to the appeal of non-state redistribution to welfare and political activists were the civic and moral bonds they understood it to regenerate after decades of authoritarian and earlier colonial rule. Many welfare activists thus saw their charitable and philanthropic service as forming the normative basis for a more genuinely 'democratic' Myanmar. When questions of constitutional reform arose among these interlocutors many had clear ideas of the parts the needed amendment, though none suggested including a stronger commitment to achieving redistributive justice for past injustices or a clearer focus on the social responsibilities of the democratic state. The practical and ideational appeal of informal redistributive institutions among grassroots democracy activists was evident when the blood centrifuge machine at the General Hospital broke down a few months prior to the 2015 elections, disrupting the flow of donations during the peak of dengue-fever season and exposing a welfare capitalist ideal of 'democracy'. The subsequent fundraising campaign

and notions of democracy enlisted throughout it help to clarify how informal redistributive institutions can entrench regressive social policy ideals and impose constraints on democratic redistribution separate from those presented by formal constrains such as military dominance over key parts of the bureaucracy.

Rejuvenating moral community through private redistribution

Dengue fever outbreaks are common during Myanmar's rainy-season between May and October, and often claim the lives of infants, the elderly and infirm whose weak immune systems are unable to fight off the virus. Platelet transfusions have become a common form of treatment for dengue fever in recent years in Myanmar and require large numbers of blood donations which must then be processed by centrifuges to extract platelets and red blood cells for subsequent transfusion.[148] When the only blood centrifuge machine in Taungoo broke down at the General Hospital during the peak period of dengue fever in June 2015 news spread quickly through local welfare networks.

Once word of the disruption to the flow of blood donations reached the 5000-strong Facebook page of NLD-affiliated township welfare group 'At All Times'*, fears about patients dying from a lack of transfusion prompted demands for immediate action. "Can we lease a new one?" one commenter suggested. "How long till they can fix it?" asked another. When group members heard that the South Korean manufacturer had refused to send out a replacement immediately, instead requesting a recall and inspection, a former doctor turned gold merchant intervened in the Facebook thread: "Of course the government machine broke! Let's just buy a new one. Lives can't wait!" (Fieldnotes, 1 June 2015). The comment was interpreted by other users as imputing corruption in the purchase of the machinery, and received supportive likes and comments from other followers of the group. One commenter extended the criticism of the government, arguing that the "shit-bag" (B: *cheetoh*) centrifuge machine was probably purchased by one of the many former military officers who had been appointed to senior positions in the Ministry of Health.[149] A fundraising appeal was subsequently commenced by

[148] As the number of patients treated at the local Taungoo General Hospital has increased in recent years with additional government funding, flows of charitable blood to support patients have also intensified. According to Taungoo General Hospital Blood Bank records between 2012 and 2016 there was a 40 percent increase in the number of 500 mL bottles of blood donated for patients in the hospital from less than 3900 donated in 2013 to over 5500 bottles – the vast bulk of which were non-compensated, voluntary donations.

[149] The criticism of the militarisation of civilian-led ministries proved prescient of larger social mobilization in the months that followed. In August 2015 nurses in Mandalay Bone Hospital and Taungoo General Hospital

the gold merchant and other local welfare activists. Nurses and doctors were not formally involved in fundraising but gave support by informing contacts about the appeal (Interview, 6 June 2015). Within a week over US$20,000 had been raised from dozens of local businesspeople including a number of prominent 'town elders'. A new machine was promptly ordered from Yangon.

Alongside concern about maintaining the flow of blood donations despite the failure of the government machinery, the fundraising effort was also seen by activists as contributing to a broader ideal of private redistribution which formed the basis for a more moral and democratic Myanmar. Over tea during the week of fundraising Tin Win*, a prominent supporter of Buddhist chauvinist group Ma Ba Tha as well as the NLD, explained the larger societal and political stakes of the centrifuge appeal and blood donations more broadly. Beyond the individual patients who he claimed would die if they did not receive a platelet transfusion, he argued that the abstract notion of 'social consciousness' (B: *parahita seit*) enacted through blood donations was essential for generating the moral bonds necessary for a truly 'free' political community:

> If Myanmar is to become a true democracy (B: *tageh demokrasi*) we need more people to have goodwill/good intentions (B: *cedana*) and be willing to give their blood for others to reduce suffering (B: *dukkha*) among our kin (B: *amyo*) (Interview, 11 June 2015).

The notion of "*amyo*" conceived as beneficiaries in this notion of 'true democracy' is an amorphous term used variously in Burmese to refer to family, type, race or nation. It forms one of the three founding concepts of the Buddhist chauvinist group 'Ma Ba Tha' which the organisation itself interprets and translates variously as 'Patriotic Association of Myanmar' as well as 'Organisation for the Protection of National Race and Religion'.[150] For a Ma Ba Tha supporter to rhetorically link blood, kinship and democracy suggests a racial conception of 'political community', the boundaries of which might be defined by the state ideology of

placed a black ribbon on their uniforms in protest of appointment of former military doctors into senior positions in the Ministry of Health. The resulting 'Black Ribbon' campaign spread across Myanmar, with other sectors including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Electrical Power and Ministry of Energy starting their own ribbon campaigns as well. See McCarthy 2018a: 98-99 for further discussion.

[150] As Brac de la Perriere (2015: 5) observes, Ma Ba Tha connects three forms of belonging: "*amyo*" as 'nation', "*batha*" as individual belief or faith in religion and "t*hathana*" as institutions of religion. For a discussion of *amyo* since the colonial period see Phyo Win Latt (2016).

'national races' or 'sons of the soil' (B: *taingyintha*). These associations were certainly made by some Ma Ba Tha and USDP-linked interlocutors, many of whom cited sermons by Buddhist monk Wirathu suggesting Suu Kyi and the NLD would grant special opportunities and positions of power to Muslims at the expense of people they claimed were real 'sons of the soil'. True democracy was not solely defined according to exclusivist racial ideas about indigeneity, however. Rather, this was a practice-oriented conceptualisation of democracy defined by provision of bounded aid to others in need. The social obligation to render aid beyond kin enacted and popularised by welfare groups throughout the 1990s and 2000s was thus see by Tin Win as essential for achieving a truly democratic polity.

The state was not absent from the vision of redistribution evoked in the blood bank appeal, or in the 'Thank You' ceremony held a few weeks later to recognise the contributions of donors to the blood centrifuge machine. A nurse at the event presented at length on the growing number of patients treated at the hospital on an annual basis, attributing the increase to Ministry of Health funding which had received a significant boost after 2011. However, both hospital management and welfare activists linked to the NLD campaign praised the ideal of a democratic form of welfare capitalism as practically and morally necessary to achieve redistributive outcomes. Even though government resourcing had increased with political liberalisation, they argued that state funding needed to be at least met, and in many areas led, by charitable and philanthropic contributions. The generosity of wealthy businesspeople had a special role in this welfare capitalist ideal of democracy, along with acts of charity by ordinary people. In a speech to a crowd of 50 or so local businesspeople, social activists and civil servants from Taungoo, the hospital's head doctor emphasised the leadership and 'loving kindness' (B: *myitta*) of the donors who contributed to the fundraising appeal. After handing each of the donors a certificate of appreciation and posing for photos, the head doctor then espoused his vision for a new hospital building, to be funded entirely by local philanthropists and a grass-roots donations campaign. "We can't wait for the government… The people need these new facilities now", he explained. His appeal and plan implicitly compared the incompetency and inadequacy of government initiatives with the efficiency and directness of the privately-funded social initiatives which had delivered a new blood centrifuge within a week of the breakdown.

Figure 21 Senior doctor from General Hospital thanks donors for blood centrifuge. Photo by author.

Alongside practical judgments of state inefficiency, however, there was also a normative notion of philanthropically-funded public goods as necessary *regardless* of the magnitude of government social expenditure or service delivery. The former doctor turned gold merchant who helped coordinate the blood centrifuge appeal and also actively supported the NLD during the 2015 election explained the importance of continued philanthropy to donors after the event: "No matter how much the government does, it will never be enough. Your contribution is vital!" he encouraged them (Fieldnotes, 12 June 2015). Their donations were crucial not just because they filled a specific need within the hospital and health system. Rather, their actions also served to enact a distributive ideal in which private and communal mechanisms of redistribution and risk-pooling generated during junta rule could viably provide for the sick or destitute. Rather than private mechanisms of welfare provision acting simply as small injections into a starved or malfunctioning system, the blood bank appeal exposed a broader *ideal* of moral and political community bound together by charitable service and philanthropic giving. The promise of the private distributive ideal was future-oriented, in the sense that it envisaged donations continuing forever, at least to the extent that moral obligations of liberty were enacted by rich and poor alike. Yet it was also historically rooted, as the ideal of liberty defined by private redistribution resonated with broader narratives of democratisation which framed practices of mutuality as existing prior to colonial rule.

Private redistribution restores bonds of pre-colonial political community

Many lowland welfare and political activists idealise a period prior to colonial and military rule when, they claim, civic and moral bonds within the 'community' were far stronger. Reform and democratisation thus compelled ordinary citizens to regenerate the substance of a truly 'free' political community through their daily practice, including engaging in service for others and socially-oriented donations. What emerges is a notion of citizenship practice that superficially resembles yet substantively deviates from more liberal notions of freedom and rights. Political scientist Tamas Wells conducted dozens of in-depth interviews with predominantly ethnic Bamar Buddhist democracy activists between 2012 and 2014 on their conceptualisations of 'democracy' and 'reform'. He argued that activists often portrayed democracy and the liberalisation process initiated by President Thein Sein "within a local and historically embedded story as opposed to an international and future-oriented one" (Wells 2016: 170). Indeed, the Burmese term for 'reform' (B: *pyu pyin*) which was used by activists and political elites alike to describe liberalisation since 2011 evoked memories of glorious monarchical periods prior to colonial rule. The term carries strong connotations of renovation or rejuvenation, echoing as it does the terminology of 'regeneration' by 19th century monarchs in response to the British seizure of Lower Burma after the First Anglo-Burmese War (see Candier 2011). These same historically-rooted ideals were also evoked at NLD campaign events in the months preceding the 2015 election in Taungoo. At a public rally the NLD candidate for the upper house of Parliament emphasised the need for popular moral renewal to achieve true societal and political change:

> The people have suffered such terrible things since the 1962 coup. Because of the coup people were tortured, this country became so terrible and the education system was destroyed. People no longer have morals or shame. This is not the mistake of people; it is the fault of the government! If you really want change, we need to leave this system and mind (B: *seit*) behind (Fieldnotes 5 September 2015).

The notion of reform evoked by democracy activists envisioned an idealised period before the country 'became so terrible' and morality was 'ritualised' as a result of authoritarian rule. Reform in this frame was thus placed in a cyclical rather than linear or progressive notion of time, with democratic reform seen by many activists as restoring practices inherent to Burmese

culture and people (Wells 2016: 166). This moral narrative of democratisation encapsulated ideals and practices of charitable service and philanthropy and framed them as forming the substance of a bounded notion of political community. In contrast to earlier Buddhist conceptions of monarchical 'just rule' and 'reform', however, in this version the sovereign ruler no longer bore the primary obligation and duty for care for subjects. Rather, the ideal of democratic rejuvenation mobilised by political activists after the 2011 liberalisation required all people, especially those engaging in profit-seeking commercial activity, to participate and contribute to moral and political community through volitional acts of charity and renunciation. Political scientist Matthew Walton, for instance, cites a prominent monk who emphasised that the rules of conduct for kings, such as providing for the welfare of the needy and patronising Buddhism, were "a way to evaluate citizen participation in politics" in a more democratic society (Walton 2016: 159). The vision of liberty and moral obligation upon which this configuration of democracy is founded deviates considerably from a liberal vision of rights. Rather than democracy implying a system "in which every individual is the bearer of potentially enforceable rights", 'freedom' in this moral configuration of democracy relies on what anthropologist of Indian humanitarianism Erica Bornstein (2012: 172-173) describes as relationality with people and groups to whom one belongs and to whom one is obligated.

Democratic welfare capitalism narrows the scope of state social obligation

The philosophy of welfare capitalism enacted by grassroots democracy activists in 2015 and 2016 bears close similarity to the ethos of volunteerism which has emerged, often with state encouragement, amid retrenchment of welfare states in Western Europe and other OECD countries. In these contexts, encouragement provided to non-state groups to fill the breach left by state social retrenchment have often been made on the basis of private or charitable provision of welfare being symbolically synonymous with 'the family' and 'the nation'. As anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach (2012: 69) recounts from austerity northern Italy, instead of relying on the state for welfare assistance these discourses produce a configuration of social responsibility in which "citizens are to attach themselves to each other, through spontaneous, sympathetic acts". Claims of belonging or entitlement from the state are thus replaced with kinship-imbued welfare and philanthropy framed as "a form of life-blood swirling through the arteries of a human body… having a total reach that the state could never have" (Muehlebach 2012: 69). The suffering and need experienced by citizens is thus seen to require action not by the state but by generous and compassionate members of the community, especially virtuous

capitalists, who are seen to cultivate individual virtue and civic culture through volitional acts of giving or service. In Myanmar, activists most openly opposed to aspects of the 2008 Constitution were often the strongest proponents of this vision of democratic welfare capitalism. My interlocutors often argued that the civic and moral bonds required for 'true' liberation were generated by practices of informal reciprocity and redistribution. Indeed, it was common for grassroots welfare and political activists to advocate reforming the military-drafted 2008 Constitution while simultaneously seeking to reinforce ideals and mechanisms of private redistribution generating during authoritarian welfare capitalism.

Wells provides a vivid demonstration of how formal and informal institutions co-exist and shape the politics of constitutional reform in contemporary Myanmar. The reform demands of the democracy activists with whom he conducted research predominantly focused on removing the coercive dominance of the military over civilians, especially in relation to the free exercise of political thought. Wells (2016: 220-221) recounts attending a regional meeting of NLD activists held during the campaign for reform of the 2008 Constitution coordinated in 2013 by party leaders and civil society partners. Attendees at the session were asked to sign in at the door and commit themselves to the reform of the Constitution. The sections cited for reform were articles related to the provision of parliamentary seats to the armed forces, the processes of constitutional amendment itself and restrictions on eligibility for the Myanmar Presidency that precluded Suu Kyi's ascendance to the role. In the subsequent 'discussion' session all attendees were then encouraged to vocally repeat three times a commitment to *amending* the constitution, a practice which Wells (2016: 220) argues likely masked potential disagreements about the diverse democratic aspirations of loyalists present. The affirmation of the NLD's amendment priorities was then followed by a collective rejection of entirely rewriting the document, a proposition which reflected the NLDs formal party position. Many of the welfare and political activists who coordinated the blood centrifuge appeal shared similar opinions and priorities about reform of the Constitution. They often emphasised the need for amending specific sections, mostly regarding reducing the military seats in the legislature or ensuring civilian control over the bureaucracy. At a betel-nut shop in the weeks following the November 2015 elections I asked a number of prominent welfare and political activists what else should be changed, specifically whether they felt the Constitution provides adequate redress to those dispossessed or abused during junta rule, or whether it sufficiently commits the state to

providing for the welfare of citizens. One of the assembled activists, a volunteer with a charitable health clinic run out of a nearby monastery and vocal critic of the Thein Sein government on Facebook, responded: "There are lots of problems with the 2008 Constitution. But we need to have priorities about what to change and who our real enemy is" (Fieldnotes, 3 December 2015).

The commitment of NLD activists to 'picking battles' and amending very specific sections of the 2008 Constitution partly reflects the *realpolitik* approach of the party's leadership. In a context where military dominance is institutionally and economically entrenched, it is unsurprising that activists may be reluctant to challenge the impunity entrenched within the 2008 Constitution for past and ongoing military atrocities and expropriation of land amid a tentative political transition. However, in addition to these strategic choices we also see how informal redistributive institutions formed as a consequence of tensions between ideas and institutions in earlier regimes can shape the imaginable and desirable possibilities of democratic reform. Exposed in events such as the constitutional reform 'discussion' as well as the blood centrifuge donor ceremony organised by avowed democracy and welfare activists is an emphasis on the moral and political value of unity, linked to a vision of reciprocity with allies or co-participants in efforts of reform and restoration. For welfare activists, ideals of unity and obligation enacted through private and charitable redistribution form the basis of free moral and political community, and therefore define good and virtuous 'democratic' citizenship. Consequently, rather seeking to constitutionally enshrine social rights to redress for past injustices or clarify the redistributive obligations of the state to citizens, democracy activists instead seek to revitalise civic and moral bonds of reciprocity and obligations.

Economic elites are essential to this welfare capitalist vision of democracy as they provide donations and patronage grassroots social and political activists are unable to garner on their own. As a result, few of my interlocutors envisioned constitutional or legal reforms which would enlist the power of the state to collect appropriate taxation from these same elites in order to finance state-mediated social expenditure. The curtailing impact of these welfare capitalist ideals upon the priorities for formal and informal political reform proposed by local welfare activists thus demonstrate that the constraints imposed by informal redistributive

institutions on the redistributive potential of democracy operate separately to 'rigged' formal political institutions which entrench the interests of economic elites (see Albertus & Menaldo 2013). Indeed, democracy and welfare activist interlocutors who may otherwise be vocally critical about reforming some aspects of the Constitution often simultaneously seek to revitalise and further entrench ideals and systems of private and informal redistribution throughout my fieldwork. Many established social initiatives for youth, or repeated moral discourses condemning allegedly unethical businesspeople, with the aim or effect of socially reproducing an ideal of democracy in which practices of informal redistribution would form the basis of moral and political community.

In the next section I explore how notions of moral and political community generated through private mechanisms of redistribution recurred in initiatives and debates aimed at regulating the moral conduct of youth or socially sanction allegedly 'stingy' and 'immoral' businesspeople – claims disproportionately levelled against Muslims rather than the major military-linked culprits of expropriation during junta rule. The constraints imposed by authoritarian-era formal political institutions upon state-led redistribution must thus be analysed alongside how these ideals and practices of informal redistribution endure political transition.

Section Three: Youth and Muslims as mechanisms of normative reproduction

Moral cultivation of youth strengthens democratic nation

Social activists throughout my fieldwork often sought to regulate the moral character and behaviour of youth to ensure that ideals and systems of private and charitable redistribution endured the transition to a more democratic form of governance. In welfare groups, at Dhamma Schools or in everyday discussion with interlocutors I frequently heard youth disparaged by teachers, monks and other authorities as lacking an understanding and appreciation of proper 'moral' and 'social virtues'. These were often referred to with reference to the alleged reluctance of youth to engage in volitional acts of service for others. Anxiety about the social reproduction of moral virtue is not a new phenomenon in Myanmar. Indeed, it has been a recurring feature of Buddhist social action since the colonial period as Alicia Turner's (Turner

2009, 2014) exploration of Buddhist moral revival and independence movements highlights.[151] Contemporary expressions and discourses of moral regeneration echo these earlier anxieties. Many Buddhists, especially monks, blamed what they claimed had been a degradation in social morality on the ritualisation of Buddhism during military rule – reinforcing a notion of 'democracy' as ideals and practices of reciprocity and moral action.

Sunday Dhamma Schools were a key forum where interlocutors sought the moral rejuvenation of youth, seeing it as essential for achieving a more 'democratic' society. Since 2011 thousands of Dhamma Schools have proliferated across the country to teach Buddhist ethics to students (see Walton 2014). Often inspired by the example of Christian Sunday Schools, the lay founders and volunteers that run Dhamma Schools have sought to revive knowledge and engagement with Buddhist teachings during a period of political reform and transition.[152] At the time of research in Taungoo over ten weekly Dhamma schools ran each week, all but one established since 2012. Every Sunday afternoon throughout my fieldwork close to 2000 children from around the township would flock to these monasteries. Activities typically included sermons given by monks, lessons and songs about the life of the Buddha and the virtues he preached taught by volunteer teachers as well as an occasional meal provided by a local donor. The abbot of the largest Dhamma School in Taungoo argued that these largely lay-led efforts were essential to rejuvenating moral virtue after decades of authoritarian rule: "Until 1962 they had Dhamma education in schools so people kept their morality and ethics. But military rule shook people's morality. All children know how to do now is pray. They don't know anything about the Buddha's life and what he taught", he argued (Interview, 8 September 2015). So what did these classes actually teach?

Echoing the concerns of prospective parliamentarians, a consistent focus in Dhamma School classes and teaching materials I studied and sat in on over several weeks was the need to

[151] There was widespread anxieties about the decline in Buddhism during the independence movement. However, unlike the more social content of contemporary classes the movement primarily sought to address these anxieties through the rejuvenation and state support of monastic schools as well as the cultivation of moral discipline through meditation (Turner 2009; 2011; 2014).

[152] Most schools teach using the textbook provided by the national Dhamma School Foundation, which as of late 2015 only had materials for classes three to six – catering for children aged 5 or 6 through 10 or 11. Some, however, taught their own curriculum for students in seventh and eighth class. Two senior monks interviewed in Taungoo mentioned plans for release of a new Dhamma School Foundation curriculum focusing more explicitly on "citizenship" and the role of Buddhism in politics for seventh grade in 2016 and eighth grade in 2017.

regenerate the bonds of national moral community weakened by authoritarian rule by engaging in acts of *parahita*, social service. The same concept was also repeatedly mentioned unprompted in interviews with volunteer teachers, senior monks and school committee members when I asked them about practices that rejuvenated moral community. The concept of giving (*dana)* also recurred in the 'objectives' listed at the top of student booklets developed by the national Dhamma School Foundation: i) to educate youth about the Buddha; ii) to instill discipline and virtues of charity (*dana*) and 'social consciousness' (*parahita seit*); and iii) to protect "national religion" *(amyo batha thathana)* (Fieldnotes, 8 September 2015). Notions of social obligation discussed in Chapter Three were here directly tied to a conception of the 'nation'.[153] As the ideals and practices of private redistribution institutionalised during junta rule were seen by my interlocutors to form the basis for a rejuvenated moral community, Dhamma Schools and youth social education were seen as important means of institutionalising these ideas and practices during the transition to democracy.

Activists closely linked to the local NLD campaign shared many of the concerns about youth and moral cultivation that animated Buddhist revivalists. A number of these activists sent their children to Dhamma Schools on a weekly basis, and some were involved as committee members. A group of NLD-aligned welfare activists, businesspeople and civil servants also established a new initiative to cultivate 'social consciousness' (*parahita seit*) among local youth. The group met weekly throughout 2015 and 2016, predominantly focusing on trash-collection. The initiative was run by principals from local private schools, which had thrived following their legalisation in late 2011. Local businesspeople also provided funds for small expenses such as t-shirts, which bore a Burmese slogan urging 'Let's take responsibility for trash!'. The group proved popular among parents of private school students, with the result that the piles of rubbish and organic waste collected each week quickly became too large to stuff into a light truck owned by one of the schools. In late 2014 the coordinators of the group approached contacts in the municipal government and asked them to "work together" by providing a truck each week to help the group collect the garbage (Interview, 11 February

[153] The association between Buddhist chauvinism and notions of service or social work (B: *parahita*) was strengthened further in 2017 after the main state body regulating Buddhist affairs, the Sangha Maha Nayaka, formally banned Ma Ba Tha as an organisation. Within a week a new group called 'Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation' was established which explicitly referenced the concept of service for others or 'social work'. See Aung Kyaw Min. 2017. 'Ma Ba Tha to continue under new name'. The Myanmar Times. 29 May. https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/yangon/26171-ma-ba-tha-to-continue-under-new-name.html [accessed 3 June 2017].

2016). The municipal government officers were apparently keen to show their support for the initiative, seeing it as a chance to support efforts "for the development of Taungoo". Throughout 2015 the collaboration between the NLD-led garbage collection initiative and the municipal council flourished, providing a means of social interaction between local middle-class parents, members of the NLD as well as the municipal government.

I joined the group on many Sunday afternoons throughout my fieldwork, often at the invitation of activists who I had been lunching or drinking with at tea-shops or restaurants immediately prior. After finishing our drinks, we would stop off at pharmacy shops to pick up plastic gloves before helping pick up garbage and weeds – usually from an overgrown field in the centre of the town which surrounded the local soccer stadium. Under the supervision of teachers and these local activists, students aged between 10 and 16 would wander around the oval – often in sweltering afternoon heat – getting their gloves and clothes filthy as they cleared small patches of the oval. The mostly male adults chatted as they helped gather the piles of plastic or organic waste into small bins, providing occasional encouragement to the students. Yet mostly the group of 30 or so youth scampered around on their own, dumping armfuls of gathered waste into the back of a municipal government pick-up truck, proof of an evolving collaboration between local state officials and civilian social mobilisation efforts in the name of public hygiene and order. The sweaty labour of those Sunday afternoon collection efforts was an up-hill battle: miniscule progress was made in these weekly sessions of an hour or so, and the garbage often replaced itself from week to week as attendees at soccer games or other events held at the adjacent stadium regularly dumped bottles, wrappers and other waste throughout the clearing.

Figure 22 Young people collect rubbish prior to Martyr's Day commemoration. Photo by author.

The organisers of the weekly initiative emphasised that the ability of state institutions to deliver waste services made their efforts essential. Coordinators sought to confront the immense urban waste problems around Taungoo, and by extension across Myanmar, by encouraging youth to clean up rubbish, stop their littering behaviour and encourage others to do the same. I frequently heard principals of schools involved with the initiative complaining that Myanmar's youth lacked discipline (B: *si kan*), often citing the propensity to casually dispose of rubbish on the road while riding their motorcycles. In one sense, the clean-up initiative was thus an attempt to encourage youth to 'take responsibility' for the mammoth litter problem that plagues Myanmar's urban centres.[154] Other local activists critiqued the efforts to collect small pieces of rubbish, saying it absolved the municipal government of their own responsibility and was an ineffective use of young people's time and labour (Interview, Aug 1 2015 and Feb 11 2016). Apart from confronting the litter problem, however, the coordinators of the initiative also saw themselves as rejuvenating an idealised notion of civic and moral community by cultivating the 'social consciousness' of local youth. Offering labour for the benefit of others (B: *parahita*)

[154] For a discussion of the chronic problem of urban waste management and questions about 'responsibility' see Swe Zaw Oo. 2018. 'Who is to blame?: No trash talk please'. Tea Circle Oxford. 15 March. https://teacircleoxford.com/2018/03/15/who-is-to-blame-no-trash-talk-please/ [accessed 12 April 2018].

through even small acts such as picking up rubbish thus rejuvenated political community and strengthened the selfless virtues that they saw as constitutive of a genuinely free democracy.

The symbolic value of trash collection as a form of moral cultivation was exposed in the week proceeding Martyr's Day in mid-2015. A national holiday which commemorates the assassination of General Aung San and his cabinet on 19 July 1947, local NLD activists organised a public memorial to mark the day at an obelisk located in the centre of the oval cleaned weekly by the local youths. The Sunday prior I joined the group in a collection which was far larger than usual. A cross-section of activists, including local business-associates of prominent national tycoon Khin Maung Aye, helped clear rubbish and weeds from around the obelisk before sweeping and preparing it for the planned memorial service. A few days later thousands of people attended the solemn commemoration. Local NLD dignitaries, representatives from the township government as well as dozens of nurses, police and firemen all assembled wearing their respective uniforms. Hundreds of students from Taungoo University also joined, many wearing black clothes to mark the solemnity of the event. NLD flags were also flown on bamboo poles around the obelisk, highlighting the symbolic connection and lineage between General Aung San and his daughters' political party. At the exact moment that the assassination occurred a horn was blown and a minute of silence was observed. Monks then led a procession to the obelisk, followed in train by local party and government dignitaries as well as university students and youth who had helped clear the area the Sunday prior. All bowed deeply before placing flowers and other offerings around the obelisk (Fieldnotes, 19 and 29 July 2015).

The ceremonial participation of youth volunteers in the memorial service highlighted how the practical concerns of the waste management initiative blended with normative objectives of propagating an outlook in which private citizens engaging in work for the good of 'community' strengthened democracy. The same NLD activist who helped organise the clean-up event a few days prior was at pains to differentiate the party's symbolic dominance of the event and the involvement of local youth from partisan politics. He emphasised that the event was strictly "to give respect to martyrs and to remember them" and was not "to make political advantage" (Interview, July 30th 2015). He differentiated the memorial from a Martyr's Day public feast (B: *studithar*) hosted by a USDP candidate that day, which he and other NLD activists

considered to be a gratuitous attempt to influence voters ahead of the election. Rather than constituting partisan political participation, he explained that the students who cleaned the obelisk and oval ahead of the event were "learning from the example of the martyrs" by engaging in 'work for others'. An abbot at a nearby monastery made a similar connection, arguing that "*parahita* in the original sense meant working for others and for the benefit of 'sons of the nation/kind' (B: *amyotha*)" (Interview July 29th 2015). Following this logic, he explained that if labours such as cleaning the field ahead of the Martyr's Day commemoration were done with a selfless intention they would draw merit for the participants and also strengthen 'the nation' (B: *amyo*). Seen through this historical political lens, small acts of service can come to constitute labours for the nation comparable to the sacrifice made by Myanmar's independence 'martyrs'. Being seen to cultivate and model these nationalist values of selflessness was a point of pride for the school principals who helped coordinate the clean-up effort alongside NLD activists. Some even included images of pupils participating in these activities in their school's marketing materials, in the hope of attracting parents seeking an educational environment that supported this kind of moral and social cultivation (Fieldnotes, 23 October 2015).

The large-scale urban clean-up effort held a few weeks after the November 2015 election in Taungoo described in the opening vignette to this chapter similarly demonstrated how these ideals of informal institutions of public service and redistribution were enacted by local activists during the transition period between the Thein Sein and Suu Kyi administrations. Organisers of the initiative recognised the municipal government as playing an essential role in the provision of waste and other urban services. Municipal staff were thus invited to join the effort and provide one of the trucks used in the cleaning initiative, much as they had done on a smaller-scale every Sunday since late 2014. In contrast to the common perception of the military government's fecklessness in delivering public goods and the degradation of moral character, many activists perceived these acts of service and reciprocity as helping to cultivate a more orderly, disciplined and morally virtuous democracy. Young people had a central role to play in these efforts but so did affluent local elites, who they praised for providing most of the dump trucks and excavation machines for these local improvements efforts.

Attempts to rejuvenate the morality and patriotism of youth through Dhamma Schools and 'service' initiatives such as community clean ups also served to reposition ideals and systems of private redistribution and social governance which emerged during post-socialist junta rule as the basis for a more 'democratic' Myanmar. Deeply shaped by the ideals and practices that underpinned authoritarian welfare capitalism, this vision of a democratic form of welfare capitalism relies both on the contributions of ordinary people and the financial or in-kind contributions of economic elites. Ensuring that elite patronage of welfare and reciprocity initiatives continues in the absence of a military state, however, necessitates social sanctioning of businesspeople who do not comply with the expectations of welfare capitalism as 'stingy' or 'self-centered'. When these allegations cannot openly be made of elites who are contingently integrated into networks of informal redistribution they are instead projected onto out-groups, further reinforcing the exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities from political community.

Anti-Muslim narratives regulate morality of commercial elites

Throughout my fieldwork in Taungoo I often encountered accusations about the unwillingness of commercial elites to contribute to private mechanisms of redistribution in discussions with my interlocutors as well as on social media. Local activists frequently labelled local businesspeople, especially those who did not share their political commitments to the NLD, as 'stingy' (*gatsayne*) or 'self-interested' (*atta*). A local hotelier and land-owner who supported the Thein Sein-affiliated National Democratic Party at the 2015 election, for instance, was criticised on social media by NLD-aligned welfare volunteers for refusing to contribute to local road improvement initiatives nearby one of his properties (Fieldnotes, Feb 1 2016). The same activists also repeatedly claimed that some businessmen only supported *parahita* teams so they could engage in other illegal activities, receive concessionary tax treatment or be absolved of personal liability in cases of commercial accidents, accusations which eroded the public recognition of their intentions essential to their contributions being considered meritorious (Fieldnotes, Aug 1 2015, Feb 1 2016 and Feb 11 2016; see Jordt 2007). In questioning their moral intentions, these stories had the potential to damage the public reputation of individual businesspeople. Yet they also served the social function of publicly declaring the obligations that businesspeople were *expected* to fulfill within the ideal of democratic welfare capitalism. While stories about self-interested Buddhist commercial elites were not uncommon, the most frequent and vicious condemnations of selfish profiteering I encountered during my fieldwork were focused on Muslims in particular. Stories about Muslims as immoral, greedy or selfish

became the primary social mechanism through which the tensions and moral obligations of businesspeople in the private distributive ideal of democracy could be publicly and openly debated among Buddhists. Such narratives socially inscribed the obligations of businesspeople in a welfare capitalist ideal of democracy while reinforcing the exclusion of Muslims from notions of moral and political community.

Anti-Muslim sentiment, especially the notion of Islam as a threat to both personal and societal security, was ubiquitous across Myanmar in the years following the 2011 liberalisation (see Schissler, Walton et al. 2015). In 2012 communal violence broke out in Rakhine State following the rape of a Buddhist women by a group of Muslim men. Stories detailing rape, violence and forced conversions by Muslim men not just in Rakhine State or in Myanmar but across the globe were frequently retold and disseminated by prominent monks, senior members of President Thein Sein's administration in old and new media and by ordinary people in the years that followed.[155] A common feature of these narratives was a depiction of Muslims as disproportionately wealthy relative to ordinary Burmese people. Though such stories were often factually inaccurate or entirely fabricated, this genre recurred repeatedly during efforts to incite inter-communal violence throughout the country and fuelled riots in Meiktila in 2013 and Mandalay in 2014. The narratives of Muslims as stingy and immoral businesspeople also recurred in a public signature campaign led by Buddhist chauvinist group Ma Ba Tha which demanded the government take legislative action to "protect race and religion".[156] The subsequent laws, and the stereotype of the wealthy, violent and immoral Muslim man embedded within them, served to socially and legally embed moral distinctions between Buddhists and Muslims. Throughout 2015 and 2016 I conducted dozens of lengthy interviews about the 'Race and Religion' laws with Buddhist revivalists, many of whom were also vociferous NLD supporters. The gendered depiction of allegedly sexually aggressive Muslim men as threats to the social production of a bounded notion of the nation certainly recurred.

[155] In addition to stories about Myanmar Muslims, articles and images of violence committed by so-called Islamic State (IS), rumours of Al Qaeda cells within Myanmar, or posts detailing allegedly 'terrorised' conversion of Buddhist women also circulated widely on the Facebook pages of welfare groups during 2015 and 2016. The narrative-making framed around these images of global or local violence and coercion regularly involved universal claims about Muslims being intrinsically violent or morally deviant. Beyond serving to reframe memories of past suffering and project blame on Muslims (see Schissler, Walton et al. 2017), grievances about economic inequality thus melded with allegedly differential notions of the 'value of life' to morally legitimise attempts to exclude Muslim formal and informal belonging.

[156] The campaign resulted in the passage of package of four laws signed into law by President Thein Sein in the month prior to the 2015 election restricting inter-religious marriage and conversion, enforcing monogamy and limiting the reproductive rights of families. See McCarthy & Menager (2017b) for a longer discussion.

My interlocutors often emphasised that children of Buddhist women who converted would no longer be regulated by Buddhist moral conduct, weakening the moral character required for what they considered to be a 'true democracy'.[157]

Beyond expressing concern about the allegedly violent or sexually aggressive nature of Muslim men, my interlocutors also expressed grievances regarding their alleged economic dominance and the inequality they claimed it produced. In retelling stories they had personally witnessed, heard from friends or seen on Facebook, the religious identity of actors in these narratives was elevated and Muslim characters in particular were depicted as having experienced the suffering of the authoritarian period differently from Buddhists. By virtue of their commercial success, these stories claimed, Muslims were able to avoid the worst excesses of authoritarian rule by bribing government officials for special deals and citizenship papers or 'terrorising' (B: *agyanbyet-hmu*) others into submission via practices of high-interest lending or brute force (McCarthy and Menager 2017b).[158] Buddhist notions of merit and virtue shaped by the logics and mechanisms of authoritarian welfare capitalism recurred in comparisons about the apparently minimal value Muslims placed on 'life'. Indeed, a number of welfare volunteers recounted stories of violence, coercion or cow-slaughter engaged in by Muslims, concluding that the "major problem with Islam is that they believe killing gives merit (B: *kutho*). That's the meaning of Jihad" (Fieldnotes, 10th July 2015). These stories and interpretations served to reframe memories of past and present interactions of local collaboration across religious lines, rendering Muslims the scape-goats for decades of junta-era suffering in place of prominent tycoons or military leaders (McCarthy and Menager 2017a).

In addition to projecting blame and creating hierarches of suffering, however, narrative-making about Muslims also served to clarify and reinforce the obligations of businesspeople in a more democratic Myanmar. The gossip, stories or cautionary tales repeated in interviews or at betel-nut shops often depicted Muslims as commercially successful yet morally bankrupt, frequently defined with reference to the mechanisms or practices of welfare capitalism. In contrast to

[157] A similar cosmological discourse of moral decline recurs in contemporary Sri Lanka. For useful comparisons see Gravers (2015) and Walton & Schonthal (2016).
[158] Similar characterisations recurred in stories which circulated prior to inter-communal riots in Meiktila in 2013 and Mandalay in 2014, with Muslims traders or shop-owners depicted as behaving in an aggressive or exploitative manner towards their employees or customers. For a useful account see post by anonymous blogger, 2014, 'Rumour, religion and riots in Mandalay'. 3 July. New Mandala. http://www.newmandala.org/rumour-religion-and-riots-in-mandalay/ [accessed 9 July 2014].

Buddhists, who my interlocutors claimed would demonstrate their compassionate intentions (B: *cedana*) through donations and 'work for others', Muslims were described as 'stingy' (B: *gatsayne*), greedy and aggressive businesspeople who offered help 'only to their own kind (B: *lumyo*)' (McCarthy 2018a). "Look at my Facebook—there are so many images of Buddhists helping each other", a member of the Buddhist chauvinist group Ma Ba Tha said while showing me images of a local ward road project which had appeared in his feed. "I never see Muslims making donations or volunteering for these kinds of projects", he claimed.[159] Such claims were not empirically true of Muslims in central-east Myanmar. Indeed, Muslim respondents to the household survey conducted in March 2016 contributed to public goods and to people of other religions at a disproportionately higher rate on average than Buddhist and Christian respondents.[160] As often occurs with the extension of new liberties, however, social out-groups – in this case Muslims – have become a socially acceptable mechanism through which the obligations of new social, political and economic liberties opened up by liberalisation are being thought through and clarified (see McGovern 2015).

Barely hidden behind the religious and racially prejudicial dimensions of these narratives is a welfare capitalist ideal of democracy. Redistribution of wealth via private or charitable institutions is depicted as a practical and morally admirable means of achieving social outcomes. Narratives about allegedly wealthy Muslims refusing to share their wealth, though factually inaccurate and deeply prejudicial, thus served three functions. First, they entrenched hierarchies of moral virtue in which religious identity is linked to a disposition of generosity towards those in need; second, they project blame for past abuses and ongoing economic precarity onto Muslims rather than the junta and military-linked businesspeople who emerged

[159] Ironically, the reverse theme recurred in the Facebook feeds of Muslim contacts about Buddhists during this period with a post being shared repeatedly by Muslim contacts which included six images: five depicted alleged assaults and attacks on Muslims in Myanmar including burning mosques; the final image was a photo of Muslim men wearing religious headwear handing sacks of rice to what appeared to be Buddhists affected by the floods. Above the images was the caption: "They do this to us… And we do this for their benefit".

[160] Muslims scored an average of 9.4 points out of 20, compared with 7.7 for Buddhists and 7.4 for Christians (Baptists) in a social capital index constructed from the March 2016 survey results. The twenty-point index combined a series of variables focused on interaction and contribution to public goods as well as donations to other ethnic or religious communities, weighted in order to ensure the relevance of the index to both urban and rural contexts where reciprocity practices take differing forms. The variable and weighting were: Donation or volunteering in the past month (1 point); associational involvement (0.5 point for each group, and 0.5 points for each group that had other religious or ethnic people involved - max 3 points); blood donor (2 points); contribution to the 2015 floods (1 for contribution; 0.5 point for each form of contribution - max 3 points); voting at 2015 election (1 point); contribution to road construction (1 point each for funds, labour and meetings - max 3 points); contribution to electricity provision (1 point for each form of contribution - max 3 points); attending the funeral or wedding of anyone from a different faith or ethnicity in the past year (2 points); and contributing to another religious group in the past six months (2 points).

during the post-socialist period (see McCarthy and Menager 2017a); and third, they define the terms of morally respectable capitalism, thereby regulating the social behaviour of economic elites more broadly. These functions help to clarify how informal redistributive institutions endure during political transition and entrench inequities and exclusion despite a more democratic form of governance. Virtuous capitalists are defined as those who voluntarily give away a portion of their wealth to the 'community', thereby fulfilling the expectations of a more volitional form of welfare capitalism. An imaginary in which moral bonds generated through practices of service and charitable giving for 'others' thus comes to define the practice and ideal of 'democracy'. Meanwhile, ethnic and religious minorities become the social mechanism through which those obligations can be openly discussed, further exacerbating cleavages and eroding notions of 'national' political community upon which more progressive state-led redistribution financed via formal taxation might otherwise be legitimised (see Lieberman 2001). Beyond 'rigged' formal political institutions, informal redistributive ideals and practices that exacerbate insecurity and inequality may endure because they fulfill needs and resonate with the felt grievances both of beneficiaries and seemingly well-intentioned people who contribute to and help to manage systems of risk-pooling and reciprocity. Separate to the constitutional enshrinement of race-based citizenship and military political dominance, the endurance and adaption of informal redistributive institutions amid political transition may thus play an equally pernicious role in limiting the potential for more progressive democratic practice.

Conclusion

The distributive connotations of 'democracy' in contemporary central Myanmar are shaped by ideals and practices of informal redistribution generated during post-socialist authoritarian welfare capitalism. These emerged as a consequence of the junta's mediated marketisation and devolution of social responsibility during the 1990s and 2000s but have entrenched themselves following political liberalisation in 2011. Conceptualisations of democracy popularised and enacted by social and political activists in central Myanmar tacitly and explicitly draw on these ideals and practices of private welfare and redistribution, forming a key part of Myanmar's grassroots democracy movement despite weak party structures (see Stokke et al. 2015). Practices of selflessness and renunciation of wealth through informal redistributive institutions have thus come to be seen as cultivating a 'true' democracy as they (re)generate the social

bonds of reciprocity and virtuous conduct seen to provide the basis for liberated political community.

Informed by the logics of this moral framework as well as prior experience of minimal state role in welfare, activists who engage in charitable work and campaigns for reform of the 2008 Constitution did not expect or necessarily desire the state to assume a greater role in social expenditure and redistribution. Indeed, notions of redistributing the wealth of economic elites and expanding the provision of public goods was largely absent from the 2015 election campaign in Taungoo. In place of the demands of the 'median voter' was instead the moral ideal of private and informal redistribution framed as essential regardless of the magnitude of direct state social expenditure. Informal redistributive institutions generated during authoritarian rule are thus shaping the distributive demands of the state imagined and desired by ostensibly reformist social and political activists.

The centrality of voluntary renunciation to a welfare capitalist understanding of 'democracy' imposes significant burdens, especially upon minorities who form the socially convenient 'Other' onto which social or moral violations can be projected. More broadly, however, the welfare capitalist vision of democracy also requires the median voter, and especially the poor, to demonstrate their worthiness for state welfare or development assistance by competitively performing their willingness to accept 'responsibility' (B: *tawun*) for local improvement. In this understanding of political community, only those who present the appearance of moral cohesion by binding themselves to each-other and to commercial elites are seen by government officials as justifiably 'worthy' of the 'gifts' of development from the democratic state. Chapter Six explores these dynamics further, highlighting how securing local development assistance from Myanmar state officials in a more democratic system of governance requires local populations to paradoxically demonstrate their 'self-reliance' and 'unity' with local commercial elites.

Chapter Six: Self-reliance as a Mechanism of Entitlement and Exclusion

What do you have to do to receive assistance from the state in contemporary Myanmar? And on what basis is exclusion from government poverty alleviation aid justified by state officials? Chapter Five showed how the exercise of liberty through charitable donations and labour for others was an essential element of 'democratic' visions of redistribution mobilised in the lead up to the 2015 elections. This chapter explores how the expansion of state poverty alleviation in recent years has served to further entrench the role of informal redistributive institutions amid political transition by making participation in 'self-reliance' mechanisms a key basis for eligibility to material aid from the democratic state.

Focusing on the mechanisms and idioms of collective improvement enacted at a community level, the chapter explores the cash, labour and in-kind contributions to public goods made to local roads and other improvements since the transition to civilian rule in 2011. Myanmar's post-socialist junta was infamous for demanding corvee or involuntary labour from ordinary people to help construct national and local infrastructure. The practice of forced labour has declined significantly in recent years, especially as Myanmar's transition to partial civilian rule has produced new mechanisms of local accountability and increased state spending on local development and poverty alleviation programmes. The result has been a reduction (though certainly not elimination) of forced labour practices in delivery of infrastructure and other public goods.

Although corvee projects have become rarer and state funding for local infrastructure has increased, community contribution of funds and labour to local development initiatives have not declined. Rather, 'self-reliant' public goods provision is practiced widely throughout the country. Indeed, it is the primary form of road construction in both urban and rural areas of central-east Myanmar. The ubiquity of 'self-reliance' initiatives in a more democratic context exposes the physical and symbolic labour upon which democratic distributive politics now relies. Tracing case-studies of local development initiatives and analysis of unique household survey data from 28 villages and 14 urban wards in central-east Myanmar it shows how

communities that demonstrate their commitment to an ethic of 'self-reliance' are markedly more likely to receive government grants and schemes. The ideals of private redistribution at the heart of welfare capitalism are thus setting the terms of who is worthy of participating and receiving rights from democratic political community. These terms produce deeply regressive outcomes as the poor must accept a disproportionate burden for provision of public goods relative to the rich or risk being rendered ineligible to receive state aid. Meanwhile, the zero-sum nature of eligibility encourages and legitimises a vicious cycle of competition, driving demands to further socially excise minorities already excluded from constitutionally-enshrined notions of political belonging. The chapter demonstrates that ideals of informal redistribution and practices of brokerage that entrench inequity and exclusion are able to endure even despite the democratic state expanding direct social expenditure.

The chapter proceeds in three sections. Section One establishes that the decline of 'forced labour' projects since the mid-2000s has occurred alongside an increase in projects of 'self-reliant' local development. Section Two explores case-studies of these local improvement initiatives, outlining how their leaders hide hierarchies of wealth and responsibility and elide the support provided by state officials in an attempt to construct an image of 'self-reliance'. It then shows how participants use these projects to make claims for development aid or poverty alleviation assistance from state officials, providing an insight into the logic of rights and entitlement in the contemporary context. Section Three then explains these expectations by outlining an idealised path of eligibility and ineligibility to state aid in contemporary Myanmar. It shows how enacting a welfare capitalist vision of 'shared responsibility' through collective contributions to public goods strengthens claims to state aid. The same logic also provides a basis for excluding from government assistance people or communities unwilling or unable to contribute to projects of local improvement. 'Self-reliance' thus forms the basis of social cleavages of worthiness to state aid which exclude some of Myanmar's poorest populations, including ethnic and religious minorities. The chapter concludes that even though the state has expanded spending on redistribution in recent years, moralised distinctions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor are being reinforced, perpetuating social and economic inequalities and legitimising exclusion in the name of democracy.

Section One: Local development funds and 'self-reliance'

The transition to civilian rule in Myanmar has so far prompted only a marginal increase in direct state social expenditures. Government spending on health and education have increased

with the transition to civilian government in 2011, though combined comprised less than the total budget for Defence in 2017-18.[161] Meanwhile, an optimistic plan developed with the support of international consultants and endorsed by the Thein Sein administration in 2015 envisioned an expansive programme of direct cash transfers, old-age and disability pensions, unemployment insurance and improved labour regulation by 2024 (DSW in Mangshang & Griffith 2018: 12). Though the plan assumes budget allocations to social protection of 5.4 percent of GDP, in the 2016-2017 budget only 0.09 percent of government expenditures were directed to the lead ministry, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MoSWRR) (Yawbawm Mangshang and Griffiths 2018: 65).[162] Outside of health care where co-payment and co-contribution remains ubiquitous (see Brennan 2017), there has thus been little scope in recent years to study the shifting dynamics of individual entitlement from the state.

On a collective level, however, the most ubiquitous form of social spending led by state officials since the liberalisation have been local development funds disbursed to support infrastructure improvements or poverty alleviation initiatives. A number of local development funds were established after 2011, many run by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation.[163] These schemes have provided new opportunities for interaction between state officials and local communities, and many have genuinely delivered improved infrastructure and rural livelihoods outcomes, especially in remote areas of the country (see Griffiths 2016 for an evaluation). In one of the few scholarly assessments of local development funds in Myanmar, political scientist Renaud Egreteau (2017) studied the constituency development fund which is managed by committees at Union and township-level. The scheme was established in 2013 and provides 100 million kyat (c. US$80,000) to parliamentarians across Myanmar's 330 townships to fund basic infrastructure such as roads, bridges, clinics and

[161] Combined budget for education and health comprised 13 percent of the 2017/2018 budget, compared with the defence ministry which totalled nearly 14 percent. See Nyein Nyein, (2017), 'Parliament Approves Reduced Budget for 2017-2018'. The Irrawaddy. 17 March.

[162] As of early 2017 the ministry had a total of 4,935 staff, the majority of whom are assigned to pre-school education roles. For background, see Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, www.mswrr.gov.mm/index.php/main/about [accessed 1 February 2017].

[163] The most prominent schemes at the time of research in 2015 and 2016 were the Poverty Reduction Fund, Rural Development Fund and the Green Emerald Fund, along with the Constituency Development Fund and Ministry of Cooperative's Agricultural Loan Programme (Robertson, Joelene et al. 2015: ii). The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation administered the first three of these schemes, along with initiatives which now extend to much of the country such as the World Bank-funded National Community Driven Development Project. Constituency development funds, meanwhile, were managed by a Union central committee and a township-level committee comprised of parliamentarians and public servants (Robertson, Joelene et al. 2015: 10-11).

schools. He finds that many parliamentarians elected at the 2010, 2012 by-elections and 2015 polls apparently saw local improvement projects supported through the constituency fund as a key mechanism of deepening their relationships with constituents, especially in remote areas of the country (Egreteau 2017: 9-11). Reflecting experiences in similar regional contexts, however, Egreteau notes considerable scope for constituency development funds to be expended in a 'pork-barrel' manner to secure electoral support of specific voters or constituencies. Though other local development funds had more complex structures of accountability (Robertson, Joelene et al. 2015: 10-24), the constituency development fund granted Parliamentarians significant powers over fund management, including ability to influence which communities receive state-supported projects and the companies contracted to assist in construction (Egreteau 2017). However, as the 2015 election was for many voters a referendum on military rule (see McCarthy 2015), the intermediation of local development projects for political benefit had little impact on re-election prospects of parliamentarians.[164]

Beyond the potential for use of local development funds as a form of 'pork barrel' politics aimed at securing electoral support, studying the selection process and claims by communities for inclusion suggests that eligibility is also determined by more normative factors. Indeed, a key factor on which communities are chosen to receive local development funds is their collective endorsement of the ideal of private redistribution in which the 'community' must assume significant responsibility for development and poverty alleviation. Rather than the state leading provision of local infrastructure, chosen communities are expected to contribute to public goods and 'development' through labour, finance and other forms of participation. Communities who perform their commitment to an ideal of co-produced public goods by engaging in projects of local improvement are considered more 'worthy' of state funds by state officials than those who have not. Conversely, the exclusion of those who are not sufficiently 'self-reliant' is defended as 'democratic' by state officials. Prior to describing how this mechanism of eligibility functions in both urban and rural contexts alike, it is necessary to historically situate 'self-reliance' within the larger context of community contributions to infrastructure provision in Myanmar.

Forced labour and Myanmar's public infrastructure

[164] Less than 13 percent of parliamentarians elected in 2010 were re-elected at the November 2015 election (Egreteau 2017: 16).

Contributing labour or funds to public goods or state initiatives has a long history in Myanmar. The practice of corvee labour to construct pagoda, bridges, roads and irrigation canals was common during pre-colonial monarchies (Taylor 2009: 43-44). Contemporary local improvement initiatives, however, bear closer resemblance to the 'rehabilitation' measures introduced by the Pyidawtha programme of the democratic independence government during the 1950s (see Chapter Two). One of the key elements of that scheme was a fund which provided the equivalent of around US$10,000 in 1953 terms (almost $100,000 in 2018 terms) to every township to "defray expenses" for projects of village improvements such as construction or repair of reservoirs, roads, bridges and primary schools (Maung Maung 1953: 118).[165] According to Maung Maung's report written at the end of the first year of the scheme, privately-provided 'people's contributions' were ubiquitous, apparently comprising in many townships "more than five times the government grant" (Maung Maung 1953: 118). As discussed in Chapter Two, the Pyidawtha Plan and its interventionist welfare capitalist ideology was abandoned with the 1962 coup.

Reports of forced labour during the BSPP period rarely reached the level of commonality sufficient to attract the attention of international activists (Horsey 2011: 8). After the 1988 uprising and transition to the junta's authoritarian form of welfare capitalism, however, Myanmar became notorious for the practice of forced labour (see Vatikiotis 1996). Despite being a signatory to the International Labour Organisation's Forced Labour Convention, reports throughout the 1990s detailed the use of forced portering in conflict zones and involuntary labour to construct infrastructure, especially irrigation aimed at improving national rice output (Horsey 2011: 10-11). Labour was often coordinated at the command of military officers or headmen of villages nearby projects. At least one member of each household in the village was expected to report to work camps on a daily basis, frequently for weeks at a time. There they would be directed by soldiers or headmen to help move construction materials, dig trenches and holes or provide other menial labour. If these requests were refused, or if labourers grew tired, beatings, imprisonment or fines were common (see Horsey 2011: 4-5). Projects of rural development in particular relied heavily on uncompensated or under compensated contributions in the form of services, cash or materials (Vatikiotis 1996: 48). In order to

[165] The criteria for the project cited in 1953 by senior government adviser (and later President) Dr. Maung Maung were for projects to be "to the immediate benefit of the peasants; they must be economically sound… [and they] must not exceed the government allowance, unless… the estimated deficit will be met by voluntary local contributions in money or services" (Maung Maung 1953: 117).

increase rice output by enabling a third annual harvest, 'contributions' were solicited by state officials from local residents to land reclamation as well as construction of roads, bridges and irrigation canals.[166] Junta officials would then claim a portion of increased crop yield enabled by the irrigation extension at a fraction of market rates to fulfil national junta objectives (Thawnghmung 2001).

Rural development projects of these kind increased significantly after 1988, apparently resulting in an increase in the total irrigated area of Myanmar from 2.5 to 4.1 million acres between 1991/1992 and 1994/1995.[167] Data released in 1997 by the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, depicted in Figure 23 below, highlights the marked increase in the value of rural development initiatives after 1988. In addition to reporting the overall monetary value of these projects running back to Ne Win's 1962 coup, the data also cited 'the people's contribution' to these projects of rural development which valued 'in-kind and services' contributions that many activists considered forced labour. Despite the massive increase in the overall value of rural works after 1988, 'the people's' share as a percentage of overall projects – including 'donations' in cash as well as monetarily valued in-kind and service contributions – was acknowledged by the state as regularly exceeding half of the total value of projects, comprising 50.49 percent in 1993/1994 and 53.51 percent in 1995/1996.[168] Many people perceived these projects to be of poor quality, however, with stories of corruption and mismanagement of construction funds cited by officials as explanations for why many small—scale irrigation projects "did not last long, and needed to be constantly repaired and reconstructed" (Government employee in Thawnghmung 2001: 252).

[166] In most unirrigated rice growing regions in the 1990s only two harvests conducted each year. The push towards increased irrigation was thus a reflection of the junta's attempt to boost agricultural productivity during this period (Vatikiotis 1996: 48).

[167] The scale of the push to rural irrigation was evinced in US Embassy reported which placed the value of new irrigation works between 1993-1995 alone at around 100 million kyat, compared to 126.7 million kyats for the entire 31 year period prior (1962-1992) (cited by Thawnghmung 2001: 246-27). Thawnghmung cites data from the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development as well as Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation which claimed seventy-four irrigation projects were completed between 1990-1996. The projects permitted two or three crops per year, which she claims played a major role in increasing national rice output to a record of 19 million tonnes in 1995 (Thawnghmung 2001: 248).

[168] These numbers are likely to vastly under-estimate the proportion of involuntary labour solicited by junta officials during this period, as many military officers also enlisted 'unofficial' forced labour to help tend their gardens, till their lands or assist with other activities (see for example Thawnghmung 2001: 252).

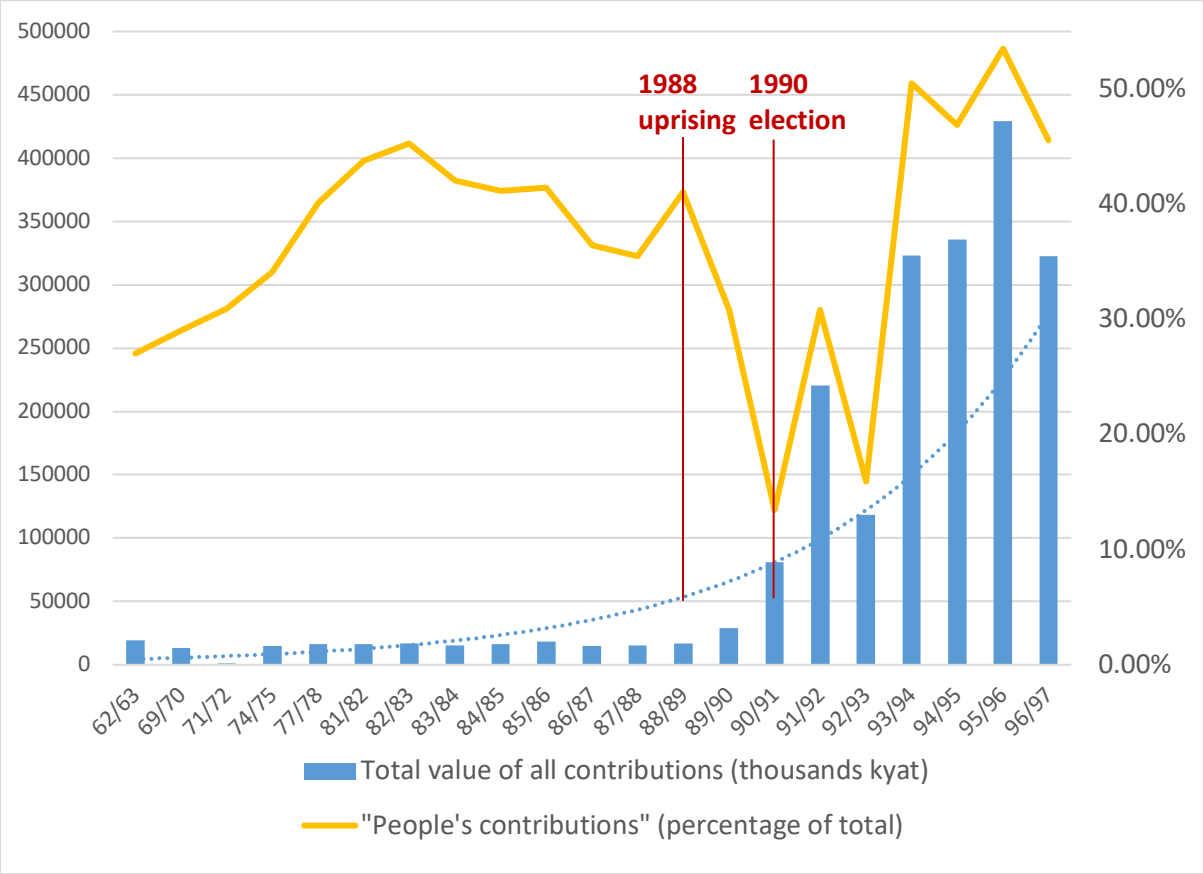

Figure 23 Value of rural development initiatives and percentage of 'People's contributions' ('donations' in cash, in-kind and services) 1962-1997, as reported by Myanmar government. Source: Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development 1997 adapted from Thawnghmung 2001: 247.

As accounts of corvee labour projects trickled out of Myanmar through refugee and activist networks, the practice became internationally symbolic of the junta's egregious abuse of power. Into the early 2000s, however, senior junta officials defended 'the people's contributions' on the basis of national development, arguing it was coherent with Buddhist ethics and technically consistent with colonial-era laws which permitted the practice (Horsey 2011: 11). At a 1999 ASEAN Labour Ministers' meeting, for instance, Lieutenant-General Khin Nyunt argued:

> Since a sound infrastructure is essential for economic development, our Government places special emphasis on this sector. Hence, a sustained effort to improve the infrastructure of our economy by building roads, bridges, rail network, dams and reservoirs has been undertaken. Realizing the benefits to the communities from these projects, people have voluntarily contributed labour so that they can be completed sooner. Moreover, in Myanmar thinking, the

> contribution of labour not only brings immediate material benefit in the present life, but also merit for future life cycles (quoted in Horsey 2011: 35).

In the early 2000s, however, the Myanmar military junta began to reduce its use of forced labour (see Horsey 2011: 84). Former International Labour Organisation (ILO) representative in Myanmar, Richard Horsey, recounts the prominent case of Su Su Nwe, a sickly woman who had been fined for failing to contribute her labour to a local road project at the direction of government officials (Horsey 2011: 137-140). Amid ILO pressure, in 2004 the case was permitted to proceed to Burmese court, resulting in the sentencing of local government officials on charges of forced labour (Horsey 2011: 1). The ruling challenged the climate of impunity which characterised the 1990s, and over time the junta became more willing to permit the prosecution of other junior government officials who led forced labour projects. With the shifting political and legal environment, there was a marked decline in incidences of forced labour on government construction projects in the mid-2000s (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007b: 246). Since 2011, a range of upwards and downwards mechanisms of accountability have been introduced including the election of local administrators, which has led to fewer instances of the most egregious forms of forced labour (see Pursch, Woodhouse et al. 2018). The practice continues to be documented in conflict zones including Rakhine, Shan and Kachin States, however.[169]

Though the incidence of rural development projects involving corvee labour have declined since the mid-2000s community contributions to public goods provision have not reduced over the same period. The 1000 household survey conducted in Taungoo township in northern Bago Region and Thandaungyi township in northern Karen State in 2016 found that 70 percent of respondents in rural areas, and 47 percent in urban areas attributed local roads to 'self-reliance' or a 'partnership' between 'the community' and the state (see Figure 24).[170]

[169] For reports of alleged forced labour in recent years, see Fortify Rights (2016) 'Myanmar: Investigate Forced Labour of Rakhine Buddhists in Western Myanmar'. http://www.fortifyrights.org/publication-20160315.html [accessed 17 January 2018].

[170] Over 60 percent of respondents in the sample townships reported personally making a contribution for construction of local roads - 92% giving labour, 27.5% donating funds. Middle-income and rich households were much more likely to have contributed financially. See McCarthy (2016) IGC for more detailed data and discussion.

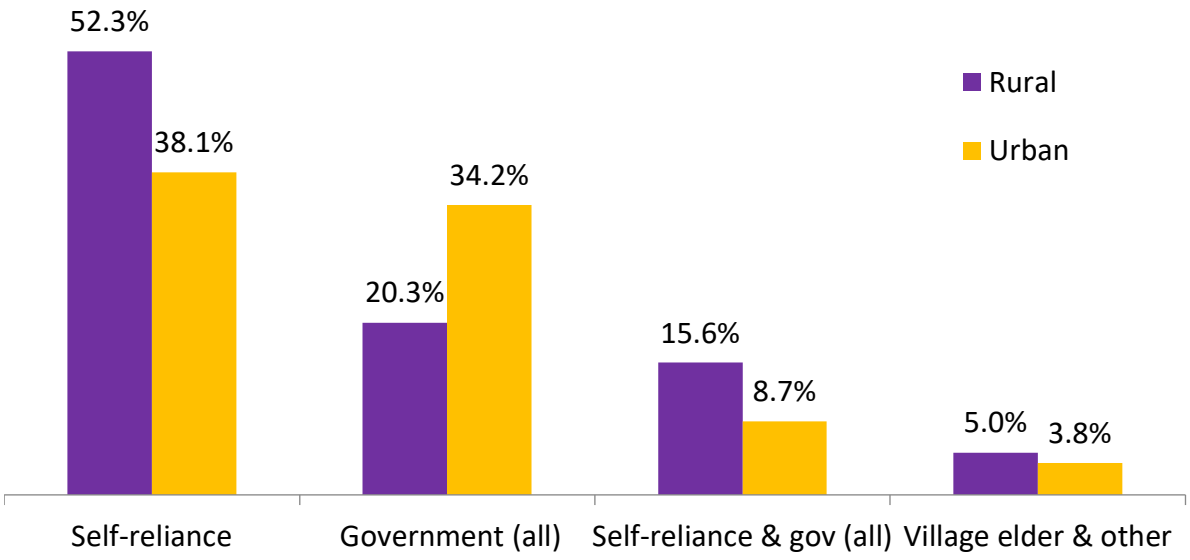

Figure 24 Attribution by rural and urban of who built road nearest to dwelling (multiple options permitted). Source: Author survey.

Researchers in other regions of Myanmar have also noted significant community participation and contribution to local public goods provision in recent years (Griffiths 2017, Okamoto 2017). As state-led corvee projects declined in the early 2000s, locally focused initiatives of local improvement framed by participants as 'self-reliance' appear to have become increasingly common, especially since 2011. So what distinguishes 'self-reliance' initiatives from forced labour?

'Self-reliance' is a descriptive idiom and normative ideal

'Self-reliance' is a descriptive and normative idiom that denotes the need for individuals and households to take control of their own affairs. The subject or agent is almost always 'myself' or 'I' (*ko*), as in common idioms "stand on your own" (B: *kothu kotha*), "rely on your own power" (B: *ko ah koko*) and "eat your own rice" (B: *kothamin kosa*). Interlocutors characterised a 'self-reliant' outlook as necessary after the collapse of the BSPP as the state retrenched its role in redistribution and limited government food quotas to public employees. As a former soldier and village tract administrator explained:

> After 1988, people started to develop a self-reliance/do-it-yourself (*kothu kotha*) attitude as the government totally collapsed. So people developed the attitude that if they don't work for themselves they won't have food to eat. (Interview, 8 February 2016).

As networks and practices which had yielded a degree of social protection for decades were radically reconfigured, 'self-reliance' became both a *descriptive* term for creative livelihoods strategies as well as a *normative* commitment to looking beyond the state for aid.[171] The idiom thus signals the transfer of responsibility to the individual and household for welfare following the collapse of the BSPP. Though the 'self' evoked in these idioms refers to the individual or the family unit, civil society activists, religious authorities and administrators also deployed the language of 'self-reliance' in a *collective* sense to encourage cooperation at the village, ward or neighbourhood level.[172] Accounts from interlocutors who participated in these projects in the late 1990s and early 2000s put considerable emphasis on the voluntary and meritorious nature of contributions from 'the community', distinguishing the labour provided by villagers from the coercive and non-meritorious contributions commanded by military officials.

In the absence of in-depth accounts of local development projects in the 1990s and 2000s it is difficult to assess the extent of organisational and interpretive overlap between what the state labelled as 'people's contributions', what international activists considered 'forced labour' and what ordinary people and local administrators now describe as 'self-reliance'. Interlocutors interviewed in 2015 and 2016 described 'self-reliance' projects during junta rule as overwhelmingly small scale and locally oriented, often focusing on repaving high use village roads with dirt and stone or digging drainage ditches to prevent flooding. The local focus of these initiatives appeared to cultivate a strong sense of ownership and benefit for many participants.[173] State officials were not always absent from these 'self-reliance' projects during

[171] Both the practice of corvee labour and the ideal of 'self-help' have historical precedents. Thawnghmung (2001: 246) argues that the use of conscript labour had pre-colonial origins, as Burmese kings "conscripted their subjects to build pagodas, bridges, roads and irrigation works". The valorisation of 'self-help' or 'self-reliance' itself has historical roots at least back to the early independence period, when the discourse of the Pyidawtha plan of the 1950s emphasised the need for the citizenry to contribute to the achievement of national objectives of industrialisation and welfare state formation (see Tharaphi Than 2013: 651; Maung Maung 1953: 117-118).

[172] For a discussion of self-reliance and self-help as a practice of everyday resistance "between passivity and open, collective defiance" (Scott and Kerkvliet 1986: 1) against the state during junta rule in Myanmar, see Chapter Four of Mullen (2016).

[173] Research from this period suggests that the extent of benefit to participants was a key determinant of how contributions to improvement projects were perceived. Thawnghmung argued that perceptions of labour contributions to irrigation projects varied among farmers according to "how it affected their lives, whether they are paid or not, and the season in which they were drafted and called upon" (2001: 251). She cites an interview with a farmer who was initially "very angry when he was ordered by the authorities to construct a small scale irrigation networks adjacent to his village. In retrospect, however, he was very grateful for the leadership of the military regime and the local political and civilian officials made summer paddies possible" (cited in Thawnghmung 2001: 251). Thawnghmung concludes that those who received a clear benefit from irrigation in the form of higher yields on their land nearby had a more positive perception of involuntary labour and financial contributions than those who accrued little or no benefit (2001: 251).

the 1990s and 2000s and were in fact highly involved. Interlocutors recounted local administrators, military-linked businesspeople and even military commanders contributing to these initiatives through cash or in-kind donations (Interviews, 8 February 2016). Businesspeople also recounted being encouraged by military officials to proactively contribute to local public good provision, organise fundraising campaigns and coordinate 'volunteer' labour in order to secure annual renewal of commercial licences (Interview with traders, 3 and 8 August 2015, 6 May 2016).

Despite the role that authorities and commercial elites often played in these initiatives, the term 'self-reliance' attributed local improvements to the 'collective' efforts of all residents, rich and poor alike, regardless of their formal or informal associations with the junta. The discourse of 'self-reliance' thus had the potential to rhetorically encapsulate local administrators, junta-linked businesspeople and even military officers into notions of the 'self' or community. The claim of collective 'self' ownership and the local initiation of many of these projects meant that coordinators were often able to solicit labour or cash from local residents far more willingly than forced labour projects. Indeed, the household survey conducted as part of my fieldwork in early 2016 found that participants at least retrospectively viewed their contributions as volitional rather than coerced. Of those who said they had made contributions for local roads, 97 percent of respondents said their actions or donations drew 'good merit' (B: *kutho*) or grace (B: *kaungyi mingalar*) as the projects contributed to the welfare of others.[174] Given that merit is widely seen to accrue only to actions taken or possessions renounced freely and willingly (Kumada 2004: 5, Jordt 2007: 101-102), these perceptions suggest a far stronger sense of local ownership than more coercive local improvement projects during the 1990s and 2000s. The notion that working on village roads could draw merit also contrasts sharply with research conducted during the 1950s which suggested that labelling contributions to public goods provision as 'meritorious' was highly contentious.[175] The disjuncture between earlier accounts of villagers refusing to see their contributions to local improvement as meritorious and contemporary moral inflections of 'self-reliant' development highlights the ideological reconfiguration of responsibility for local public goods provision which occurred following the

[174] This association of work on public good projects with good merit or grace was consistent at over 95% across both townships and across all major religious communities with more than 50 respondents surveyed (Buddhist, Christian and Muslim). These associations suggest that the social and cosmological interpretation of 'work for others' have been embraced by both non-Buddhist and Buddhist communities alike in the survey areas.

[175] Anthropologist Melford Spiro, for instance, recounted a village elder in the 1960s who "contrary to most of the villagers, insisted that public works for the common good - for example, the repair of roads - was also *dana*, which would confer merit on the volunteer worker" (Spiro 1982 [1970]: 464).

collapse of the BSPP in 1988. Indeed, almost a quarter (24 percent) of respondents in the 2016 survey agreed with the normative statement that local road provision *should* be the responsibility of the local community. Prior involvement in 'self-reliance' projects was a strong predictor of support, with those who said road construction should be the sole responsibility of government considerably less likely to have participated in these kinds of projects previously.[176] Beyond being a descriptive term used to collapse social hierarchies and promote collective ownership, 'self-reliance' projects thus also indexes a vernacular principle of subsidiarity in which social affairs are best managed at the lowest level possible.

There were good reasons for residents and local administrators to embrace the ideal of 'self-reliance' during junta rule as it allowed communities to avoid interaction with higher authorities. Escalating community issues to government officials during the 1990s and 2000s could result in far worse and more violent outcomes for people seeking assistance or redress than local resolution. In the context of arbitrary or predatory interactions with more senior state officials, a 'self-reliant' approach to social governance served to insulate local residents from higher, more depersonalised levels of the authoritarian state. Anthropologist Ardeth Thawnghmung's (see 2003, 2004, ch 4 and 5) research on perceptions of legitimacy in rural Myanmar in the 1990s, for instance, highlights that headmen who strategically managed junta officials in ways that maximised benefit for locals and kept the state at bay were considered to be the most effective by villagers. From the perspective of local junta officials, the ideal of 'self-reliance' also served the purpose of devolving obligations for social governance and redistribution previously assumed by the BSPP state to the locus of 'community'. The growing incidence of local improvement projects framed as 'self-reliant' during the 1990s in this sense reflects a significant ideological reconfiguration of the expectations that ordinary people and commercial elites were expected to fulfil in post-socialist governance of 'the social'.

Eliding hierarchies of power and wealth

The collective 'self' demonstrated and performed through local improvement projects in Myanmar relies on hierarchies of power and wealth being rhetorically subsumed into the

[176] Respondents in both contexts who reported self-reliance as the preferred form of road provision had a markedly higher social capital score marked out of an index of 20: 8.4 in Taungoo and 7.5 in Thandaungyi, compared with a mean of all respondents of 8.1 in Taungoo and 7.19 in Thandaungyi. The twenty-point index combined a series of variables focused on interaction and contribution to public goods and to other ethnic or religious communities, weighted in order to ensure the relevance of the index to both urban and rural contexts where reciprocity practices take differing forms. The higher scores of those who normatively endorse self-reliant road construction suggests that participation in local initiatives of these kind may significantly shape individual ideals of social governance.

collective 'community'. As contemporary state agencies now allocate increasing budget to local development and poverty alleviation schemes, inequalities of authority and income continue to be masked by performances of 'self-reliance'. Many contemporary local improvement initiatives are led by commercial elites and often receive assistance from some tier of the Myanmar government in the form of development funds or organisational and design support. Despite theoretical and empirical literature suggesting that state officials are strongly incentivised to remind the public of the government's contribution to service provision (see Sacks 2011), the role of the state as an *institution* is often rhetorically elided both by state-officials who often lead or support projects as well as participants and supporters such as local religious authorities. Two local administrators, for instance, stressed that it was "not good" to talk about government involvement during fundraising campaigns as it could introduce perceptions of coercion and thus undermine the notion of the road improvement project as volitional and meritorious (Fieldnotes, 3 and 5 April 2016).

Contributions of labour and funds are thus coupled with significant symbolic work to ensure that even when assistance is received from state officials a moral veneer of 'self-reliance' is maintained. Rather than contributions of labour or money being made under the threat of violence or coercion from 'the state', assistance rendered by everyday people and traders to projects followed during fieldwork were often framed in a Buddhist discourse of giving (B: *dana*) and 'work for others' (B: *parahita*) or as an expression of the community's attitude of collective problem-solving and 'solidarity' (B: *sii sii lone lone*) (Fieldnotes, 12 February 2016). Committee members including village or ward headmen who led 'self-reliance' projects acknowledged the support of 'compassionate' (B: *cedana*) people in the municipal or township governments for assistance provided in budgeting and design of the project or in the form of machinery loaned from the municipal government (Fieldnotes, 11 February 2016). However, the assistance of state officials was repeatedly subsumed into the abstract notion of the collective 'self' of the community, even by state officials involved with the project (Interview, Feb 8 2016).

Beyond eliding the role of government representatives, the veneer of 'self-reliance' can also justify the transfer of a considerable burden onto poorer households. The *amounts* donated to projects by more affluent households often appear to be highly progressive, in some urban

contexts comprising between two and five times the amount donated by poorer households.[177] When the foregone wage value of labour contributions to 'self-reliant' initiatives are considered, however, the discourse of collective unity enlisted in projects of local improvement may actually be regressive. Poorer households in the survey, for instance, were 8 percent more likely to contribute labour for road initiatives than richer households and 12 percent more likely than middle-income respondents (see Figure 25).[178] Moreover, as we recall from Chapter Three, when overall household donations to social and religious causes are calculated as a *proportion* of a household expenditure, the amounts donated are only weakly progressive between poor households (7 percent) and more affluent households (10 percent). The poor in central-east Myanmar thus carry a larger burden for private provision of public goods relative to their wealth, use and role in their degradation or benefit. Seen in this way, projects of 'self-reliance' lend a veneer of moral legitimacy to hierarchies of wealth by allowing commercial elites to be seen as disproportionately 'generous' while simultaneously reinforcing inequalities bequeathed by junta-era business concessions to trusted elites.

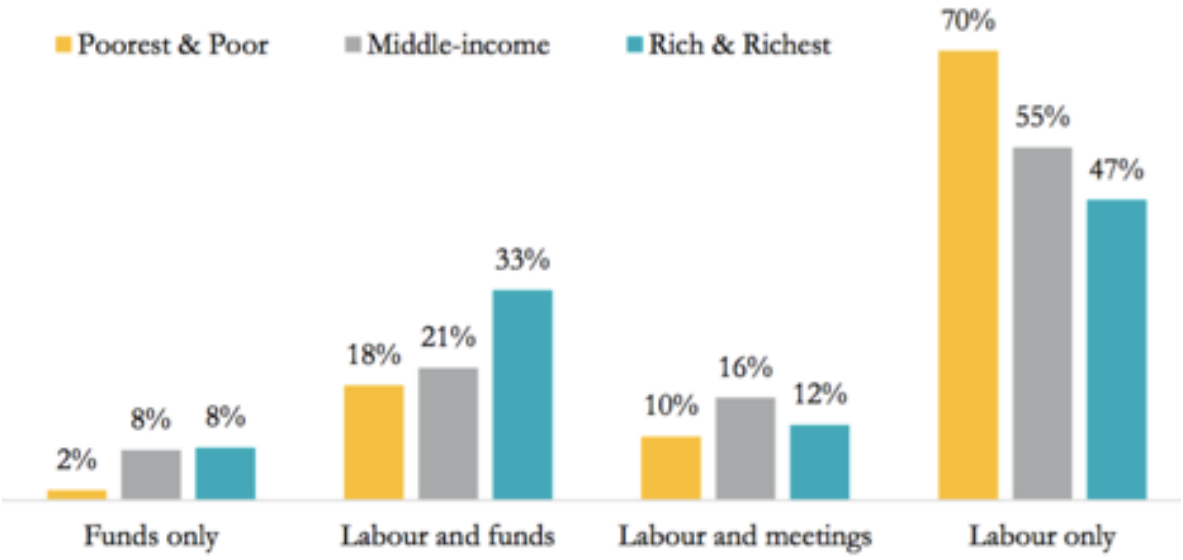

Figure 25 Types of contributions made to road projects by household poverty.[179]

[177] In one urban ward road improvement project in which the municipal government itself was privately contracted by a ward committee to renovate and repaid ward roads and drainage ditches, commercial elites donated the equivalent of US$200 compared with US$40 for poorer households (Fieldnotes, 12 February 2016).
[178] 88 percent of poor households reported contributing labour and/or funds to local road improvements, compared with 80 percent for richer households and 76 percent for middle-income households. More affluent households, in contrast, were 6 percent more likely to have solely contributed funds than poorer respondents.
[179] Respondents were asked "Have you ever contributed to local road construction?", and if so then "What form of contribution? (Labour; Meetings; Funds; Other)".

The endurance of these dynamics and inequities in a democratic context c puzzling. Why do both community leaders and ordinary people work so hard to maintain the appearance of 'self-reliance'? Why do state officials permit the leaders of projects to elide the role of state aid? In the following section I draw on a case study to show that the ideal of 'self-reliance' has become one of the primary criteria upon which claims to state aid can be made. I then show that officials including civil servants and parliamentarians of the NLD see 'self-reliance' as one of the foundational values of a welfare capitalist understanding of democracy. I demonstrate that this implicitly and at times explicitly legitimises the exclusion of people who fail to properly use the liberty afforded to them by the goodwill of the sovereign state for the benefit of others.

Section Two: Claiming 'self-reliance' and eligibility to state aid

Self-reliance as an anticipatory claim for eligibility to state aid

Claims of 'self-reliance' reinforce a welfare capitalist ideal in which redistribution of wealth and provision of public goods is possible through social and moral bonds between rich and poor. However, there are also *anticipatory* dimensions to claims of 'self-reliance'. In addition to easing the solicitation of contributions from the 'community' by symbolically rendering financial and labour contributions as voluntary and meritorious, demonstrating 'self-reliance' is also perceived by many local administrators and ordinary people as a central basis upon which eligibility to state assistance can be secured. As a result, individuals and communities perform their 'self-reliance' in anticipation of making resource claims from authorities or decision-makers. A road project led by a local leader in a village on the fringe of Taungoo provided an insight into this relationship between moral subjectivity and eligibility for state aid in civilian-led Myanmar.

Kyaw Naing* lives with his family in a small rural hamlet with around twenty or so other Buddhist, Karen Christian and Muslim households about 200 metres from a bitumen inter-town road connecting Bago Region with northern Karen State. A former Tatmadaw soldier in his mid 60s, he retired from active duty in the 1990s with his ethnic Karen family to this quiet agricultural area where he and his family could enjoy rural life as well as the benefits of proximity to schools and clinics in Taungoo less than 20 minutes motor-bike ride away. We first met in September 2015 at a small Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) campaign event held in the village administrators' three-room concrete and wood home prior to the November election, which one of the candidates asked me to attend.

After meeting a chatty group of locals, including Kyaw Naing, at the biriyani feast which followed the event, I was invited to return for the upcoming wedding of the local village administrators' daughter. I subsequently became a regular visitor to the village before and after the November 2015 elections to chat about the national election campaign or swap local gossip – often about the village administrator - over tea at various villagers' houses. Riding into the village on one of these visits in late January 2016, Kyaw Naing was sweeping the front yard of his small compound. Hailing me down on my motor-bike he invited me in to his home, a Karen-style two-story dwelling made of bamboo poles and thatch. A few minutes after our first sips of tea, he passionately declared his admiration for Aung San Suu Kyi and told me he had just been elected to the position of 10 household administrator – the lowest tier in the administrative structure of the Myanmar government bureaucracy – in elections held earlier that month (see Kyed, Harrisson et al. 2016). Repeatedly referencing notions of 'democracy', he told me he was already making plans to repave the hamlet laneway – an objective of which I had personally saw the value as I had been bogged in the same road a few months prior while en route to the campaign event. The road led at one end to an adjacent hamlet and then on to the bitumen inter-town road, and trailed off into lush green paddy fields at the other.

He told me he had initially sought support with repaving the road from the village tract and township administrators, but that they claimed to have spent all available funds for township projects until the next financial year. Convinced that 'doing it yourself' was the only option in the short-term, in subsequent weeks I followed Kyaw Naing as he collected around US$20 (25,000 *kyat*) per household for trucks of stones and soil to cover the road. He insisted this financial contribution was entirely voluntary, though all households in the hamlet had contributed by the end of the project. When I returned the day of the road construction in late February 2016 ten or so local men – their *lungyis* hitched up around their thighs – were jovially shovelling stone from the back of a reversing truck onto the road, where a group of jovial women with large pans were then disbursing the stone onto the muddy tracks of the road. Two Christian household leaders who lent their labour expressed pride at the levelled-out road when I interviewed them later, and emphasised that their contributions drew 'good grace' (B: *kaungyi mingalar*) from a spiritual perspective (Interviews, 8 February 2016).

The small road improvement project bore close similarity to locally focused rural development initiatives which often enlisted forced labour during the 1990s and 2000s. The project was led

by a local state official who 'encouraged' households – rhetorically and socially, though not violently – to contribute both funds and labour. As with some 'forced labour' initiatives, the project also delivered a clear benefit to local residents – though the road came to an abrupt stop at the end of the hamlet and did not continue the extra 50 metres or so through the rest of the village and on to the main bitumen road to Taungoo. "That road is another administrators' responsibility", Kyaw Naing explained to me when I asked why the improved road ended prematurely, highlighting that the local focus of 'self-reliance' initiatives often provide at best a patchy solution to chronic state under-investment in local infrastructure. Despite the limited efficacy of the project, however, for Kyaw Naing the project achieved symbolic as much as functional ends. Over Chinese yellow-bean steamed buns and tea later at his home, he framed the project as a deeply political act in which collective pride was generated as well as standards set for receipt of assistance from the recently elected NLD government. For Kyaw Naing, the road repaving was thus not just a small village improvement project. Rather, it was an expression of 'self-reliance' which resonated with ideas of 'people power' evoked by Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD operatives during the election campaign:

> Really, this project is about pride that we don't have to rely on the government. If I talk with the government I can be confident and have pride, without feeling small. Now the government is elected by the people, so by doing this work and sharing responsibilities we are showing we have power too (Interview, 8 February 2016).

The emphasis on 'sharing responsibilities', 'collective pride' and 'showing power' resonated with discourses of morality and democracy which circulated, often covertly, throughout the 1990s and 2000s before forming the basis of political debates in the run up to the November 2015 election (see Chapter Five). Embedded within this demonstration of 'self-reliance', however, was also an expectation that representatives of 'the state' would acknowledge these contributions and on their basis deem the village collectively worthy of government assistance. Kyaw Naing explained:

> We are trying to influence the government by showing them we are working hard. Once we lay the foundation for the road, then the government can come later and do a better road… When we do self-reliance projects we can ask for more help from the government because it shows we are organised and want to share responsibility (B: *tawun*). (Interview, 8 February 2016).

From Kyaw Naing's perspective, 'self-reliant' road repaving demonstrated to state officials the willingness of the village to 'share responsibility' for development. As 'self-reliance' was a virtue deeply fused with welfare capitalist notions of democracy (see Chapter Five), he believed the improvement would create an obligation on behalf of state officials to extend greater poverty alleviation assistance to the village, thereby increasing the village hamlet's collective chances of development. The notion that state officials would disburse aid on the basis of demonstrated 'self-reliance' reveals how contributions made to local improvement through collective hard-work and financial wherewithal is forming the basis of a more democratic politics of entitlement.

Accruing rights requires accepting the sovereign's vision of liberty

The perceived need to demonstrate commitment to the collective in order to be eligible to accrue 'rights' echoes socialist-era logics of entitlement. Scholar of Burmese legal and political thought Nick Cheesman (2015a) highlights how during BSPP rule 'rights' were framed by the state as uni-directional, accruing to individuals or groups by virtues of the goodwill or *cedana* of the sovereign ruler, Ne Win. Claims to delimited, contingent rights in socialist law could be made on the basis of the subject's role in satisfying particular policy goals of the sovereign. 'Rights' during BSPP rule were thus "conditional privileges paternalistically bestowed… [upon] certain people who deserve them because they conform with the sovereign's vision for the community" (Cheesman 2015a: 109). Reflecting a legal logic common in socialist regimes (see Markovits 1978), individuals who supplicated for rights or redress – sometimes successfully –from the socialist state often predicated their claims on the basis of contributions they had made to the collective project of socialism led by Ne Win (Cheesman 2015a: 107-109).

The logic of 'socialist rights' in which entitlement to, or withdrawal of, rights depended on the subject's performance of particular duties endured through the transition to authoritarian welfare capitalism under the SLORC/SPDC. People who had engaged in forced labour, for instance, frequently used their participation in these initiatives as proof of their moral worthiness for other opportunities or entitlements, or in the case of Muslims as proof of their right to *have* rights (see Cheesman 2012: 205-206, Cheesman 2015b). Even though the state no longer assumed the parental role of redistribution and social welfare, any notion of a social contract remained "contextual and contested… subject to one's ability to marshal other resources (symbolic, material, social), subject to luck or contingency… state agent whim or

risk profile, the extant political conditions in the country etc" (Prasse-Freeman 2015: 98).[180] Unsurprisingly, as anthropologist Elliot Prasse-Freeman notes from research with contemporary activist networks, the word 'right' (B: *akhwint*) is more commonly associated with permission, approval or opportunity than an entitlement, "index[ing] an appeal to power rather than a demand for a restoration of what one already 'has'" (Prasse-Freeman 2015: 96).

With the transition to civilian rule and the emergence of alternate and more direct mechanisms of claim-making such as political parties, parliamentary committees and advocacy groups, we would expect more assertive forms of claim-making to emerge. This has certainly occurred.[181] Cheesman (2015a: 227-237) analyses letters to authorities between 2004 and 2013 in which "citizen-complainants" assert their entitlement to rights and redress, often shifting from supplication to stridency when successive attempts to secure redress failed. Prasse-Freeman (2015) similarly describes assertive claim-making among land-rights activists seeking restoration of land from which farmers had been dispossessed. Despite these new mechanisms for claim-making, the logic that rights accrue to people or communities who practice and possess virtues coherent with the sovereign's vision of political community is being *reinforced* rather than *weakened* with the transition to civilian rule. We've seen what people do to get the attention of higher state officials. But does signalling 'self-reliance' actually work in soliciting state aid? As the next section shows, 'self-reliance' has paradoxically become one of the central pillars of the politics of entitlement from the democratic state.

Section Three: Democratic government by community

Self-reliance as a mechanism of eligibility

Local improvement projects play a key role in determining eligibility to state aid in civilian-led Myanmar. 'Self-reliance' initiatives enable a powerful claim to worthiness from the democratic state as they present the image of a 'community' unified and bonded across wealth and social hierarchies. Data on selection criteria for state-mediated local development initiatives demonstrates that ten-household leader Kyaw Naing had good reason to be

[180] The military state passed orders and laws which, as Prasse-Freeman (2015: 98) notes, "delineated actions that were forbidden without creating any reciprocal 'rights' allowing subjects to make claims against the state". The one-way flow of 'rights' reflected pre-colonial monarchical understandings of power as 'self-justifying', in which kings governed their subjects on the basis of performances of divine authority and a system of natural law derived from Buddhist cosmology (Myint Zan in Prasse-Freeman 2015: 97).

[181] Aung San Suu Kyi's Rule of Law and Tranquillity Committee, for instance, received 11,259 submissions in 2012-2013 alone. Of these 3600 concerned the executive and 3466 land confiscation cases. Many claims made in these and other letters referenced notions of a 'just' rule of law, claiming an entitlement to fair and impartial treatment and redress for past wrongs. See Cheesman 2015a 227-237.

optimistic that the hamlet road could render his village more eligible to state aid. The 2016 household survey of 28 rural villages in Taungoo, Bago Region and the adjacent township of Thandaungyi, Karen State found a statistically significant skew in a government loan scheme, the Green Emerald Fund. Administered by the Department of Rural Development (DRD) in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, the scheme was established in the 2014/2015 Union budget to create revolving funds at the village level in participating townships which would then "provide loans for entrepreneurial activities in the village" (Robertson, Joelene et al. 2015: 24). Participating villages were recommended by township DRD officers with final approval from the Chief Minister and Director of the DRD in the state or region (Robertson, Joelene et al. 2015: 24).

The survey found that respondents in villages which had been selected for inclusion in the 'Green Emerald' loans scheme were 17 percent more likely to have contributed labour or funds to road construction in the past than households in villages nearby which had not been selected.[182] Communities that had demonstrated their 'self-reliance' through local improvement projects were thus disproportionately likely to receive the scheme than communities where fewer households had engaged in these initiatives. This difference was not a treatment effect as the scheme provided household-level loans to support enterprise development across the village and was not intended to fund construction of local infrastructure. Rather, headmen in villages which received the Green Emerald scheme recounted how their communities had been selected for inclusion because they demonstrated their ability to fundraise and contribute to local improvement through earlier road construction projects and other initiatives of local improvement (Fieldnotes, November 2015 & February 2016). These earlier projects were often coordinated in partnership with local monasteries or welfare groups, and were described in interviews as projects of 'self-reliance'.

Achieving eligibility for government funding is not as simple as engaging in 'self-reliance' projects, however. Village headmen described how local administrators, monks as well as

[182] 300 respondents were surveyed in 14 villages of each township, of which seven villages (150 respondents) had received the Green Emerald scheme and another seven villages (150 respondents) in the same village group that had not received the scheme. A total of 600 rural respondents across 28 villages were surveyed in the two townships. There was a statistically significant difference in road construction assistance rendered by respondents in Green and non-Green emerald villages (p-value of 0%). 81 percent of respondents in villages selected to receive the Green Emerald initiative in 2015 or 2016 had contributed previously to local road construction, compared with 64 percent of respondents in non-Green Emerald villages – a robust 17 percent difference. On other relevant indicators such as poverty rates, however, there was no statistically significant variation between the villages as the treatment and non-treatment villages were otherwise in the same village group.

businesspeople or state officials connected in various ways to the villages then lobbied relevant government officials to support their eligibility for the scheme. Without the demonstration of both neediness and 'self-reliance' in ways that rendered the community intelligible to decision-makers as virtuous, state aid was not assured. Bonds to wealthy commercial elites were particularly important in this process, given businesspeople tend to have strong ties to state officials at village tract, township, and in some cases state or national level as a legacy of decades of licence renewal and proactive assistance with junta objectives. Poverty and engagement in 'self-reliance' projects in the past could thus be considered *necessary* but *not sufficient* conditions for communities to be rendered eligible to state assistance.

'Self-reliance' can best be considered as a performance community leaders and members act out for authorities at village tract, township, and in some cases state or national level. Moreover, we have seen it is one which reinforces rather than undermines hierarchies of power and wealth. These performances of 'self-reliance' and worthiness are institutionalised through the encouragement of competition among different villages that are embedded in local development schemes, including the World Bank's National Community Driven Development Programme. The US$480 million scheme is funded by the World Bank and the Governments of Myanmar, Italy and Japan and has been expanding since 2013 to townships across the country, providing grants for local development initiatives identified by a committee of local residents.[183] The initiative aims to fund projects in at least one village in every village group of the participating township.[184] While poverty rates are the "primary criterion for selecting the participating townships"[185], below that level projects are selected from within village groups through a 'planning and consultation process'. Once the majority of villages in a township have received a grant, a township-level 'multi-stakeholder consultation' is held which concludes with prizes and awards. This competition is judged by local and regional authorities both on the basis of the impact of the projects as well as community participation and willingness to

183 For background on the controversies involving the scheme see Krembzow, J. 2016. Community-driven development generates benefits, and criticism. Frontier Myanmar. Thursday, September 22. https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/features/community-driven-development-generates-benefits-criticism [accessed 5 October 2016].

184 The World Bank's Q&A about the scheme cites the aim of including "at least 63 townships across the country" by the end of the roll-out period: http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/03/31/qa-myanmar-national-community-driven-development-project#4 [accessed 22 August 2017].

185 In addition to "(i) the absence of external funding for similar activities; (ii) willingness and capability of the township authorities to implement the project; (iii) a minimum level of peace and stability in the township to allow for safe implementation and supervision of the project; and (iv) a minimum level of logistical access to and within the township." http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/03/31/qa-myanmar-national-community-driven-development-project#4 [accessed 22 August 2017].

contribute to the success of the project. After speeches, presentations and in some cases performances from representatives of each village, prizes for the 'Best Village' as well as 2nd and 3rd place are awarded. Competition is fierce for these prizes, with significant time and resources being expended on projects of local improvement, rehearsals and so on. Villages which are recognised are able to lobby for inclusion in other development schemes on the basis of their official recognition as 'self-reliant'.[186] This process, and the mechanism of 'self-reliance' in which local businesspeople, parliamentarians, civil servants and other patrons play a significant role, is idealised in Figures 26 and 27.

Figure 26 Mechanism of moral legibility and eligibility to state assistance post-2012

Eligibility to state aid requires sharing responsibility for development

Legibility of a community to authorities (cf Scott 1998, Walker 2012) does not result in the state taking full responsibility for provision of public goods such as roads or electricity.[187] Rather, even when eligibility is established, state-supported initiatives often require co-production of 'development' by communities and the state. Indeed, willingness to co-contribute to projects in the form of funds or labour was a key selection criteria cited by a representative in the Karen State parliament who had helped coordinate more than 60 state funded development projects between 2010 and 2015. He explained that many government grants and rural development schemes explicitly stated in project guidelines and consultation workshops with prospective communities that villages willing to contribute funds or labour "voluntarily" would be favoured over communities unwilling to make these contributions.[188] He argued that this criterion allowed government funds to "go further" and have a wider impact

[186] Thanks to an anonymous researcher and consultant on the scheme for this description of the competition process within NCDDP. Personal communication, 19 September 2017.
[187] My use of legibility here is an homage to James Scott's description of state technologies such as cadastral maps and censuses aimed at simplifying complex phenomena into readable, comprehensible or 'legible' domains. As anthropologist Andrew Walker (2012: 182) argues from fieldwork in northern Thailand, in addition to "the state's desire for legibility, we have to consider the desire of the governed population for eligibility: eligibility for grants, services, development and political representation".
[188] Conversely, the author also encountered a number of cases where communities spent more than the allocated government budget for a project and then raised additional funds through donations from the local community.

than would be possible if workers were paid. According to a consultant on the World Bank's NCDDP initiative, villages which are "more emphatic in their display of volunteer spirit" during the 'multi-stakeholder consultation' are similarly favoured.[189] The beatings or fines meted out by state officials to those who failed to contribute to involuntary labour initiatives during the 1990s and early 2000s has thus been replaced with financial and social incentives to engage in 'self-reliance' and share responsibility for development with the democratic state. Communities that demonstrate a track-record of 'self-reliance' initiatives and a willingness to co-contribute to local improvement initiatives financially or in the form of 'volunteer' labour are seen to be more worthy of these schemes by state officials. 'Self-reliance' as the basis of eligibility to state aid thus institutionalises a logic of deservingness to development aid in which poor communities must compete with each other to 'share' responsibility for development and render themselves worthy of state generosity.

Across South and Southeast Asia these dynamics of performance and claim-making are a feature of what Tania Li (2007) terms the 'politics of entitlement'. Focusing on local community development projects funded by the World Bank in provincial areas of Indonesia, Li analyses how various technologies of measuring community 'cohesion' were utilised to make villages the possible subjects of intervention by state and development actors. Li's work highlights how these technical distinctions allowed for differentiation between the 'deserving poor' and those "whose failure to perform made them ineligible for assistance" (Li 2011: 117). As the stake of local development initiatives for poverty alleviation or problem-solving can be significant, projects of 'self-reliant' improvement are often enlisted by communities in attempts to make themselves eligible to intervention and subsidy by the bureaucratic state. Partha Chatterjee's (2004) work on 'political society' in India, for instance, explores how community-based welfare groups assist squatters in Calcutta to "get themselves identified as a distinct population group that would receive the benefits of governmental programs" (Chatterjee 2004: 33). Andrew Walker has similarly recounted how ritual performances of 'community' and 'local development' in northern Thailand "add potency in the form of visibility and moral authority" to claims of eligibility to state aid or subsidy (2012: 33).[190] In this sense "the

[189] Consultant for NCDDP. Personal communication, 19 September 2017.

[190] In a striking parallel to these 'multi-stakeholder consultations', Walker similarly recounts festival assemblies in northern Thailand where villagers offer ritual and gifts offerings for government officials in "ritualized processes of reciprocal recognition" (Walker 2012: 185). He argues that "ritual performance of project formation… writing, assembly into committees and sacrificial goods works", as well as participation in festivals present a "simplified and technically legible arena for state officials… for the disbursement of their budget allocations" (Walker 2012: 154).

institutions and imagery of community are used by the population to render themselves eligible for government support", with "the sacred context of collective endeavour" or 'community' becoming "the mutual construction of both legibility and eligibility" (Walker 2012: 33).[191]

'Self-reliance' initiatives play a similar role in contemporary Myanmar, as they demonstrate a community's coherence with the moral expectations of welfare capitalism and render them comprehensible and legible as a potential subject of state intervention. In this process of performance, a zero-sum logic is inscribed as the basis of entitlement with communities encouraged to compete with each other on the basis of 'self-reliance' in order to be deemed worthy of state aid. These logics serve to entrench inequality and contingency as the basis of democratic entitlement.

Democracy and the unworthy poor

Embedded in the distinction between 'eligible' and 'ineligible' communities are hierarchies of deserving and undeserving poor which justify the exclusion of 'underperforming' poor communities. Communities that have not engaged in 'self-reliance' initiatives nor demonstrated their willingness to 'co-contribute' to state-supported improvement projects are thus at a distinct disadvantage. Instead, authorities see them as justifiably ineligible or unentitled compared with communities who accept 'self-reliance' as the basis of democratic entitlement. This pathway of ineligibility is visualised in Figure 27.

Figure 27 Mechanism of illegibility and ineligibility to state assistance post-2012

The ascendency of Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD to Myanmar's civilian government in 2016 has further institutionalised these moral distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving'

[191] Walker links this legibility to the broader dynamic of rural agricultural subsidies, noting the importance of symbolically constructing an entity legible as 'community' that can be "an eligible participant in the new fiscal relationship that has emerged between the subsidising state and the rural economy" (Walker 2012: 185).

poor. The durability of this logic does not derive from continued military control over the bureaucracy, as local development is an area clearly within the ambit of Myanmar's democratically elected civilian government.[192] Rather, conceptualisations of co-produced public goods as a criterion for eligibility to state aid is legitimised by national as well as local members of the NLD with reference to the moral notions of democracy described in Chapter Five. The constellation of democracy with 'self-reliance' recurred in campaign events in the months prior to Myanmar's historic November 2015 elections. At a village event on the fringe of the township, one of the NLD candidates explained to villagers how 'development' would work if the NLD was elected:

> [After the election], you will be able to ask for your rights *(B: akhwint ayay)* and try to develop your village…. We can cooperate and work together. The NLD needs to know the needs of the village. But the village also needs to discuss and cooperate with us to lead improvements here (Fieldnotes, 20 September 2015).

Strikingly absent of promises for specific projects or initiatives, the notion of communities securing 'rights' by 'cooperating' with the state and leading improvements echoed the emphasis Suu Kyi herself placed on 'responsibility' or 'duties' during this period. At public events following the November 2015 elections, for instance, she repeatedly urged: "Think of what you can contribute for the development of your country, not what benefits you can have from your country… Only demanding rights without assuming responsibility and accountability, which are wholly left to the government, does not comply with democracy standards" (Callahan 2017).

Exclusion is easily justified in this understanding of democracy. If self-reliance is the basis of democratic entitlement, those who do not fulfil the 'responsibility' or 'duties' envisaged by this welfare capitalist notion of free political community are considered less worthy of state aid. State and region NLD parliamentarians interviewed in September 2016 about the exclusion of communities who have not contributed to local development strongly agreed with this sentiment. They repeated the same discourse of reciprocal duties as a requirement of liberty

[192] Albeit one which ultimately requires budgetary approval from the military-controlled General Administration Department (GAD) within the Ministry of Home Affairs. The military commander in chief remains responsible for appointing the ministers for Home Affairs, Border Affairs and Defence. For a useful overview of the GAD, see Kyi Pyar Chit Saw and Arnold (2014).

discussed in Chapter Five, explaining that communities who had not engaged in local improvement initiatives did not deserve state funding as "democracy needs people to take responsibility" (Fieldnotes, 20 September 2016).

The role of 'self-reliance' in claim-making and entitlement reveals a politics of entitlement determined not just by active participation in capitalist enterprise but also on fulfilling the obligations of social relatedness and 'community' generated by the informal institutions of welfare capitalism (see Chapter Five and Six). The contingency of this vision of entitlement is congruent with socialist-era legal reasoning. Whereas eligibility to possess rights could previously be claimed by virtue of sacrifices made willingly or unwillingly for the socialist vision of Ne Win and later in support of the welfare capitalist state-building strategy of the SLORC/SPDC, rights are now accrued by demonstrating contributions to a welfare capitalist notion of free moral and political community. The claims of entitlement possible on the basis of forced labour during the junta-era and self-reliance today are thus categorically similar. Both enable claims to "a delimited right tied to reciprocal duties" (Cheesman 2015a: 109, see also Wells 2018).

The distributive imaginary reinforced through a welfare capitalist politics of entitlement is cruelly optimistic (see Berlant 2011). Development and progress are encouraged to be seen as achievable through the unity and generosity of community members alone, with minimal support from institutions of the state. Residents concerned about inaccessibility of emergency vehicles or the spread of disease from openly-flowing effluent are encouraged not to expect the state to respond, even though municipal governments and central state agencies are increasingly resourced to do so. Instead, citizens must engage in practices of private redistribution by cultivating bonds across wealth and social hierarchies. State officials are encapsulated into the collective of 'community' evoked during these projects, with their contributions to 'self-reliance' initiatives depicted as personal *gifts* dispersed through their goodwill and provoked by the demonstrated worthiness of subjects.[193] Possession of formal

[193] Similar depictions of rural development assistance as 'gift' rather than entitlement are common in northern Thailand. Walker (2012: 185) describes village performances aimed at soliciting aid from state officials by ritually depicting "the local social system… stripped of its complexity and represented in clear governmental categories, while the state is represented as a benevolent supporter of local livelihoods and traditions". He describes villagers bringing "food, samples of local produce, betel nuts, fermented tea, alcohol and contributions to officially sponsored projects…. In return the state provides food prizes for the best cultural displays and direct handouts of cash or other essential items (such as blankets) to the elderly and socially disadvantaged" (Walker 2012: 185). Anthropologist Peter Vandergeest found similar dynamics in 1980s northern Thailand, recounting how local officials "promoted the language of mutual help by setting up elabourate ceremonies to initiate development

citizenship or payment of municipal taxes lend no inherent weight to claims on the state, as officials are empowered to withhold state aid from communities they judge are not sufficiently committed to the virtues of 'self-reliance'.

Putting aside the fact that failure to participate or co-contribute to public goods provision could also logically signal the need for *more* and not less assistance from the state (see chapter seven of Bulloch 2017), the moral criteria use to distinguish 'worthy' from 'unworthy' recipients of state aid may also provide the basis for broader and more pernicious societal cleavages.

Zero-sum rights and societal cleavages

It is not only the poor or those who lack connections to patrons and commercial elites who are excluded from the democratic politics of entitlement. The competition required to have 'rights', which constructs distinctions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor', may also exacerbate Myanmar's existing ethnic and religious divides by entrenching exclusion and legitimising violence towards minority communities. The imaginary of rights as zero-sum and competitive recurs in increasingly violent demands to exclude minorities such as the Rohingya and Muslims more broadly from the rights and opportunities of legal citizenship. Narratives which have framed Muslims and South Asians more broadly as disproportionately wealthy and better resourced than average Burmese people (see Chapter Five) circulate alongside state propaganda which have gradually elided Rohingya and other minorities from notions of 'national races' (B. *taingyintha)* (see Cheesman 2017a). When these formal and informal conceptions of citizenship are combined by state or ethnic elites, they lend powerful ideological content to campaigns aimed at violently excising minorities from territory and political community based on their 'unworthiness' to compete with 'legitimate' citizens for finite state resources or opportunities (see Davies 2018: 145-158). The outpouring of popular support from many Burmese people for the Myanmar military's campaign of alleged atrocities against the Rohingya, especially since August 2017, and in defence of the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi demonstrates the tragic and pernicious nature of this competitive logic of 'rights'.

projects, in which they ritually affirmed that they were 'helping' villagers, and in which villagers were expected to affirm that they were grateful and obligated" (Vandergeest 1991: 433). 'Development' as emerged from these context was defined "as a gift from enlightened officials to backward villagers, a gift by which they helped villagers advance towards modernity and morality… [V]illages where people went along with the officials' definitions of development were able to garner more state resources" (Vandergeest 1991: 433).

Yet minorities included in official ethnic-based notions of citizenship must also work to earn the recognition of state officials, despite long histories of conflict which have often eroded their trust in the state. Decades of violence and insurgency throughout Myanmar's borderlands have produced informal institutions of non-state redistribution and governance with differing ideologies of those dominant in lowland areas. As a result of decades of insurgency in northern Karen State, for instance, informal institutions of private redistribution that characterised lowland areas did not develop after 1988, limiting the development of welfare capitalist social licensing and obligation described in Part Two of the dissertation.[194] Instead, since the escalation of insurgency in the early independence period the KNU and its broader societal partners including churches and largely Thailand-based community-based groups have attempted to deliver a range of essential services such as schools and mobile health treatment in areas over which it retained control or were able to secure access (Decobert 2015, Brenner 2017a). Rather than mitigating the expectations of the state, the symbolic language enlisted by non-state institutions in their everyday interactions with populations emphasised the failure of the Myanmar government to provide basic public goods and respect the aspirations of Karen people for cultural and political autonomy (see Brenner 2017a, McCarthy and Farrelly 2017). Consequentially, the expansion of state-mediated local development funds in northern Karen State since a bi-lateral 2012 ceasefire has produced tensions over the demands these schemes make for local contributions to public goods.

Karen communities in Thandaungyi were far more sceptical of attempts to render them responsible for co-production of public goods than their counterparts in the adjacent township of Taungoo. At the heart of this reluctance are strong variances in perceptions of state responsibility for public goods. When asked who *should* be responsible for building and maintaining roads, 15 percent more survey respondents in northern Karen State than in lowland areas named government agents such as the municipal or state government. The entirety of this difference was explained by 15 percent more Taungoo respondents who said that roads *should* be built through 'self-reliance' or in partnership with village elders who tend to be local commercial elites. Decades of insurgency politics and the alternative informal redistributive institutions it has generated thus appear to have formed markedly different expectations of the

[194] Northern Karen State has seen conflict between the Myanmar military and the Karen National Union armed group since 1949. Though severe clashes have reduced significantly since a preliminary bi-lateral 2012 ceasefire was signed in 2012 and the KNUs subsequent 2015 signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the situation remains fragile at the time of writing in the absence of progress towards a more federalised political order.

state linked to divergent political identities. Limited exposure to 'self-reliant' mechanisms of public goods provision are a key factor here, with respondents in Thandaungyi 10 percent less likely to have contributed to local improvement initiatives at the time of the survey than lowland respondents.[195] Of those who had contributed, less than 5 percent gave support in the form of funds, making them almost 40 percent less likely than respondents in Taungoo to have contributed financially for road construction.[196] These cleavages between upland and lowland areas are already creating tensions regarding whether communities who apparently refuse to embrace the expectations of a welfare capitalist rights, or indeed reject the legitimacy of the Myanmar more broadly (see Brenner 2017b), are worthy of government-mediated poverty alleviation and development assistance.

Many ethnic minority politicians and armed groups envision progress towards a federal system that devolves considerable budgetary and expenditure powers to sub-national level, enabling intermediation of development through previously insurgent social orders (see Brenner 2017a; McCarthy & Farrelly 2017). For practical as well as normative reasons idioms of 'self-reliance' would likely endure and be entrenched despite greater devolution of governance. Some Karen elites who reside in lowland Taungoo and manage community-based organisations in northern Karen State expressed anxiety that little developmental progress would be made and that tensions could arise with state officials if communities in ceasefire areas did not begin to willingly contribute to local improvements. As a Karen pastor involved in social development explained:

> We can say that in terms of their Christian faith, the mountain Karen villagers are very strong. But there is a problem with their mindset as they expect others to support them and will not take responsibility for themselves. They refuse to accept that they must stand on their own in a unified way in order to develop fully (Interview, 4 July 2017).

The legacies of decades of conflict during which insurgents criticised the state as failing to fulfil its responsibilities to its subjects can be reframed by elites socialised in lowland areas of Myanmar as indicators of 'unworthiness' to state aid. Tensions around the extent to which

[195] In Taungoo 70 percent of the sample had reported assisting in local road construction versus 60 percent in Thandaungyi, with a p-value of 0 percent.
[196] Though 301 respondents in Thandaungyi reported contributing their labour to road construction, only 11 (3.75 percent of contributors) stated they had donated funds. This contrasts with 41 percent of respondents in Taungoo who contributed either funds or funds and labour.

development should be co-produced by minority populations in ceasefire areas are likely to intensify in the coming years. If and when negotiations regarding a more federalised political structure do commence, questions regarding which governmental entity will have the authority to intermediate aid and deem communities worthy of 'state' aid – Union-level Ministries, the Karen State government or the state-like apparatus of the KNU – are likely to be at the heart of any viable peace agreement (South 2017). Given these struggles to broker the 'gift' of development, performances of worthiness that require supplication and co-contribution and entrench exclusion will prove an enduring feature of Myanmar's state-society relations, even in a more federalised political system.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have exposed how democracy, contingency and exclusion co-exist in contemporary Myanmar, generating a politics of entitlement with close resemblance to earlier logics underpinning socialist rights and the post-socialist junta's reliance on forced labour. By focusing on local development initiatives, a key area of Myanmar's direct state expenditure in recent years, I examined how hierarchies of deservingness are being institutionalised by communities competing to collectively claim aid from the state. Rather than eligibility to state assistance implying government leadership in local improvement, however, the animating logic of welfare capitalist rights envisions responsibility for development as shared between the state and its subjects, who are compelled to organise themselves into 'communities' where wealth and labour is collectively contributed to initiatives of 'self-reliance'.

There are multiple dimensions of inequality to this politics of entitlement. The poor bear a disproportionate burden for many of these projects relative to the wealth of commercial elites and the burgeoning middle class, their role in the degradation of infrastructure or benefit from provision of public goods. Meanwhile, official's recognition of the community's performance of collective moral worth is an essential part of achieving entitlement from the state. The need to demonstrate a compassionate or 'self-reliant' subjectivity to earn eligibility to state aid may partly be symptoms of a bureaucratically weak, resource poor state with limited ability to effectively administer more individualised and targeted aid to citizens. From this perspective, economic development and the planned expansion of more individualised state social spending in Myanmar over the coming years may cultivate clearer ideas of 'entitlement' from the state as comparative literature suggests (see MacLean 2011b). The role of informal authorities and moral criteria in the distributive politics of neighbouring countries such as India (Chatterjee

2004) and Thailand (Walker 2012), however, highlights that the logic of 'self-reliance' as the basis of entitlement claims are entrenched across the region and are only likely to deepen over time. Yet these dynamics are not isolated to South and Southeast Asia. The replacement of the 'welfare state' and 'social rights' with the 'welfare community' and 'self-reliance' has similarly been observed in austerity Europe, where state retrenchment has dramatically reconfigured the politics of entitlement (Muehlebach 2012).

Rather than appealing to frameworks of democratic entitlement of people as 'right bearers' by virtue of their citizenship, in contemporary Myanmar rights are earned through demonstrations of 'self-reliance' and moral worth. The process through which people demonstrate self-reliance creates distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Central to this reconfiguration of entitlement in the context of a transition to civilian rule is a "rescaling of citizens' affective attachment away from the lofty realms of the national order of things to what appear as unmediated, intimate, local levels" (Muehlebach 2012: 69). The competitive logic of welfare capitalist rights justifies the exclusion from state aid of people and communities unable or unwilling to 'stand on their own'. In conflict-affected communities, for instance, the provision of aid to communities by state authorities lies at the core of debates about who will govern and the institutions that intermediate the 'gift' of development (see McCarthy & Farrelly 2017). The zero-sum nature of competitive rights also leads many to see the extension of 'rights' to groups elided from political community such as Muslims and the Rohingya in particular as coming at the expense of opportunities for more 'worthy' subjects. The ideals and practices of private redistribution generated during junta rule are now proving path dependent, shaping the mechanisms through which many lowland elites and ordinary people imagine redistribution occurring in a more democratic context.

Beyond allocating significant obligations to ordinary people to contribute to the common good, the central role of commercial elites within ideal of democratic welfare capitalism provides amble scope for Myanmar's formerly military-linked tycoons to defend their wealth and generate a publicly-rooted social licence in the contemporary context. Chapter Seven explores these dynamics, focusing on how public philanthropy accrues symbolic capital to donors and limits the potential for resolving past or future injustices and inequities through state-led redistribution.

Chapter Seven: Public Philanthropy as Elite Wealth Defence

Chapters Five and Six explored how practices of private redistribution generated during the 1990s and 2000s shape contemporary notions of democracy and entitlement in lowland areas of provincial Myanmar. In particular, they highlighted the ways that the democratic welfare capitalist ideals ubiquitous among social and political activists have the potential to generate regressive outcomes despite the state increasing direct social expenditure in recent years. A question at the core of the political economy of welfare and redistribution in contemporary Myanmar remains unanswered, however: what do donors gain by continuing to engage in philanthropy even though the influence of junta officials in commercial licensing has waned in recent years?

This question is pertinent as existing literature on Myanmar's tycoons highlights an intensification rather than weakening in practices of public philanthropy since liberalisation in 2011 (see Ford, Gillan et al. 2016, Menager 2017, Prasse-Freeman and Latt 2018).[197] However, little research has explored the role of public philanthropy in larger strategies of reputation management and wealth defence and the implications of elite gifting for Myanmar's contemporary distributive politics. In order to gain an insight into these dynamics this chapter focuses on the public patronage dispensed by a nationally prominent tycoon within the context of central-east Myanmar. I argue that by renouncing a proportion of wealth via patronage of local welfare groups, religious and historical festivals, public goods and so, tycoons generate moral and social bonds of imbalanced mutual dependence with 'the public'. By rendering themselves so central to democratic conceptions of community, tycoons can accrue a publicly-rooted form of social licence, legitimising their prior accumulation of capital and shielding their assets and power from scrutiny or public demands for state-led redistribution. Public patronage by tycoons can particularly erode the commitment and capacity of democratically-elected state officials to resolve ongoing junta-era distributive injustices and collect the formal

[197] Menager (2017: 116-118), for instance, documents the marked intensification of philanthropic donations to schools, hospitals, and pagodas by prominent tycoon Tay Za after 2011. As Menager notes, Tay Za and his children make highly public contributions to athletes, conservation work, and medical care in remote areas, with activities often documented in Burmese on social media (Menager 2017: 116). Prasse-Freeman and Phyo Win Latt (2018: 405), meanwhile, note the potential for vertical bonds of patronage to degrade with Myanmar's integration into global marketplaces as well as the spread of an ethos of individual accomplishment.

taxation revenues vital to expanding state-mediated systems of redistribution. Viewed at a macro, systemic level, public philanthropy by economic elites can thus impose constraints on the redistributive potential of democracy separate to those presented by 'gamed' or 'rigged' formal institutions (see Albertus and Menaldo 2013) which protect and entrench their interests.

The chapter explores these dynamics in three sections. Section One briefly highlights how bonds of patronage and clientelism are evolving with the shift from junta rule to partial civilian governance in Myanmar. It then highlights how these patronage networks are mobilised for the purposes of public philanthropy which express the identities and social commitments of economic elites to the democratic 'public'. Section Two explores how public renunciation of wealth to support welfare, political and civilisational initiatives can generate a democratic form of social licence. Using Khin Maung Aye, chairman of CB Bank, as an example it then charts the role tycoons historically played as sources of credit, employment and philanthropy during the days of credit scarcity in the 1990s and 2000s and explores how philanthropy is now conducted in a manner that publicly burnishes the donor's alleged commitment to democracy and reinvents collective provincial identities. Section Three focuses on the contingent legitimacy generated by elite provision of public goods, especially waste management, and the impediments that the centrality of tycoons to essential services and collective identity presents to resolving land-grab disputes or adequately taxing their business activities. The chapter concludes that public philanthropy entrenches an ideal of democracy in which economic elites are central to social outcomes while also foreclosing the possibilities of government authorities using the power of the state to tax or seize their assets so as to redress past injustices or satisfy the needs of the 'median voter'.

Section One: Philanthropy and patronage in contemporary Myanmar

Patronage structures evolve with economic dynamics

Public philanthropy by Myanmar's contemporary tycoons relies on networks of patronage and practices of renunciation with deep historical roots. Patronage structures in provincial areas developed during the SLORC/SPDC period, for instance, play an essential role in the execution of public gifting. These clientelistic relationships vary according to the balance of coercion, instrumentality and affection involved, often linked to underlying commercial logics and

economic regulation.[198] Stability of patronage ties between commercial elites and their clients in rural areas of the delta, for instance, have historically derived and continue to emerge from a willingness of patrons to render social protection or debt payment relief at times of disaster or family crisis (see Scott 1972a, Adas 1974, Boutry 2013).[199] As political anthropologist James C. Scott argues, dynamics of reciprocity which rely on moral bonds rely upon frequent, face-to-face interaction between the patron and his or her clients. The constraints of a patron's financial resource base, and the need for a degree of social intimacy, however, generally "limits the number of direct active ties a single patron can have" to between twenty or thirty people (Scott 1972b: 95).[200] The significant opportunities and other assistance that commercial patrons are able to offer, however, can extend their influence as their direct clients develop transactional and affective patronage bonds with associates of their own. Clients in these second-tier clusters often have no face-to-face contact with the pinnacle patron, yet can usefully be conceived within what Scott terms a patron-client pyramid (Figure 28). Through this larger social structure, pinnacle patrons may be able to command loyalty from, or at least influence, hundreds if not thousands of people across industrial sectors, regions and tiers of government through the relations of (often contingent) loyalty that comprise a patronage pyramid.

[198] Some patron-client relationships are purely transactional and short-term many are based on longer-term interactions and claims of obligation, affection and fictive kinship. While the balance of 'calculation' to affection may vary from dyad to dyad, the maintenance of direct patron-client ties relies on a "continuing pattern of reciprocity… creat[ing] trust and affection between the partners" (Scott 1972b: 94).

[199] The balance of protection and exploitation involved in these patronage relationship have evolved over time along with shifts in underlying commercial logics and the regulation of assets which form the economic basis of patronage networks. For instance, Michael Adas argued that the replacement of non-contractual usufructuary rights with a tenure system during the colonial period fractured ties that bound patron and client. When the Depression struck the result was thus "the wide-spread alienation of land to non-agriculturists" as patrons were no longer obliged to render debt relief to their clients (Adas 1974: 387). Scott similarly argues that the shift to contractual tenure arrangements had the effect of "systematically [undermining] the comprehensiveness of exchange and the relative bargaining position of peasant clients – particularly in lowland areas most affected by colonial administration and market agriculture" (Scott 1972a: 7). As land became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small number of mostly non-agriculturalist landowners "the relative power of the patron was vastly inflated, his need for clients was reduced, and the incentive to serve the community by protecting it against the larger state was broken" (Scott 1972a: 18). From the perspective of rural populations, these bonds did not disappear completely but were replaced with "multiple dependencies – each of less intensity and comprehensiveness" than earlier forms (Scott 1972a: 17). See Boutry (2013) and South (2012) for a discussion of enduring patronage structures in the delta in the wake of Cyclone Nargis.

[200] Scott (1972b: 95) contrasts commercial networks with politicians who he argues tend to have small, dense and largely familial networks of support.

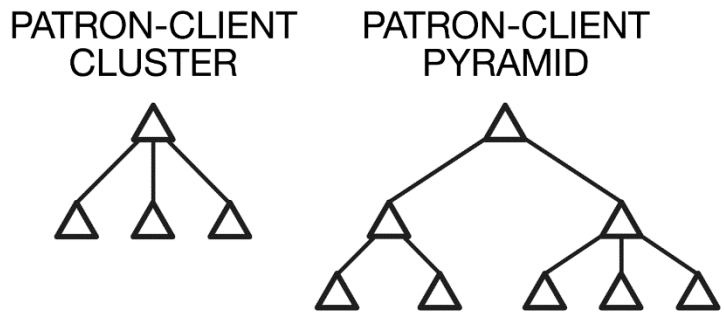

Figure 28 Patronage clusters vs pyramids (Scott 1972b: 96).

During the SLORC/SPDC period, the military-mediated nature of marketisation meant junta officials were the pinnacle of provincial and national patronage pyramids.[201] As described in Chapter Four, dyadic relations with their direct clients enabled military commanders to off-put obligations to emergent businesspeople and accrue personal fortunes through profit-sharing arrangements. With the transition to partial civilian rule in 2010 government agencies have increasingly run competitive tenders for state-issued licences, projects and contracts and military officials have become one of a number of actors including political party representatives and civil servants with the power to influence commercial and regulatory decisions. For the dozen or so tycoons who accumulated immense capital and built diversified conglomerates throughout the 1990s and 2000s these shifts have seen civilian politicians and 'the public' replace junta officials at the pinnacle of patronage pyramids. Relations of social licensing previously reliant on recognition of public philanthropy by junta officials have thus been partly democratised. Formerly military-dependent 'cronies' must now enlist a range of strategies to institutionalise their economic dominance and defend their wealth from potential redistribution in a more democratic context (see Jones 2014, Ford, Gillan et al. 2016). In addition to 'incubating' personal connections and patronage "at or near the center of the regime" (Winters 2011: 159), strategies of 'wealth defence' now rely heavily on elite public philanthropy reflecting the donors' commitment to expectations and demands of a more democratic political regime.

[201] These networks ultimately linked to senior members of the SLORC/SPDC junta. The instability within and competition between patronage pyramids was exposed when Khin Nyunt and all networks perceived as linked to him across business and military networks were dramatically arrested amid his purge in 2004 (Taylor 2009: 394).

Philanthropy expresses donor identity, generates 'public'

Sociologists define philanthropy as a rationalised, institutional and 'scientific' form of giving distinguishable from allegedly 'impulsive' and 'sporadic' charity.[202] Contemporary modes of elite philanthropy in Myanmar, however, reflect a global shift towards "the lasting interpenetration of gifts and personal identities" through philanthropic gifts (Silber 2001: 394). As sociologist Illana Silber argues in a review of trends in global philanthropy, instead of 'detachment' forming the primary basis of elite renunciation as earlier 'scientific' forms differentiated themselves, "a major feature of current philanthropy is precisely the contempt for anonymous, impersonal giving" (Silber 2001: 395). Rather than maintaining a degree of social and institutional distance with beneficiaries, studies of philanthropy from the US to India highlight donors' attempts at "forging, consolidating or changing" their identity through personal gifts or institutional donations mediated by corporate or family foundations (Silber 2001: 396). The embeddedness of donor identity and intentions within the 'gift' does not mean philanthropy simply becomes a "reflexive, self-referential" practice, however (Silber 2001: 395). Rather, philanthropy can simultaneously shape the social reputation of donors and contribute to the "constitution of a highly dispersed and localised sphere of 'public'" or 'semi-public' goods and institutions (Silber 2001: 397). These personal and public dimensions of philanthropy are essential to understanding the historical evolution and contemporary forms of gifting in Myanmar.

Practices of public gifting have been a source of social hierarchy and elite prestige since the pre-colonial period in Burma. Echoing ethnographies conducted in post-independence Burma (see Chapter Four), research on gifting in early 1990s Myanmar emphasised the social and moral stratification generated by acts of renunciation. Drawing on anthropological theories focused on obligations and hierarchies generated by possession and exchange of objects (Bourdieu 1977, Mauss 2002), Naoko Kumada argued that the "eternal value" of money and material objects in 1990s upper Myanmar was revealed in their 'consumption' or expenditure on pagoda construction, feasts for others, provision of public goods such as wells and so on (Kumada 2004: 10). Kumada analyses these practices of gifting through the prism of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic capital', arguing that social and religious philanthropy constituted both a "form of renunciation and a form of manifestation of power… [that] maintain

[202] Gross (2003) and Friedman (2003) for instance, argue that a progression occurred in the 1920s as the US grew as an industrial power, gradually formalising charity through more 'scientific' forms of philanthropy. See Silber (2001) for a more sceptical take on categorical distinctions in contemporary giving practices.

or enhance… [a donor's] position in society" (Kumada 2004: 13).[203] In addition to accruing good merit to the renouncer as they were conceived as *dana* or religious charity, these donations also served mundane functions for the donor by 'totalizing' "his biography, his labour and his social milieu" (Kumada 2004: 11). The renunciation of wealth which formed the basis of social licensing and commercial expansion during the SLORC/SPDC period (see Chapter Three) thus simultaneously served to embody, generate and legitimise social hierarchies by allowing donors to perform or express their identity and milieu.[204]

The transition to partial civilian rule since 2011 has shifted dynamics of commercial licensing. As a consequence, Myanmar's tycoons are now competing to proactively generate a social licence congruent with a democratic welfare capitalist ethic by expressing their identity through public philanthropy. The renunciation of wealth in a way that reflects and generates the identity of the donor should be here distinguished from the economic transactions that lubricate loyalty within aforementioned patronage networks. In contrast to the provision of economic benefits to a clique of supporters, the beneficiaries of public philanthropy in contemporary Myanmar often have little or no financial tie to donors. Despite this, patronage and philanthropy are often inter-related as the maintenance of a democratic social licence relies upon significant physical and symbolic labours by clients on behalf of patrons. As will be shown, second and third-tier clients in particular are essential to executing the commercial and social initiatives of pinnacle patrons and identifying potential business opportunity or areas of public philanthropy which could strengthen the pinnacle patron's social licence. Section two explores these dynamics in various forms of philanthropy encountered in central Myanmar during 2015 and 2016, paying particular attention to how the expectations of democratic welfare capitalism are fulfilled through performances of renunciation.

Section Two: Philanthropy generates a democratic social licence

Elite public philanthropy in contemporary Myanmar takes a variety of forms. Gifts from tycoons to support education, social welfare and infrastructure provision have intensified in

[203] Bourdieu argued that symbolic capital, such as prestige or renown of a family or a name, is "convertible back into economic capital" and "is perhaps *the most valuable form of accumulation' in certain societies*" (Bourdieu 1977: 179).

[204] In the context of tensions associated with capitalist activity and inequalities created by it, businesspeople thus sought to answer questions about how they "take the otherworldly into their life" (Kumada 2004: 10) through renunciation in the form of often localised philanthropy. Large-scale public ceremonies, especially those "performed without the help of others" become the "object of public admiration"; inversely, "failure to meet people's expectations, on the other hand, can result in a lowering of the donor's dignity and reputation" (Kumada 2004: 11).

magnitude in recent years, often disbursed via corporate or family foundations (see Menager 2017: 116). Alongside the increased magnitude of philanthropic giving, however, perhaps the most significant shift in recent years has been a growing emphasis on the expression of donor identity through the 'gift'. In the following section I explore how these dynamics play themselves out in the provincial philanthropy of a nationally prominent tycoon.

Tycoons as creditors, employers and philanthropists

Lower-tier clients play essential roles in public philanthropy of tycoons, executing the commercial and social initiatives of their patrons as well as identifying areas of potential business opportunity or impactful public philanthropy that reflects the identity or intentions of Myanmar's proto-oligarchs. By making themselves essential to provision of public goods and propagation of collective identity, public philanthropy can accrue symbolic capital which legitimises their past and present accumulation of capital and assets. As discussed in Chapter Three, the most prominent businessperson from central-east Myanmar is the chairman of CB Bank, Khin Maung Aye. Born in Taungoo, his proactive philanthropy throughout the 1990s and 2000s enabled his 'incubation' of senior members of the junta and subsequent emergence as a nationally-prominent businessman by the late 2000s (see Chapter Three). Since political liberalisation in 2011, his business interests have formalised and expanded considerably in an effort to meet foreign compliance and investment standards. Hundreds of new branches were opened throughout provincial areas since 2011. Coupled with rapid uptake of digital banking, CB Bank – which he chairs – has grown to be the third-largest private financial institution in Myanmar. Reflecting the increasingly international profile of CB Bank, Khin Maung Aye's philanthropy is often mediated through his companies and framed in global discourses of 'corporate social responsibility'.[205] Despite business and political interests drawing him more to Yangon and Naypyitaw than Taungoo, his hometown in central Myanmar remains a focal point of philanthropic efforts. This geographic focus reveals how networks of patronage generated during the 1990s and 2000s remain essential to the maintenance of a social licence coherent with the vision of democratic welfare capitalism described in Chapter Five.

Local instantiations of Khin Maung Aye's 'generosity' take a variety of forms from support of local sports teams, welfare groups and cultural festivals to road construction and pagoda

[205] See for example the description of CB Bank's 'corporate social responsibility' activities at http://www.cbbank.com.mm/aboutus/aboutus_csr.aspx [accessed 15 September 2017]

renovation. Gifts of both financial and in-kind forms often arrive at pivotal moments in the development of diverse social initiatives or projects, and are symbolically attributed to Khin Maung Aye through rituals of recognition, vinyl banners and signboards bearing his name, CB Bank or his conglomerate 'Good Myanmar Victory' (Kaung Myanmar Aung or KMA) which has interests in a diverse range of sectors including hotels, construction and mining. As a result, very few of my interlocutors – even those in more remote rural villages – had not heard of or encountered Khin Maung Aye's philanthropy in some way. Identifying people, groups or initiatives worthy of support and ensuring symbolic attribution of philanthropy to his *grandesse* in these ways requires significant time, effort and resources. Given that he spends most of his time in Yangon, Naypyitaw and abroad, who plays these roles?

Khin Maung Aye's local philanthropic footprint relies on a network of business associates developed since the mid-1990s. Part of this network comprises direct employees, as Taungoo remains a major base for a number of his personal commercial operations, including hospitality, mining and construction businesses. Employees with these businesses fulfil various business tasks including customer service, logistics and procurement. They are mostly integrated into a pyramidal structure of corporate hierarchy, the higher tiers of which are based in Yangon, and thus they tend to have little or no direct contact with Khin Maung Aye. These local employees occasionally play minor roles in the execution of philanthropic initiatives, though are only rarely involved outside of work hours. Beyond his employees, the core of Khin Maung Aye's local patronage network is a small group of direct clients who received personal or commercial loans at his intercession during junta rule. Despite the ostensible liberalisation of the banking sector in the early 1990s, a number of private banks which were formed during this period – including the three institutions which merged to form Cooperative Bank in 2004 – "conducted very little formal banking business" until the early 2000s (Turnell 2009: 266). Indeed, prospective borrowers unconnected either to the banks, their owners or junta officials were commonly required to give collateral equivalent to around 200 percent of the value of a loan upfront, in addition to paying hefty 'establishment fees' on loans (Turnell 2009: 272). These restrictions on formal credit meant that most small and medium sized enterprises instead relied upon 'self-financing' through funds from friends and family underwritten by intimate social obligations (Mieno 2006: 158, Turnell 2009: 273).

Some aspiring entrepreneurs, however, were able to secure lines of credit by cultivating personal ties with regime-linked businessmen such as Khin Maung Aye. These credit ties

between wealthy businesspeople and their personal clients relied on broader relationships of patronage, lubricated through regular face-to-face contact and often unequal exchange of favours. The conditions of formal institutional loans such as collateral requirements, interest rates, loan lengths and so on were often relaxed by the bank at the personal intercession of the pinnacle patron (Khin Maung Aye), who would vouch for these 'clients' to junta officials if required. This semi-institutional form of financial patronage thus combined the social and familial obligations typical of 'self-financing' with the institutional heft and credibility of private or semi-private banks and their junta-linked executives.

In addition to cultivating junta officials and assuming social responsibilities of welfare and public goods provision (see Chapter Three), numerous members of Myanmar's provincial commercial class sourced initial capital for business expansion by entering into patron-client arrangements with shareholders and executives from private banks. Regulatory reform and banking sector development after 2011 saw the relaxation of collateral and other requirements for commercial loans (see Foerch, Thein et al. 2013). However, wealthy tycoons maintained their credit relations with direct clients in provincial areas after the liberalisation. Throughout my fieldwork in 2015 and 2016, for instance, interlocutors who managed or funded local welfare and social activities often complained about their struggles securing loans for business expansion. In cases where their commercial aspirations outstretched the lending limits or collateral requirements of formal bank loans, they would often seek to use social ties with wealthy financiers to seek concessional loan terms. While these loans were usually institutionally mediated by banks, they were apparently not negotiated or managed by bank managers in Taungoo. Instead recipients would often describe loans as having been provided at the personal dispensation of Khin Maung Aye, with negotiations occurring directly with his office in Yangon (Fieldnotes, October 27 and November 23 2015). Underpinning these relations of informal institutional finance were complex obligations to maintain Khin Maung Aye's philanthropic presence in provincial Myanmar.

Borrowers become clients who facilitate public philanthropy

The pyramids of patronage formed through ongoing relations of semi-institutional credit remain essential to the maintenance of the commercial and philanthropic interests of tycoons in provincial Myanmar. One of Khin Maung Aye's direct clients – the speaker at the town-hall meeting vignette which opened the dissertation – provides a prism into these dynamics. Dr Kyaw Tu* is a Taungoo native who studied medicine in the 1990s before returning to open a

small private clinic. Following the liberalisation of private health care in 2007, he secured a licence to open one of Taungoo's first private hospitals, a highly profitable business given stagnant state health funding and the poor standard of treatment at government facilities during this period (see Chapter Four).[206] Determining how credit to fund the hospital and other enterprises during this period was acquired is difficult as publicly available documentation is sparse. Attempts to probe these details in interviews with business associates of Khin Maung Aye solicited vague and sometimes evasive answers. However, it is clear that a relationship of close commercial and social loyalty developed between Dr. Kyaw Thu and Khin Maung Aye. The two frequently appeared alongside each other in donations records of various religious and social initiatives in the late 2000s and especially after 2011 (Fieldnotes, 4 and 7 September 2015). As will be discussed, Dr Kyaw Tu was also instrumental in the execution of large-scale public philanthropy projects financed by Khin Maung Aye from late 2010. He also joined 20 or so other businesspeople and prominent former civil servants as 'town parents' or elders *(B: myo mi myo pah*) on the township development committee, often acting on behalf of Khin Maung Aye according to other committee members (Interviews, 23 February 2016). By the commencement of my fieldwork in early 2015, Dr Kyaw Tu's business had expanded from medical services into hospitality with the construction of hotels providing lodging for clientele unlikely to stay at the luxury hotel owned by Khin Maung Aye. As described in the opening vignette to the dissertation, Dr Kyaw Tu also formed a construction company partially underwritten by Khin Maung Aye, which he hoped would be granted permission to construct a shopping centre and condominium complex on the former site of the Taungoo market (Interview, 27 October 2015).

Clients such as Dr Kyaw Tu played significant roles in identifying social and welfare initiatives potentially worthy of Khin Maung Aye's support. One highly strategic form of gifting I encountered was the use of philanthropy to responsively or pre-emptively co-opt and silence Khin Maung Aye's most vocal critics such as prominent local welfare volunteer Tin Win (see Chapter Four). Tin Win ran the largest locally-oriented Facebook page in Taungoo which, at its peak in 2015 had more than 5000 followers, prior to being hacked and taken down in late 2015. The page featured up to a dozen posts daily depicting various *parahita* activities by

[206] At the time of fieldwork in 2015 and 2016, there were three private hospitals providing both inpatient and outpatient services. For a discussion of the history of private health care facilities and their role in contemporary Myanmar see https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4885812/ [accessed 13 January 2018]. As a trade town with a relatively significant commercial class, a significant proportion of household expenditure since the 1990s has been directed to private health services. See McCarthy 2016 for a fuller discussion.

volunteers as well as Burmese-language articles about local, national or global news. Alongside posts suggestively linking Myanmar Muslims and Islam more broadly to violence and terrorism (McCarthy 2018a), many posts criticised the military and the allegedly corrupt dealings of 'cronies'. Khin Maung Aye was a common focus of Tin Win's posts, some of which detailed his alleged involvement in land-grabs and criticised his plans to construct a 'green' industrial zone on the fringe of the town and attempts to secure an extension of a concessional lease from the municipal government for his luxury hotel. In late 2015 and early 2016, however, posts critical of Khin Maung Aye became markedly less frequent as the page was repeatedly hacked and as Tin Win came under increasing pressure from other welfare activists to quieten his critique. In July 2015 another volunteer at the same welfare group mentioned that Khin Maung Aye was planning to donate the equivalent of around US$20,000 to the organisation, declaring that he "has a mind for others" (B: *parahita seit*) (Interview, 13 July 2015). Tin Win's vocal critique of Taungoo's most prominent tycoon continued in offline discussions throughout 2015. Over tea in early 2016, however, he admitted to being less aggressive in his criticism online as the chairman of his *parahita* group had asked him to hold back a little after Khin Maung Aye's business associates approached him with a proposal to donate an ambulance to the organisation in lieu of earlier promised funds (Interview, 11 February 2016). Even for those deeply critical of the business dealings of tycoons, the prospect of welfare groups receiving philanthropic gifts essential to their work can quieten public scrutiny of their business-dealings.

In addition to coopting groups whose members are critical of them, tycoons can also form new groups over which they are able to wield direct organisational and discursive control. For instance, at the same time that business associates of Khin Maung Aye were promising an existing *parahita* group funds and then later a new van, a group of his clients in the local Sino-Burmese community were forming a new relief team with his support. Established in the wake of the 2015 floods, the group aimed to mobilise in the context of local and translocal disasters. Official-looking uniforms which bore the logo of the group printed on sleeve patches were produced and disbursed to members, who also received mobile phones, ostensibly for use when they deployed. In early 2016 the team began irregularly posting images to a newly-created Facebook page of their efforts responding to local accidents such as fallen trees or fires. Their social media presence was led by a Sino-Burmese business-associate of KMA who had been prominent in disaster relief activities in 2015 and also led a Chinese dance troupe. Though posts on the Facebook page exclusively focused on their relief activities, the leaders of the relief group regularly posted videos both to their personal Facebook pages and to township

notice-board pages profiling Khin Maung Aye's 'philanthropic' activities (Fieldnotes, 16 December 2015). One of the Sino-Burmese activists was particularly vocal in support of the shopping-centre and condominium proposal led by Dr. Kyaw Tu and financed by Khin Maung Aye. In the months preceding and after the town-hall meeting about the future of the market he posted architectural animations of the proposed shopping centre and accused the municipal government of "failing the people of Taungoo" as they had not yet given their approval for the market redevelopment (Fieldnotes, 12 January and 7 February 2016). The use of patronage ties and targeted public philanthropy by associates of tycoons such as Khin Maung Aye can thus silence some of the most vocal critics of tycoons while helping to disseminate corporate and personal propaganda which frame them in a positive light. However, much like dynamics of political party provision of welfare discussed in Chapter Five, public philanthropy should not be interpreted solely as a means of co-opting critics into quiescence. Instead, as the next section shows public philanthropy also serves to express the donors' commitment to values and identities coherent with democratic welfare capitalism.

Philanthropy demonstrates the donor's commitment to democracy

With Myanmar's transition to partial civilian rule since 2011, demonstrating the political commitments of the donor has become an essential part of tycoon philanthropy. These dynamics were exposed in the narratives about Khin Maung Aye's relationship to the democracy movement which circulated prior to the November 2015 elections. Along with many other local commercial elites and prominent tycoons, Khin Maung Aye previously funded the USDP at the 2010 election (see Chapter Five). At the 2015 elections, however, he shifted allegiances by providing funds and seconding a business-associate to manage the local NLD campaign.

In early 2015, I encountered the NLD's brash campaign manager, who was in his 40s, at a hotel restaurant owned by one of Khin Maung Aye's direct clients. At the time he was working as a fixer for Khin Maung Aye's latest commercial project, attempting to negotiate a deal with farmers for the acquisition of land for the construction of a proposed industrial zone on the fringe of the township. A few months later we travelled together to the delta to engage in relief efforts in a group which received funds from Khin Maung Aye, during which he mostly wore tattered old shirts bearing the image of Aung San Suu Kyi (Fieldnotes, 1 August 2015). Soon after our return from the delta he took up the position of NLD township campaign manager and began organising village visits, trainings for party loyalists in electoral observation as well as

large urban rallies. While he appeared confident, competent and commanding at these gatherings his interactions with local activists, many of whom who had spent lengthy periods in prison during junta rule, were often tense. In a number of village visits, for instance, grass-roots NLD members – including female activists – jokingly calling him a pervert or 'hot nose' (B: *nahboo*) during casual banter after the formal proceedings had finished. An insult often hurled around by men at betel-nut shops, I had never heard it uttered so openly in public by women. Beyond expressing discontent with the campaign managers' often bawdy sense of humour, the levelling of the jibe by partly loyalists may also have reflected discontent among party loyalists with the moral compromise which his role in the NLD campaign appeared to represent. Indeed, in the weeks prior to the 2015 elections a number of NLD activists complained about the muddying of commercial and altruistic motivations within the campaign. They contrasted the campaign manager – who they explained to me was under the employ of a tycoon "close to President Thein Sein" – with all of the other village or ward township activists who were lending their time to support the NLD for free with 'good will' (B: *cedana*) (Interview, August 2015).

A narrative depicting Khin Maung Aye as a long-term democrat began to recur in my interactions with NLD activists, candidates and voters as the campaign wore on. At a village campaign event the lower-house candidate for Taungoo who party activists also perceived to be a business associate of Khin Maung Aye, recalled working closely together with him at camps set up by protesters during the 1988 uprising against Ne Win's BSPP regime. The campaign manager emphasised in teashop banter that though Khin Maung Aye "did business" during the 1990s and 2000s he "always loved democracy" (Fieldnotes, 23 October 2015). Some local welfare activists also elevated his role in the 1988 unrest in Facebook posts which circulated in the later months of 2015. Volunteers of welfare groups as well as shopkeepers, restauranteurs, students and others with whom I discussed his business dealings and philanthropy also repeated the same line. The majority of my interlocutors acknowledged his dubious commercial exploits during junta rule, but many also raised what they recalled as his long support of democracy – often citing the 1988 protests and contemporary support of the NLD – and concluding that he has "good sides and bad sides" (Fieldnotes, Oct 25 and Nov 4 2015).

It is impossible to determine whether the dissemination of this narrative during the 2015 elections was deliberately aimed at politically sanitising Khin Maung Aye's image after

decades of collaboration with junta officials; or if it was a means through which the potential ideological inconsistency of democracy activists aligning themselves with a military-linked businessman was resolved by party members. What is clear, however, is that NLD candidates and local party operatives actively framed Khin Maung Aye's philanthropic support of the NLD as an expression not of a *newly found* commitment to democracy but of a *long-held* belief which preceded the period he spent as a prominent 'crony'. Combined with the discursive framing of his direct clients and employees, philanthropic support provided to the NLD was depicted as an expression of his social commitments and identity.

Public philanthropy (re)invents collective identity

Public patronage of religious and cultural initiative can also render tycoons essential to collective identity. Khin Maung Aye's support for the historical revival of the Taungoo Dynasty since the transition to partial civilian rule in 2011 illustrates the potential for philanthropy to carry these civilisational connotations. As discussed in Chapter Four, between the 14th and 16th centuries, a Burmese kingdom based nearby the contemporary city of Taungoo conquered parts of Myanmar and much of Southeast Asia (see Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin 2012, ch 6). According to the curator of a local museum, in the 1990s Khin Maung Aye grew increasingly disappointed that many local people knew little about the local lineage of the dynasty. As discussed in Chapter Three, during the 1990s he began to memorialise the period by funding the erection of large golden gates at major entrances to the contemporary town, along with a number of twenty-foot statues commemorating the monarchical leaders of the dynasty Kings Tabinshwethi and his successor Bayinnaung. He also collected artefacts from various periods of monarchical history in Myanmar including teak racing boats, ceramics and weapons, all of which he exhibited at the luxury hotel, Royal Kaytumadi, located on the largest lake in Taungoo.

Whilst Khin Maung Aye partook in some historical preservation during junta rule, it was not until Myanmar's transition to civilian rule that public memorialisation of the Taungoo Dynasty became more prominent and spectacular. A few weeks after the November 2010 election in which Khin Maung Aye supported the USDP, he held a cultural festival celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Taungoo Dynasty. Financed through his companies CB Bank, Golden Myanmar Airways and KMA Industries, the festival has been held annually in November every year since 2010. In November 2015, barely ten days after the NLD convincingly won national elections the festival was held once again. The five days of the festival were a spectacle of what

anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1980) might term 'provincial theatre' in which rituals, performances and symbolism sought to conjure into existence a shared notion of historically and regionally situated political community. Stages were set up at the entrance to the town, where re-enactments of the sack of Ayuthaya (in present-day Thailand) were performed by costumed actors and acrobats riding horses and elephants. A parade was then held through the town to the ballroom of Khin Maung Aye's Kaytumati Hotel, referencing the dynastic name for the historical capital of the Taungoo dynasty. Famous actors from Yangon played the parts of princes and princesses, waving to thousands of people who crowded the streets as they were carried aloft by elephants and actors dressed as courtesans.

Figure 29 King Bayinnaung orders the invasion of Ayuthaya in re-enactment. Photo by author.

The (re)invention of the Taungoo provincial imaginary artfully interweaved dynastic and Buddhist symbolism. In addition to unveiling a pagoda renovated in the Bagan style, Khin Maung Aye integrated a long-running Buddhist festival into the celebration, hosted a Dhamma recitation competition for young Buddhists and held a merit-making ceremony for 505 monks from around Taungoo, a number chosen to commemorate the 505th anniversary of the dynasty. The Dhamma recitation event was conducted at the Bayinnaung ballroom of Kaytumati Hotel, named after the king of the Taungoo dynasty who invaded Ayuthaya (Thailand). At Khin Maung Aye's invitation, hundreds of children, monks and teachers from every Dhamma School

in Taungoo assembled to compete in recitation of Buddhist *suttas*. The competition served to demonstrate his commitment to the rejuvenation of morality among young Buddhists, a key concern of many avowed democrats (see Chapter Five).

Figure 30 Parade of horses, elephants and performers enter Taungoo following re-enactment of the sacking of Ayuthaya. Photo by author.

Figure 31 Movie stars and models play princes and princesses while riding elephants in the procession. Photo by author.

In addition to acknowledging and praising youth who studied Buddhist teachings, the ceremony also acted as a mechanism to redistribute funds from Khin Maung Aye to Dhamma schools and local monasteries. Cash prizes of up to US$15,000 were awarded to first, second and third prize winners of the Dhamma recitation competition. According to prize recipients and abbots of monasteries with Dhamma schools, recipients generally gave prize money to their local abbot to support the tuition and moral cultivation of youth (Fieldnotes, 25 Nov 2015). Khin Maung Aye's support was also essential to the popular participation and financial redistribution which underpinned the pagoda parade held on the second night of the Kaytumati festival. Twenty-eight floats participated, each of which depicted scenes from the life of the Buddha (*Jatika*) as well as stories about *nat* spirits central to Burmese Buddhist cosmology. A team from every urban ward in the township entered the parade, with Taungoo's Hindu community also participating with their own depiction of a sacred cow.

The parade has a local heritage running back to the independence movements of the 1930s, and had received the support of local commercial elites for decades. In 2010, however, the date of the pagoda festival was shifted at the request of Khin Maung Aye – apparently with some initial resistance from monks and local people – so it could be integrated into his revival of Taungoo dynasty memory (Fieldnotes, 27 Nov 2015). The integration of the festival was assisted by his provision of funds to support the materials and labour required to assemble each of the floats. In 2015 these funds were disbursed to ward-based committees by business associates of Khin Maung Aye in the weeks prior to the festival. Led in some wards by the local administrator, these teams then coordinated the workmanship, vehicles and volunteers for each float, often soliciting additional donations from local businesspeople for special decorations to maximise effect.

On the evening of the parade, an entourage of thirty to fourty people accompanied each float as it drove around the town into the early hours of the morning, dancing alongside it, tending to the dioramas, directing each of the floats though traffic and chanting *suttas* in light trucks trailing behind. In addition to meritorious motives for participation in the parade, there was also a competitive dynamic as the floats were judged by a committee of artists appointed by Khin Maung Aye. Similar to the Dhamma recitation competition the top three floats recognised

by the judges would receive cash prizes of up to US$15,000, with the bulk of funds re-donated to pagodas and monasteries within the ward (Fieldnotes, 25 Nov 2015).[207]

Figure 32 A ward team prepares their float for the 28 pagoda competition. Photo by author.

In funding and coordinating the recitation competition, parade and prizes Khin Maung Aye placed himself at the head of an immense machine of morally and socially generative redistribution. Alongside paid actors and employees, patron-client relationships generated through lending were essential to Khin Maung Aye's execution of the Kaytumati Festival. His direct clients, most of whom had earlier received concessionary commercial loans, helped to recruit volunteers for the historical parade, pagoda procession and various other events held to mark the anniversary. Competition between and tensions among second tier clients were sometimes exposed by these requests. Some felt they had received minimal recognition by Khin Maung Aye for their past efforts contributing to local welfare and cultural efforts, and were angered at being asked to provide far more support and man-power than his other local clients (Interview, 27 October 2015). Financial reliance evidently does not produce morally or socially stable ties. These relations, however, were essential to providing manpower and resourcing essential for large-scale public philanthropy of this kind. As explored in the next

[207] Khin Maung Aye's protégé, Dr. Kyaw Tu, was a prominent supporter of one of the most spectacular floats in the parade. The float was not allowed to receive a prize in 2015, however, as he had won the top prize in previous years, sparking frustration and speculation about favouritism given his close relationship with the primary patron of the festival.

section, civilisational philanthropy of the form expressed during the Taungoo dynasty festival can generate a contingent form of legitimate by rendering the donor essential to notions of moral community.

Patronage of collective identity generates democratic social licence

The centrality of tycoons to the collective identity of the provincial 'public' can raise the costs of rejecting their dominance in a more democratic context. As discussed in Chapter Five, ideas of democracy and reform which circulated at the 2015 elections often evoked a mythological period prior to military and colonial rule when the moral bonds of community were depicted as having provided for the welfare of all. As ethnographies of provincial politics across Southeast Asia demonstrate, the social meaning derived from membership in provincial imaginaries of these kinds can shape political behaviour in remarkable ways. For instance, as Yoshihiro Nishizaki documents in his study of the resilient popularity of the corrupt Governor of Suphanburi in neighbouring Thailand, charitable donations and patronage by political elites aimed at cultivating provincial identity can significantly increase the cognitive and social costs of voters abandoning their loyalty and supporting other politicians (Nishizaki 2004, Nishizaki 2011). In Indonesia, the reinvention of dynastic lineages was also a feature of the country's post-Suharto period, with long-lost monarchies rejuvenated throughout the archipelago to lend communitarian heft to electoral appeals or elite demands for advanced district-level autonomy (van Klinken 2007: 151-153).

A similar logic of identity construction aiding in political and economic domination is exposed by Khin Maung Aye's revitalisation of the Taungoo dynasty. After decades of perceived economic, social and moral degeneracy, the revival of this historical memory encourages pride and identification with a provincial imaginary half a millennia old. By encapsulating diverse local social and religious institutions into circuits of public philanthropy of which he is the primary donor, Khin Maung Aye renders himself indispensable to the reform and perpetuation of provincial moral community in a period of democratisation. In doing so, however, he also lends legitimacy to business activities which he frames as essential to this provincially-rooted and historically-informed vision of moral community. In a speech to the business and cultural leaders of similarly-sized historical town Mogok in Mandalay Region in 2018 – shared publicly by one of his local clients to Facebook – Khin Maung Aye made the commercial benefits of civilisational philanthropy explicit, explaining: "In promoting Taungoo I started with the 500 anniversary festival. I had a plan to develop the industrial zone (B: *sahmoozone*). By organising

the festival, local people became really motivated to develop the city and supported my project. City development in this way also contributes to national restoration and development (B: *naingan pwun pyo doh teh*)" (Fieldnotes, 19 March 2018). In this sense, civilisational philanthropy can be read as an attempt to generate a publicly-rooted form of the social licence described in Chapter Three.

Figure 33 Billboards advertising the festivities posted around Taungoo. Photo by author.

Reflecting the national commercial footprint of CB Bank as well as the weak power of regional and township authorities *vis*-à-*vis* Naypyitaw in post-2010 Myanmar, the 'public' hailed by the (re)invention of the Taungoo dynasty is both local and national. An array of prominent national politicians and military officers participated in the 2015 celebrations. Home Affairs Minister General Ko Ko cut the opening ribbon, and President Thein Sein was invited to place the golden umbrella (B: *tee*) atop a pagoda specially renovated to resemble a prominent Bagan temple (Fieldnotes, 27 Nov 2015).[208] NLD parliamentarians, many of whom were recently elected with his support only weeks earlier, attended the festival wearing the party's iconic orange outfits. Khin Maung Aye's media contacts also broadcast the festivities on Myanmar's largest

[208] Though the President was unable to attend due to an ASEAN meeting, Home Affairs Minister General Ko Ko took the honour of placing the *tee* (golden umbrella) atop of the pagoda in his absence.

pay-TV provider SkyNet, and gave coverage to the celebrations in government newspapers, including the *Global New Light of Myanmar*.[209]

The emphasis on national elites and the general public alongside the provincial audience highlights the shifting dynamics of social licensing in a democratic context. Tycoons and their clients go to significant lengths to frame public philanthropy as contributing to national reform and rejuvenation in order to legitimise past acquisition of assets as well as contemporary accumulation of capital.

Civilisational philanthropy binds donors into continued patronage

There is a paradox to the acquisition of symbolic capital through spectacular expressions of culture and collective identity. The dominance of a single donor in efforts of cultural revival can render them indispensable to collective identity, generating a form of symbolic reliance that can bind and commit them in the future. These tensions were exposed in 2016 when rumours circulated among Taungoo's commercial elites that Khin Maung Aye was not planning to fund the festival again. In the weeks prior to the town-hall meeting described in the opening vignette to this dissertation, a number of unrelated sources repeated rumours that Khin Maung Aye had grown impatient with the municipal government: despite spending more than US$1 million on the festival in 2015, they claimed he felt aggrieved that local officials had not approved the shopping centre redevelopment his protégé was seeking to lead. As another local businessman explained, however, failure to fund the celebrations would signal a financial liquidity problem that could unsettle his social licence:

> [Khin Maung Aye] must continue to fund the festival… If he didn't it would be a disaster for his reputation/face as people would think he has run out of money and is no longer a reliable supporter of the people (Interview, 3 September 2016).

If tycoons such as Khin Maung Aye fail to publicly and prominently fund expressions of provincial identity which they had supported previously, their reluctance can thus be viewed as an inability – or worse, a lack of commitment – to fulfil the duties of businessmen in a democratic welfare capitalist regime.[210] Here we see how the bonds generated 'symbolic capital' accrued by public philanthropy simultaneously serve to (loosely) tie the hands of proto-

[209] See coverage of 505 in Global New Light of Myanmar, 27 November 2015: http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-11-27-red.pdf [accessed 3 December 2015].
[210] The festival was run again in 2016 and 2017 – though on smaller scales than the spectacular 2015 celebrations.

oligarchs in contemporary Myanmar.[211] Satisfying the expectations of democratic welfare capitalism through quasi-public performances of philanthropy and renunciation generates a symbolically meaningful reputation for the donor. As Bourdieu (1977: 179) theorised, symbolic capital is then "convertible back into economic capital" as it enables continued commercial and political dominance at both a local and national level.[212] The failure to be perceived as a 'reliable supporter of the people', however, could unleash scrutiny of the sources of wealth or prompt demands to redistribute assets among the broader national 'public'. In the same manner that moral bonds with junta officials needed to be cultivated and maintained by emergent businesspeople during the 1990s and 2000s (see Chapter Three), the effort and resources put into maintaining a reputation for philanthropy by tycoons exposes how the transition to democracy has shifted dynamics of social licensing. Competition between businesspeople for recognition as reliable clients by military officers has evolved into competitive public performances of renunciation focused on both political elite and public audiences.

Consequentially, the public philanthropy of individual tycoons does not seek to lend legitimacy to *all* businesspeople. Rather, donors see their *grandesse* as providing the basis for moral comparison with other commercial elites, generating a hierarchy of social licensing and legitimate exploitation. During the May 2016 town-hall on the market reconstruction, for instance, both the Chief Minister of Bago Region and Dr Kyaw Tu threatened the possibility of less enlightened and 'generous' businesspeople intervening to exploit the town if agreement on the shopping centre was not reached. These attempts to coerce agreement are based on the implicit threat that failure to embrace the commercial dominance of tycoons and business elites could see capitalists less committed to the obligations of an ideal of privately redistributive democracy fill the vacuum as potential expropriators. In this sense, proactive performances that generate and demonstrate a commitment to a bounded conception of the 'public' also reflect the shifting configurations of power in a more democratic context. Competition between businesspeople to acquire social licence must now be conducted in a far more open and public manner than during the mediated marketisation of authoritarian welfare capitalism.

[211] Kumada noted a similar dynamic in early 1990s upper Myanmar. Large-scale public ceremonies, especially those "performed without the help of others" became the "object of public admiration". Conversely, "failure to meet people's expectations… can result in a lowering of the donor's dignity and reputation" (Kumada 2004: 11).
[212] As Bourdieu noted, in some societies symbolic capital "is perhaps *the most valuable form of accumulation*" (Bourdieu 1977: 179 emphasis in original).

Beyond the symbolic capital accrued by commercial elites through these performances, however, the competition between tycoons to engage in philanthropy also serves to evacuate from notions of the 'public' any idea of state agency in redistribution. Indeed, as will be explored in the following section, the collective loyalty accrued through public philanthropy by commercial elites can erode both the effectiveness and desirability of state action aimed at addressing social and economic inequality.

Section Three: Philanthropy constrains democratic redistribution

Beyond generating symbolic capital for the donor, elite philanthropy can reinforce an ideal of privately redistributive democracy that forecloses the desirability and possibility of state-led redistribution. Targeted philanthropy of essential public goods that are ostensibly the responsibility of state agencies is particularly impactful in this manner as it erodes the ability of state officials to resist commercial imperatives of elites, resolve land-grab disputes and increase the formal tax burden. The following section explores these dynamics in relation to waste management, land dispute resolution and direct taxation as they offer insights into functions of governance often superseded or eroded by elite philanthropy.

Elite provision of public goods generates contingent legitimacy

Patronising the public functions that state agencies have failed to adequately deliver can render commercial elites essential to popular expectations of how 'public' goods should best be provided. The impact of public gifting which supplements for poor state service delivery was exposed in the months prior to Myanmar's November 2015 elections when large green dumpsters emblazoned with the name 'Khin Maung Aye, Chairman of CB Bank' began to appear on street corners around urban areas of Taungoo. According to state legislation passed in 2012, which devolved revenue and expenditure powers, municipal governments were legally responsible for collecting taxes for waste and providing rubbish collection services. Up until mid-2015, however, the cash-strapped municipal government in Taungoo had provided no local dumpsters and only one small rubbish truck to cater to the waste management needs of almost 100,000 people living in urban wards. Consequentially, many people dumped non-organic household waste on road sides or burnt it in controlled fires in family compounds, creating a thick grey haze which often loomed over the town in the late afternoon hours. Associates of Khin Maung Aye who led the voluntary efforts at small-scale rubbish collection throughout 2015 and 2016 (described in Chapter Five) recognised that the absence of government dumpsters left a vacuum which philanthropy could help fill. Khin Maung Aye was

informed, and a month or so later his associates worked with the municipal government to order dozens of new dumpsters. Each was brandished with his name and placed on street corners around the town. Within days many were overflowing with waste, and the welfare group described in Chapter Five began providing occasional volunteers to the under-resourced municipal waste team to help collect the rubbish.

Municipal government officials were at pains to frame the contribution as a gift to the public rather than a bribe to the government. A municipal officer explained that they put his name and position on the bin in order "to honour him as the master of the gift (B: *alu shin*)". However, he insisted they felt no pressure to approve any projects related to him as "his donation is to develop his native town or city, not to help the government" (Interview, 2 Feb 2016). From the perspective of Khin Maung Aye's clients, however, the gifting of dumpsters coincided with a range of efforts to elicit concessions from municipal officials. Within weeks of the dumpster donation, Khin Maung Aye's business associates requested the municipal government extend the pepper-corn lease for his hotel located on the lake and also urged approval of the shopping mall project on the site of the old local market. Both of these requests were made public by local welfare activist Tin Win and posted to Facebook, where they received considerable criticism by Facebook users. When I asked two local activists who posted these articles whether they thought public gifts such as the dumpsters put pressure on the municipal government to accede to his commercial demands, they were surprisingly ambivalent: regardless of his plans or intentions, the bins filled an important gap in public service delivery and hygiene (Fieldnotes 27 Nov 2015, 2 Feb 2016). A municipal government official involved in the donation expressed a similar ambivalence about his intentions when asked whether the dumpsters would draw good merit for Khin Maung Aye:

> The merit of his donation depends on the *cedana* (B: goodwill) of his donation. I'm not sure if he gets merit every time people use the dumpsters as merit depends on the intention, not on what you donate. But even if he doesn't get good merit for his donation it is good for the town and he will still have a good image and reputation (Interview, 2 Feb 2016).

Welfare activists interpreted the contributions in a similar manner, seeing the dumpsters as an indicator of Khin Maung Aye's appreciation of local waste problems and practical commitment to the needs of the town. Shwe Linn, a former political prisoner and prominent local activist, strongly supported the donation. In the months preceding he had posted public criticisms of

Khin Maung Aye's 'greedy' activities and said he was "sick of hearing about [him] all the time". In the week after the November 2015 election, however, Shwe Linn posted an image to almost 5000 Facebook followers of an overflowing dumpster on the road outside his house. The post included the comment: 'Please say 'sadu' [Good work] for the donor, and put your rubbish in the bins'. He vocally critiqued the 505th anniversary and related pagoda festival as a waste of resources, declaring on Facebook that the fireworks display held during one of the evening festivities was like "burning money" (Fieldnotes 26 November 2015). Yet he appreciated the fact that Khin Maung Aye's donation was addressing public hygiene problems.

Figure 34 Author screengrab of Shwe Linn's Facebook post about dumpster donation.

I asked him privately whether it was inconsistent to praise Khin Maung Aye for his dumpster donation given the otherwise critical views he expressed towards him. He responded that it was not his place to judge the motivations of the donation and that "we should acknowledge good deeds when we see them" (Interview, 15 November 2015). The criteria of intentionality within Buddhist understandings of merit (discussed in Chapter Three) allows plenty of scope to critique public philanthropy on the basis of potentially selfish motivations, seen in the

aforementioned critique of Khin Maung Aye seeking concessional leases and sweet-heart deals from the municipal government. However, embedded within questions about intentionality, comments such as Shwe Linn's that donations provide an essential public good contain an assumption that 'good deeds' by Myanmar's crony class are central to systems of informal social protection and redistribution.

There are limits to the extent of praise some activists felt tycoons should receive for their philanthropic contributions. These boundaries were exposed in Facebook threads in 2017 when Khin Maung Aye contributed to the renovation of a degraded road behind his hotel that ran out to the town cemetery and crematorium. A post by one of Khin Maung Aye's business-associates detailing his donation, accompanied by photos of him from the Taungoo dynasty festival as well as images of the road project, circulated widely. It received over 1100 likes, and elicited almost 200 effusively supportive comments including 'Respect!' and 'Good work!'. Shwe Linn interjected with an obscene comment that stuck out from the others, and received dozens of likes: "We can acknowledge his gift, but don't lift his testicles for him!". The comment resonated with the colloquial phrase 'goats balls' (B: *seh gweh sii*) often used by critics of businesspeople to refer to their political flexibility in embracing the NLD after years of cultivating junta officials. People trying to resist the dominance and growing impunity of tycoons by minimising the virtue of their philanthropic 'gifts' effectively capitulate to the same welfare capitalist ideology as businesspeople who deliver public goods are simply seen to be exercising the redistributive obligations of wealth (Author notes, 3 October 2017).

Debates about Khin Maung Aye's intentions in donating dumpsters or building roads serve to elide how the capacity of the municipal government to deliver these publics goods was degraded by decades of junta-era tax concessions in exchange for private social expenditures. For activists socialised for decades to view state institutions as repressive, incompetent and corrupt, however, the failure of government officials to deliver essential services such as waste collection is neither alarming nor surprising. Instead of expecting or demanding officials collect more revenue and deliver the services mandated by state legislation, many self-professed democracy activists instead openly praise Myanmar's tycoons for engaging in publicly essential philanthropy. Forms of public philanthropy that supplement for the failure of the state thereby reinforce an ideal of private welfare provision in which the democratic state plays a supplementary rather than leadership role in redistribution. State redistributive action is perceived by many social and political activists as not just ineffective but unnecessary as it

may erode the moral and social bonds upon which they imagine a genuine democracy as emerging. Seen through this lens, redistributive claims against tycoons can come to be seen as an attack on collective moral community.

Redistributive role of tycoons complicates resolution of past injustices

The legitimacy of tycoons accrued through public philanthropy complicates the resolution of some of the most difficult distributive challenges in contemporary Myanmar. This is especially the case in relation to land grabs, one the most pernicious and complicated issues in the country and in central-east Myanmar. Millions of hectares of agricultural land changed hands throughout the 1990s and 2000s, often through patronage-based relationships and commercial arrangements between junta officials and emergent businesspeople. Military state officials who initiated these transactions often declared land used or occupied by villagers for decades as 'vacant' or 'fallow' land over which the state had public domain. As businesspeople have sought to capitalise on land received or purchased in this manner, especially since the liberalisation of 2011, hundreds of thousands of families have been evicted and lost usage rights over land that many had cultivated and improved for decades. Many have been forcibly evicted from land to make way for commercial redevelopment such as mining, agri-business and forestry or redevelopment for other industrial or tourism purposes have been common place. The extent of land expropriation is difficult to quantify, though data suggests that at least 12.5 percent of Myanmar's agricultural land was transferred for agribusiness purposes in these kinds of deals during the 1990s and 2000s.[213] Since 2012 the issue has gained increasing political attention, with a growing movement of farmers across the country demanding compensation for, and/or return of, land from which they were dispossessed through protests and demonstrations. The NLD recognised the need for a policy on the issue, and committed to resolving land-grab disputes during the 2015 election campaign.

In Taungoo junta and state officials leased significant allotments of land to companies in the 2000s under frequently opaque contractual arrangements. Throughout my fieldwork a number of ostensibly farmer-focused parties as well as civil-society activists attempted to mobilise

[213] A more reliable indicator of the scale of expropriation in recent decades is the Myanmar Government's 'Agriculture in Brief', according to which 12.5 percent of sown agricultural land was allocated for agribusiness purposes in 2015. These figures do not include land allocated for extractive investments, special economic zones, in conflict areas or ethnic armed group administered regions. Though not all land allocated for these purposes or regions is disputed, the scale of the problem of landlessness and land grabs is immense.

villagers who had lost access to land and had not been properly compensated. The most prominent of these local protests targeted land over which Khin Maung Aye claimed ownership. In mid-2015, farmers in an area nearby the new Yangon-Mandalay highway claimed they had received inadequate compensation for land on which Khin Maung Aye was planning to develop an industrial zone. In an interview with the English-language newspaper The Myanmar Times in November 2015, Khin Maung Aye admitted that the land initially acquired for the zone was purchased at a "very cheap" rate per acre. However, he argued that the quality of the land was poor and emphasised that if garment factories were to open in the area as planned it could create 100,000 new jobs "and the township will prosper".[214] Business associates of Khin Maung Aye closely linked with the NLD's campaign team attempted to address the grievances of farmers throughout 2015, apparently acquiring the final allotments necessary for the industrial zone at more than 300 times the amount paid per acre to acquire smaller plots earlier in the process.[215] While these extraordinary discrepancies created animosity among some villagers, the protests dissipated as better mobilised farmers received more compensation and families began to leave the area.

On 12 January 2016, however, a group of around 200 villagers and activists marched through Taungoo claiming they had been dispossessed *without* compensation by Khin Maung Aye's KMA Company. The origins of the case ran back to transactions which occurred in 2009, when the company claims it signed a 30-year lease with the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation to create a commercial teak nursery on 2400 acres of land in eastern areas of the township.[216] In December 2015 the company publicly committed to reducing the amount of land apportioned for the teak nursery to 511 acres and returning the remaining 1189 acres of land at a "giving up ceremony" to be held at Khin Maung Aye's hotel on 11 January 2016. Skynet's MNTV channel broadcast the ceremony the day prior to the protest, and edited segments of that coverage was then shared to Facebook by Khin Maung Aye's local clients (Fieldnotes, 14 January 2016). Videos and images from the event depicted him ceremoniously renouncing the majority of the land by personally giving deeds to villagers, as well as providing cash payments to those whose land his associates had negotiated would be purchased for the teak nursery.

[214] Tin Yadanar Htun. 2015. 'CB Bank chair to open industrial zone'. The Myanmar Times. 30 November. https://www.mmtimes.com/business/17876-cb-bank-chair-to-open-industrial-zone.html [accessed 13 January 2016].
[215] Ibid; Fieldnotes, August 2015.
[216] Tin Yadanar Htun. 2015. 'Farmers protest KMA Group project in Taungoo'. The Myanmar Times. 9 December. https://www.mmtimes.com/business/18043-farmers-protest-kma-group-project-in-taungoo.html [accessed 13 Jan 2016].

Only a portion of the affected villagers attended the ceremony, however. A larger group of villagers claimed that the company had seized more than double the amount of land – over 5000 acres – than what it had leased from the Ministry of Agriculture.[217] Their protest the following day, and another similar demonstration in February 2016, thus challenged the depiction of Khin Maung Aye as generously returning land which had been broadcast on MNTV and circulated online. Instead, the protesters claimed that the extent of his company's land expropriation was far larger than he was willing to admit.

Local NLD activists were quick to respond to the protests. Rather than directly addressing grievances of the villagers or the amount of land they claimed had been seized, however, the protests attacked the Eleven Media reporter who was covering the alleged land grabs. One Facebook post which received 1100 likes and over 180 shares in the days following the January protest, including from prominent local NLD and farmer activists, accused the reporter of "attacking the chairperson of CB Bank who provided a lot of support to Taungoo" (Fieldnotes 13 January 2016). The post listed 'good things' that Khin Maung Aye had done for development of the township including "working hand in hand with the NLD and USDP". It also criticised the journalist for linking the protests to land-disputes regarding the industrial zone. Citing limits to "freedom of expression", the post concluded with an indictment of the journalistic ethics of both the reporter and the outlet itself: "A few years ago prior to the entry of so-called journalists from Eleven Media we did not have this kind of problem" (Fieldnotes, 13 January 2016). Instead of acknowledging and addressing the grievances of the farmers, activists linked to welfare and political groups patronised by Khin Maung Aye mobilised against the reporter scrutinising earlier land deals made during junta rule.

A provocative meme also circulated on Facebook in which the question "Is your goal to create a riot in Taungoo?" was superimposed over an image of the gates to the city which Khin Maung Aye had donated during the military period. The image evoked the historical symbolism of the Taungoo dynasty which, when combined with the fact that the town saw inter-communal riots in 2001 in which more than 20 Muslims died, imparted the meme with a potent sub-text: allegations made by the farmers and journalist against Khin Maung Aye were an attack on the city as whole. The image was shared by local NLD activists, with some even making it their

[217] Moe Myint. 2016. 'Taungoo Farmers Restate Claims of Land Grabbing Against Well-Known Businessman'. The Irrawaddy. 12 February. https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/taungoo-farmers-restate-claims-of-land-grabbing-against-well-known-businessman.html [accessed 23 Feb 2016].

Facebook cover-photo (Fieldnotes, 14 January 2016). In the days that followed Khin Maung Aye's local clients including NLD activists organised counter protests in which a number of farmers who had received compensation in the earlier renunciation ceremony carried signs explicitly criticising the Eleven Media journalist.[218]

Figure 35 Facebook meme circulated after land protests in 2016. Caption: 'Is your goal to create a riot in Taungoo?'

The virulent defence of Khin Maung Aye in the wake of the protests demonstrates how the logics of welfare capitalism embedded in informal redistributive institutions complicate the resolution of junta-era distributive injustices in ways separate to the constraints imposed on civilians by the 2008 Constitution. The organisation of the counter-protests certainly bore the hallmarks of clients obliged to defend their patron's reputation against what they perceived as disreputable attacks. Yet people with no financial ties to Khin Maung Aye also circulated the meme on social media. The centrality of commercial elites to collective identity and public

[218] A volunteer at a local welfare group, however, filmed a Facebook-live interview with one of the protesting farmers who claimed he didn't know the name of the journalist and "just wanted his land back". (Fieldnotes, 15 January 2016).

goods provision can thus generate a degree of contingent loyalty from beneficiaries of largesse, foreclosing the possibility of resolving the ongoing distributive injustices bequeathed by military rule. The proposition of seizing and redistributing the assets of morally upright tycoons when they otherwise refuse to comply becomes not just undesirable but simply unimaginable for many avowed democracy activists.[219] The mode of redistribution preferred by prominent democratic and civil society leaders is instead voluntary renunciation of assets, often via 'giving ceremonies' such as that held by Khin Maung Aye to return land to farmers. Rather than being mandated by ministers, courts or civil servants to renounce assets in restitution for violations and harm committed in earlier acquisition of assets and capital, the ideal of democratic welfare capitalism embraced by many activists instead encourages the return of misappropriated wealth via performative expressions of morality and generosity. Here we see that formal constraints on redistributive democracy such as 'gamed' constitutions must be coupled with the informal limits that the entrenched role of private provision of public goods imposes on the normative desirability of state-led wealth redistribution.

Philanthropy is cheap for tycoons but expensive for the democratic state

Rather than waning when Aung San Suu Kyi took power in March 2016, the ideal of private and volitional philanthropic giving has been central to the NLD governments' attempts to confront Myanmar's most intractable political issues. Indeed, Suu Kyi herself has publicly challenged tycoons to renounce their wealth in the name of democratic moral community, asking economic elites assembled in Naypyitaw in October 2016: "Can't those who have previously worked for their own self-interest work for others in the future? Don't they have the necessary attributes to work for others? I believe it is possible".[220] Since then Aung San Suu Kyi herself has personally hosted a number of 'giving ceremonies' in Naypyitaw to solicit funds for her re-boot of Myanmar's peace process (in December 2016) as well as kick-start civilian efforts at repatriating Rohingya from Bangladesh who fled war-crimes committed by security forces during 'clearance operations' in Rakhine State (in October 2017). In both cases, requests from Suu Kyi and her advisers for 'donations' from Myanmar's most prominent

[219] This is not to say that such redistribution is impossible in contemporary Myanmar. In September 2017, for example, the NLD's agricultural minister of Magwe Region committed to redistributing nearly 13,0000 acres of 'unused' land it had seized from two companies as part of a national scheme led by the Ministry for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation and funded by international donors. See Htet Naing Zaw. 2017. 'Myanmar Govt to Redistribute Vacant Land'. The Irrawaddy. 26 September. https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-govt-redistribute-vacant-land.html [accessed 13 Jan 2018].

[220] See Htet Naing Zaw. 2016. 'Aung San Suu Kyi Woos Tycoons in Naypyidaw Meet-Up'. The Irrawaddy. 24 October. https://www.irrawaddy.com/business/aung-san-suu-kyi-woos-tycoons-in-Naypyitaw-meet-up.html [accessed 5 November 2016].

former cronies were met with enthusiastic performances of generosity.[221] Along with tycoons such as Kanbawza Bank Chairman Aung Ko Win and Asia World Chairman Steven Law, Khin Maung Aye featured as one of the top donors who responded to these requests.[222]

Figure 36 Suu Kyi poses for photos after receiving donations from Myanmar's tycoons to Union efforts to 'reconstruct' Rakhine State and repatriate Rohingya. Source: State Counsellor's official Facebook page.

Given the persistently low formal tax revenue of the Myanmar government since the early 1990s (discussed in Chapter Three), contemporary informal taxation of tycoons through solicitation of 'donations' to help finance initiatives of the civilian government highlights how

[221] Over US$8 million was donated to Suu Kyi in early 2017 to support peace-related initiatives projects she favoured, including US$2.2 million from Kanbawsa Bank, Myanmar's largest private financial institution. Following the Tatmadaw's campaign of ethnic cleansing in Rakhine State in August 2017 a similar appeal was made. While many of the donors were the same, their initial contributions were far less – though a number have lent in-kind services of various forms as well. See Nyein Nyein. 2017. 'Burmese Tycoons Contribute $8 Million to Govt Peace Fund'. The Irrawaddy. 24 January. https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/burmese-tycoons-contribute-8-million-to-govt-peace-fund.html [accessed 21 April 2018] and Dunant, B. 2018. 'Tycoons on the Frontline of Rakhine Reconstruction'. Voice of America. 23 January. https://www.voanews.com/a/business-leaders-support-myanmar-reconstruction/4219898.html [accessed 24 January 2018].

[222] Over US$13 million was donated for Rohingya repatriation by Myanmar's top tycoons. According to a list of donations released by the State Counsellor's office, Khin Maung Aye was the 12th largest contributor to the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine. He was recognised as contributing the equivalent of around US$380,000 while Kanbawza Bank's Aung Ko Win was the top donor, contributing over US$1.5 million.

informal institutions of private redistribution are proving path dependent during political transition. Suu Kyi's rhetorical emphasis on the moral obligations of business elites lends her solicitation of donations a strong ideational dimension. However, the public coverage of these spectacles on the State Counsellor's Facebook page and on social media also carries with it an implicit threat: the electorate will be informed if the obligations of democratic welfare capitalism are not fulfilled by tycoons. Those who fail to make the contributions expected and required by virtue of their wealth and the ideal of privately redistributive democracy could have the social licence to engage in capitalist exploitation revoked by democratically elected state officials. In this sense, the solicitation of donations from tycoons can usefully be compared to dynamics of social licensing and indirect social expenditure welfare outsourcing during junta rule. Whereas informal taxation throughout that period was decentralised, often mediated by transactional and social bonds generated by businesspeople with provincial military commanders, Suu Kyi and the NLD have sought to centralise the flow of donations through herself and her office. Public philanthropy by tycoons in response to these requests thus directs the flow of nationally and democratically symbolic 'gifts' through Suu Kyi, who crafts herself as a charismatic 'patron in chief'.

In the 1970s and 1980s Indonesia's President Suharto engaged in less charismatic solicitation from tycoons to finance schools, mosques and other initiatives via tax-free philanthropic foundations he personally chaired (Vatikiotis 1998: 50-52). Suharto often specifically targeted ethnic Chinese businessmen in solicitation campaigns, as economic liberalisation had created public outcry about the outsized wealth and dominance of the Chinese business community, which had been favoured as commercial partners by the Indonesian military since the 1940s (Vatikiotis 1998: 50). Suharto's approach to soliciting donations from tycoons thus netted him slush funds he could redistribute for political benefit while publicly demonstrating his willingness to informally regulate capitalism to ostensibly deliver benefits to ordinary Indonesians (Vatikiotis 1998: 51). In contemporary Myanmar the fact that solicitation of donations by state officials appears to target all prominent businesspeople regardless of ethnicity suggests that the Bamar elite and popular scepticism of capitalism bequeathed by colonial rule did not evaporate as a consequence of marketisation in the 1990s and 2000s. Rather, by publicly requesting donations from all junta-era economic elites democratically elected politicians are now seeking to resolve these tensions by reinforcing the ideals and systems of private, ostensibly volitional giving generated during post-socialist marketisation.

From the perspective of Myanmar's tycoons seeking to ensure their economic and political dominance unmediated by civilian or military patrons, pro-actively fulfilling the obligations of *democratic* welfare capitalism comes relatively cheaply. The amounts renounced through public philanthropy or at state-sponsored 'giving ceremonies' are a fraction of business empires accrued during junta rule, many of which have continued to expand in recent years bolstered by the lifting of all major economic sanctions on Myanmar's most infamous 'cronies' in 2016, at Suu Kyi's urging.[223] Donations by tycoons to foundations or 'national' initiatives such as the peace process or Rohingya repatriation constitute a small proportion of opaque but growing annual company profits – a small price to pay to legitimise land and assets expropriated and accrued during junta rule. Meanwhile, the government's attempts to net increased revenue for the state are complicated by a tax code that permits up to 25 percent of assessable income to be deducted through donations to welfare capitalist mechanisms of private redistribution.[224] In early 2018 Myanmar's largest private financial institution Kanbawza Bank, for instance, claimed to have donated more than it paid in tax since the liberalisation, citing US$103million given to philanthropic activities of the KBZ Brighter Future Foundation since 2009 compared with US$80 million paid in taxes since 2011.[225] Such imbalances are perfectly consistent with current tax regulations and the logics of democratic social licencing.

Alongside formal constraints on civilian power imposed by the 2008 Constitution, informal redistributive institutions are imposing separate but similarly pernicious impediments to democratic redistribution by depriving the state of revenue essential for expanding direct state social expenditures. Rather than confronting tycoons and the ideal of private redistribution on which many have been granted tax remissions since the 1990s, however, Myanmar's civilian leaders have instead sought to boost tax revenue required for state provision of a more consistent social safety net by expanding collection of indirect, regressive taxes such as consumption taxes that disproportionately impact the poor.[226] At a system-wide level, ideals

[223] See Khet Mar and Roseanne Gerin. 2016. 'In Myanmar, Mixed Reactions to The Lifting of U.S. Sanctions'. Radio Free Asia. 15 September. https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/in-myanmar-mixed-reactions-to-the-lifting-of-us-sanctions-09152016163159.html [accessed 25 January 2017].
[224] See Cornelius, P. 2018. 'Myanmar Corporate – Deductions' and 'Myanmar Individual – Deductions'. PricewaterhouseCoopers. http://taxsummaries.pwc.com/ID/Myanmar-Corporate-Deductions and http://taxsummaries.pwc.com/ID/Myanmar-Individual-Deductions [accessed 3 January 2018].
[225] See The Myanmar Times. 2018 'KBZ Bank largest taxpayer for six consecutive years'. 23 January. https://www.mmtimes.com/news/kbz-bank-largest-taxpayer-six-consecutive-years.html [accessed 29 January 2018].
[226] See Aung Thein. 2016. 'Tax Reforms in Myanmar'. Internal Revenue Department, Union of Myanmar Ministry of Planning and Finance. Paper presented at IMF-Japan High-Level Tax Conference for Asian Countries. April 5-7. https://www.imf.org/external/np/seminars/eng/2016/asiatax/pdf/at33.pdf [accessed 23 March 2018].

and practice of private and philanthropic redistribution which have been entrenched during Myanmar's political transition are institutionalising a decidedly regressive form of 'democracy'. Rather than responding to electoral incentives driving state social policy to the interests of the 'median voter', the ideal of private, volitional redistribution endorsed by contemporary Bamar civilian elites generates a form of democracy in which the state takes little action to address the inequalities and injustices produced by decades of military rule. These practices are not formally constitutionally enshrined, yet they are already shaping the redistributive potential of Myanmar's nascent democracy in fundamental ways.

Conclusion

The transition to partial civilian rule in Myanmar since 2011 has shifted the underlying economic logics of philanthropy by nationally-prominent tycoons. During the 1990s and 2000s engaging in philanthropic giving was one of the key ways emergent businesspeople generated the transactional and moral bonds with junta patrons necessary to accrue capital and build commercial empires. The political economy of philanthropy has evolved since 2011 as dynamics of licensing and contracting have become more competitive. This chapter has shown how public philanthropy has endured and intensified as it offers economic elites a more publicly legitimate and 'democratic' basis for political and economic dominance. Myanmar's most prominent tycoons are thus expanding their public philanthropy in to demonstrate their moral and civic commitment relative to other ostensibly less reputable 'cronies'. Unchallenged these practices of philanthropy may help them overcome their dependence on political patronage, offering a path to a more oligarchic status whereby they are increasingly able to defend and expand their commercial empires regardless of political leadership (see Hutchcroft 1991). For now, however, tycoons remain more of less reliant on democratic patrons and must therefore cultivate moral bonds with political elites by 'working for others' and renouncing their wealth for the benefit of 'democracy', as personally encouraged by Aung San Suu Kyi. The commitment to a welfare capitalist ideal of democracy demonstrated through public gifting thus serves to generate social licence for tycoons and their immense and growing economic and political power. Beyond the reputation or symbolic capital accrued by donors, however, these performances of gifting also propagate an imaginary of democracy in which tycoons are essential to systems of redistribution and notions of collective moral community. State-led

See also Oxford Business Group. 2018. 'Tax reforms in Myanmar'. https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/taxation-detail-long-road-towards-tax-reforms [accessed 23 February 2018].

redistribution of assets becomes unnecessary and in some cases undesirable as volitional renunciation of wealth by tycoons strengthens the moral and civic bonds from which many elite and grassroots democracy activists understand true liberation as emerging.

Separate and distinct from the formal institutional constraints to redistribution imposed by the 2008 Constitution, the welfare capitalist understanding of liberation and restoration enacted by many Bamar Buddhist democrats has already begun to shape the redistributive character of democracy. The wide-spread perception that practices of voluntary elite philanthropy enacts a democratic ideal simultaneously deprives the state of the revenue necessary for it to assume more expansive role in redistribution, embeds an increasingly oligarchic elite and entrenches a welfare mix where precarity, contingency and inequity are the defining features of social protection. Ideals and practices of redistribution generated by the tension between redistributive ideas and institutions following the dissolution of state-led socialism in 1988 are thus proving path dependent, limiting the prospects for a critical juncture in the trajectory of Myanmar's welfare regime. The concluding chapter of the dissertation draws together these insights, highlighting the central lessons that the study of Myanmar contributes to comparative literature on regressive democracy and distributive politics during political transition.

Conclusion: From Regressive Democracy to Democratic Redistribution

This dissertation has explained how regressive distribution endures and is entrenched during a political transition. Existing research on regressive democracy largely focuses on formal constitutions and laws designed during authoritarian rule which privilege the interests of economic elites and constrain state-led redistribution of economic assets and power during periods of regime change (Menaldo and Albertus 2013; Ansell and Samuels 2010; 2014). Drawing from literature on the path dependency of private social welfare this mixed-methods interpretive study has argued that informal institutions can pose separate but equally pernicious impediments to the redistributive possibilities of democracy. Using the case of Myanmar, the dissertation has traced ideals and practices of private, non-state welfare and redistribution—'informal institutions'—from their origins in Myanmar's post-socialist period to their framing as 'democratic' amid political transition. In doing so it has highlighted how informal institutions can constrain and foreclose the possibility of democratic redistribution and more equitable social policy in the future.

The thesis makes a number of theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions to the study both of political development in Myanmar and to the assessment of regressive democracy in comparative context. These concluding points focus on the advances the study makes to three areas of research: first, on the origins of informal redistributive institutions; second, on their adaptation and path dependence during political transition; and third, on the impediments they pose to more progressive policy in democratic contexts. I conclude by arguing that a fairer and more equitable democratic politics will only be possible if welfare capitalist ideology is systematically critiqued for its regressivity and more progressive approaches are imagined and enacted by scholars, activists, politicians and the public.

The origins of informal institutions

The case of Myanmar clarifies how informal institutions of redistribution are formed. Using both historical institutional, ethnographic and archival methods, Parts One and Two of the dissertation traced the origins of informal institutions of redistribution in Myanmar to an elite

consensus generated during colonial rule in favour of a low-taxing yet redistributive independence state. Focusing on the tensions between ideas and institutions of redistribution during the critical juncture of 1987 and 1988, it then revealed through original provincial level fieldwork that post-socialist military officials de-emphasised the social obligations of the state in favour of marketisation and a devolution of social governance. The post-socialist attempt to enact a reconfigured form of the colonial distributive consensus thus generated ideals and practices of informal redistribution.

Chapter Two provided the historical context for the informal redistributive institutions that emerged after the dissolution of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) in 1988. Drawing on historical materials it showed how decades of grievances with low-land colonial economic policies, especially the regressive head-tax, escalated into rebellion when the Great Depression devastated and dispossessed agricultural communities. By independence in 1948 these experiences had generated an elite consensus in support of an actively interventionist and redistributive state which was enshrined in the 1947 constitution. However, the weak post-colonial apparatus of taxation and memories of anti-tax sentiment during British rule curtailed the revenue policies independence elites were willing to consider to finance state-led industrialisation. The independence government of U Nu attempted to operate within the constraints of this redistributive yet low-taxing ideal of the state by adopting an interventionist form of welfare capitalism. In a plan reminiscent of the post-Depression New Deal in America, urban-based market trade, foreign investment and industrial enterprises were regulated so as to require enterprises and their employees to co-contribute for provision of formal social protection for workers. Reticent to increasing direct taxation, however, U Nu's instead financed his larger modernisation plan (Pyidawtha) through indirect taxation of the rural population, justifying it through a discourse of sacrifice for national development. At the same time that the financing necessary for the Pyidawtha Plan began to evaporate due to declining global rice prices, military leaders led a process of intensive institution-building. Tatmadaw officers demanded significant autonomy from civilian oversight while unifying personnel around an ideological fusion of socialism and nationalism. Following a period of 'caretaker' administration between 1958 and 1960, Ne Win legitimised his 1962 coup on the grounds that U Nu's interventionist form of welfare capitalism had encouraged foreign investment and capitalist enterprise, thereby perpetuating imperial rule. The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) subsequently sought to control all supply, distribution and civil society in the service of Ne Win's vision of socialist order – at least in low-land areas where it possessed an apparatus

of bureaucratic administration and coercive control. As the black market proliferated in the periphery to fill demand for goods in low-land Burma, the BSPP's deep aversion to foreign trade in agricultural commodities and rigid commitment to state-led industrialisation pushed the economic crisis caused by demonetisation in 1987 to escalate into outright political crisis in 1988.

The consensus against both 'free-market' capitalism and direct taxation that had defined civilian and military rule for decades did not disappear with the dissolution of BSPP rule. Part Two of the dissertation uncovered how tensions between redistributive ideas and institutions shaped the manner in which the post-socialist military junta mediated marketisation at provincial and national level. These tensions produced ideals and practices of private, non-state welfare provision and social expenditure, often framed in abstract idioms of 'social' obligation beyond intimate kin. Chapter Three recounted how the transition to capitalism was navigated by junta officials in provincial lowland areas in ways that encouraged businesspeople to extend patchy forms of social insurance to the needy without making direct state expenditure themselves – an approach to post-socialist governance I term 'authoritarian welfare capitalism'. Localised practices of informal redistribution gradually proliferated under the patronage of businesspeople as well as religious authorities, political activists and ordinary people. Out of the private social expenditures and informal social governance functions made and performed by businesspeople in return for commercial licences and tax remissions a sort of 'hidden welfare state' emerged (see Howard 1999). How were these mechanisms and actors able to cultivate a degree of 'quasi-voluntary compliance' (see Levi 1988) with the demands authoritarian welfare capitalism made on money, time and resources of both rich and poor alike? State ideology, religious authorities, democratic elites and ordinary people reinterpreted the obligations of rich and poor alike to a post-socialist notion of 'community'. As welfare groups proliferated, Buddhist notions of 'charity' (B: *dana*) and 'work for others' (B: *parahita*) were enlisted by religious authorities, commercial elites, ordinary people and activists from across the political spectrum to discursively frame their informal attempts at risk-pooling and redistribution.

Though informal practices of redistribution had a predominantly local orientation during the post-socialist period, Chapter Four demonstrated how these ideals and practices were extended beyond the village and neighbourhood to the trans-local stranger in need. As demonstrated by case studies of Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and Cyclone Komen in 2015, welfare capitalist

mechanisms and idioms were central to how disasters were governed and managed by the post-socialist junta. The chapter thus adds to a growing literature on how external shocks such as natural catastrophes can act as "germinal moments" in state-society relations and distributive politics (Remes 2015: 8). As volunteers with religious, private and other non-state groups disburse relief rivalling, if not exceeding, that provided by formal state institutions, they mobilised ideas of empathy and obligation beyond kin that revealed the informal boundaries of social and political belonging. Yet when relief workers or coordinators had few social ties to communities in need, or when the social distance generated by ethnic or religious difference frays these already limited ties, the variable and contingent protection and solidarity offered by ideals and practices of informal redistribution stretched beyond the local broke down. Here we see the contingencies and inequities of the post-socialist social imaginary mobilised by welfare groups, religious actors and businesspeople since the dissolution of the BSPP in 1988. The social, material and geographic limits of these post-socialist ideals and practices may simultaneously allow them to function while compounding the vulnerability of those excluded for reasons of either logistics or ideology. In the absence of state action which equalises between communities and regions, the elision or excision of populations from ideals and practices of social obligation and informal political community may reinforce the social cleavages of ethnicity, religion and region likely to militate against greater state capacity to tax and progressively redistribute wealth to deliver essential public goods.

From the 'free-market' colonial economy to authoritarian welfare capitalism, the tensions between ideals and institutions that entrenched informal redistribution after 1988 in Myanmar have also been observed in other post-colonial and post-socialist contexts (see MacLean 2004, MacLean 2010b, MacLean 2011a, McGovern 2017: ch 7). Welfare regimes which rely on private provision of social protection often have their roots in the ideas and fears of decision-makers during key moments in time, as literature on early welfare state development in other regressive democracies such as the United States has demonstrated (see Orloff 1988, Béland and Hacker 2004). However, comparative research on the origins of welfare regimes that entrench private and non-state institutions has rarely strayed beyond OECD countries where solid data on the outlay made by households, employers, public and charitable actors (net social expenditure) is less commonly collected. Given the significant role played by private and non-state institutions in welfare provision in both developed (see Adema 1999) and developing contexts alike (see Wood and Gough 2006), future qualitative and archival research on the

origins of informal redistributive institutions in other contexts is necessary to identify other pathways and historical processes from which such welfare regimes emerge.

Path dependency of informal institutions during political transition

The dissertation also sheds light on why regressive systems of redistribution endure during political transition. A growing body of literature on the path dependency of private provision of social welfare demonstrates that once ideals and practices of informal redistribution are entrenched political and economic elites are often able to ensure they sustain or adapt amid periods of political contingency and policy reform (see Hacker 2002, Béland 2005, Hacker 2016a). Part Three of the dissertation makes a contribution to this literature by highlighting that informal redistributive practices can have *practical* and *normative* appeal to democratic-era political and economic elites, as well as ordinary people.

Chapter Five showed how ideals and practices of informal redistribution featured in notions of 'democracy' mobilised after liberalisation in 2011. Activists and wealthy donors who became the core of the NLD's local campaign apparatus frequently compared the functional efficiency of the social outcomes delivered by welfare groups and philanthropic gifts with the bureaucratic opacity and corruption of the Myanmar government's social initiatives. However, informal redistribution was also praised by elite and grassroots members of Myanmar's ruling party as normatively superior to state-led redistribution. Here we see how informal redistribution can be represented as a normative rather than solely practical ideal, as activists believe service for others and renunciation of wealth restores moral and civic bonds of 'democracy' imagined as having existed prior to colonial rule. Despite their organisational origins in post-socialist marketisation, many of the same activists demanding reform of the 'rigged' 2008 Constitution also worked to ensure that existing charitable and philanthropic mechanisms were strengthened and entrenched in a more democratic context. By seeking to morally cultivate youth and socially sanction the behaviour of business elites through prejudicial narratives about Muslims, grassroots advocates for political reform thus ensured that welfare capitalist ideals and practices were institutionalised as 'democratic' during a period of transition.

Welfare capitalist ideals and practices have also been embedded in state social schemes which have expanded since liberalisation in 2011. Chapter Six considered the seeming paradox that contemporary state poverty alleviation and development initiatives are disproportionately

awarded to communities that demonstrate their 'self-reliance' *from* the state. Drawing on case studies and household survey data, it showed that communities who perform their collective 'self-reliance' by pro-actively contributing cash or labour to provision of local public goods are markedly more likely to receive state social aid. Here we see again how the practical and normative appeals of informal redistribution to ostensibly reformist politicians and officials ensures these ideals and practices endure political transition. From a fiscal and bureaucratic perspective, favouring 'self-reliant' communities allows sparse state funds to be 'stretched' far further than if government agencies alone took full responsibility for providing public goods. Yet 'self-reliance' is also *normatively* preferred by many state officials and party activists who see volitional acts of giving and service as generating the bonds required for a truly 'democratic' political community. Villages or wards who are seen as collectively accepting the responsibilities of welfare capitalist 'democracy' by state officials and parliamentarians are considered rightfully worthy of state social assistance. In contrast, communities that do not pro-actively contribute to social initiatives due to poverty or histories of conflict can be legitimately excluded from state aid under the guise of encouraging them to develop virtues of democratic 'self-reliance'. In many ways these modalities of eliciting contributions to local development at implicit threat of exclusion from aid functionally resemble a mutated, liberal form of the forced labour practices for which Myanmar was globally condemned during junta rule. Their *practical* and *normative* appeal to ostensibly 'democratic' officials and actors, however, is central to explaining their endurance and further entrenchment during political transition.

Economic elites also perpetuate informal ideals and practices during political transition by adopting more publicly oriented approaches to redistribution of their wealth. Chapter Seven showed that the practices of philanthropy required for capital accumulation during junta rule have shifted and intensified with the transition to partial civilian rule. No longer is it sufficient to simply satisfy provincial and national military patrons that post-socialist obligations of wealth have been fulfilled through social philanthropy, as was the case under authoritarian welfare capitalism. Rather, elite philanthropy in contemporary Myanmar is far more 'public' as tycoons increasingly seek to patronise social welfare groups, local infrastructure, political parties as well as collective projects of religious and regional identity (re)invention. Using the case of prominent tycoon Khin Maung Aye, the chapter argues that economic elites are intensifying philanthropic practices during political transition in order to generate a publicly-

rooted and more democratic form of the 'social licence' that provided a path to success under junta rule.

In exposing the normative and practical appeals of informal redistribution to partisan, bureaucratic and economic elites the thesis makes a contribution to literature on how informal redistributive institutions endure the electoral incentives heralded by political transition. The bulk of existing research on path dependency in social policy that privileges private and market sources of welfare primarily focuses on periods of policy contingency in industrialised democracies such as the United States and Canada (Béland and Hacker 2004). Meanwhile, existing literature on the perpetuation of regressive distribution in new democracies and during political transition either focuses solely on 'rigged' or 'gamed' formal institutions such as constitutions (see Albertus and Menaldo 2013) or relies on explanations of vote-buying and clientelism to explain regressive social policy (see Keefer 2007). By demonstrating that informal redistribution can have both *practical* and *normative* appeal even to politicians, activists and economic elites who seek reform of formal political institutions, the thesis helps explain why regressive systems of distribution that entrench insecurity for the poor and disproportionately benefit the affluent can endure despite political transition.

Informal redistributive institutions and regressive democracy

The final advance the thesis makes is to understanding the constraints informal redistributive institutions impose on democratic distributive politics. The literature on ideals and practices of non-state, private redistribution largely focuses on industrialised democracies and highlights their often regressive distributional impacts. This study helps expose some of the ways that informal redistributive institutions narrow the scope of possible or imaginable reforms in a new democracy, complicating or eroding incentives to appeal to the 'median voter' in ways that are separate from formal institutional constraints.

First, the role of market actors and economic elites in private mechanisms of redistribution may disrupt attempts to redress past injustices and inequities. As demonstrated in the attempt to suppress activism against land grabs described in Chapter Seven, tycoons are able to cultivate civic and moral bonds with and elicit contingent loyalty from political elites, activists and even their harshest critics by filling the vacuum left by the state in key areas of public goods provision, such as urban waste collection. The symbolic capital and contingent loyalty accrued through public gifts of these kinds can complicate the commitment of democratically

accountable politicians and civil servants to resolve distributive injustices and precarity caused by land grabs or other business deals past and present. Democratic redistribution is certainly constrained by the legal terms of the 2008 Constitution as well as the *real politik* of the negotiated political transition. However, the contingent social licence economic elites are able to accrue by fulfilling their obligations in welfare capitalist ideal can also serve to partially legitimise their past and ongoing economic exploitation while laying the ground for their future oligarchic dominance over democratic politics.

Second, the role of economic elites in delivering redistributive public goods in the absence of the state can entrench an equilibrium which avoids the possibility of implementing policies aimed at delivering more consistent and less precarious welfare outcomes for the 'median voter'. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the intensifying role of tycoons and international companies in public philanthropy provides both legal and informal scope to minimise and negotiate tax dues. Myanmar tax law permits companies and individuals to reduce the amount of assessable income by up to 25 percent in exchange for donations made to 'registered' charities and foundations. Most major domestic and international companies operating in Myanmar now make regular and public contributions to personal or corporate foundations. These 'gifts' probably achieve some positive social outcomes yet, as with informal redistributive systems more broadly, likely have a net regressive outcome, particularly as they serve to deprive already underfunded state institutions of revenue essential for expanding social services. Here we see the importance of viewing the constraints imposed by informal redistributive institutions as separate to those of formal institutions such as Myanmar's military-drafted 2008 Constitution. Following constitutional procedure, laws on taxation can be amended with a simple majority of the Union parliament and thus can be changed without the support of military representatives. Yet many democratically elected legislators and activists including Aung San Suu Kyi, view philanthropic provision of public goods as both functionally necessary and normatively admirable. As a result, few contemporary politicians see much appeal in amending tax concessions, creating new means of taxing resource rents or developing and enforcing more progressive company or income tax codes. Consequentially, the primary strategy of state revenue raising now rests on expanding indirect taxes on consumption of which the poor pay a far higher proportion of income than the affluent.[227] The

[227] See Aung Thein. 2016. 'Tax Reforms in Myanmar'. Internal Revenue Department, Union of Myanmar Ministry of Planning and Finance. Paper presented at IMF-Japan High-Level Tax Conference for Asian Countries. April 5-7. https://www.imf.org/external/np/seminars/eng/2016/asiatax/pdf/at33.pdf [accessed 23 March 2018].

constraints imposed by ideals and practices of informal redistributive institutions thus function separately to those of legal institutions, serving to 'feed back' into further regressive outcomes despite electoral incentives to appeal to the 'median voter'.

Third, state social schemes that reward informal contributions to social welfare or public goods initiatives can exacerbate pernicious social and economic inequities. As discussed in Chapter Six, the entrenchment of 'self-reliance' as a criterion upon which state officials and parliamentarians disperse poverty alleviation and development programmes effectively renders 'rights' contingent upon competition with other poor communities. Hierarchies of wealth and power must be hidden behind a performance of collective unity and 'self-reliance' in the hope that demonstrating the bonds of 'community' may result in state officials deeming the village or ward worthier than others to receive the goods of government-mediated development or social aid. What emerges is zero-sum game in which the poor have clear incentives both to engage in competing performances of 'self-reliance' by bonding themselves to local elites and to tacitly or actively endorsing attempts to regulate or excise from political community minorities such as the Rohingya who are deemed by state ideology and political elites as free-riding non-citizens. The entrenchment of informal redistribution as a criterion of 'worthiness' to state aid thus serves to 'stretching' limited government funds, hide economic hierarchies and encourage individuals to actively and at times viciously regulate the boundaries of political community.

Fourth, the protection provided by the ideals and practices of welfare capitalism place contingency, partiality and inequity at the heart of democratic practice. Access to aid from informal redistributive institutions linked to welfare groups, religious authorities, philanthropic foundations and the state rely far more on brokerage by intermediaries and moral performances of 'worthiness' by potential beneficiaries than fair and impartial provision of aid by state officials according to the needs of ordinary people. As a result, 'rights' to which one may be entitled by virtue of citizenship or at least payment of (regressive) taxes are replaced by a more slippery, bounded and contingent relationship of the 'gift' to which moral worthiness and thus eligibility must be proved. Precarity is inherent to the 'problematic inclusion' that such informal systems of social protection deliver, as providers of aid can withhold assistance in the context of scarcity or if the correlative duties of *reciprocal* relationships are not fulfilled (see Wood 2003). Moreover, as demonstrated by the social and geographic limits of non-state disaster relief efforts discussed in Chapter Four, the civic and moral content that discursively

frames informal ideals and practices of redistribution may exacerbate social cleavages of race, religion and region while further entrenching perceptions of the state as inefficient, stingy and uncaring. Informal redistributive ideals and practices may deliver essential aid in times of scarcity and need. Yet by offering a vision of a redistributive though low taxing democracy and further cleaving notions of 'national' political community they may also constrain the ability of elected officials to make more progressive formal tax revenue demands on elites and ordinary people (Lieberman 2001, Lieberman 2003a). By eroding the development of state revenue capacity, the partiality of informal redistribution may thereby ensure that regressive outcomes and inequality endure despite electoral incentives to address the insecurity experienced by the 'median voter'.

Reimagining the possibilities of democratic redistribution

The path dependence of informal redistributive institutions generated during post-socialist junta rule in Myanmar is limiting the possibility of more inclusive and socially progressive democratic governance. Starved of revenue, constrained by the 2008 Constitution and bound in complex ways to ideals and practices of informal redistribution, Aung San Suu Kyi and her senior advisers now govern according to the logics of welfare capitalism. This ideology is reminiscent of the vision of an 'associative state' popularised (though rarely enacted) by Herbert Hoover and other American Progressives in the 1910s and 1920s (see Hawley 1974). Yet in contrast to the highly progressive tax system and New Deal welfare initiatives erected in the wake of America's subsequent experience of the Great Depression, or the vision of a welfare state promised by the more interventionist welfare capitalist ideology of U Nu's Pyidawtha Plan of the 1950s, Myanmar's contemporary political elites make few promises of more progressive or redistributive social policy. Instead, the alliance between Suu Kyi's NLD and post-socialist economic elites intensifies market capitalism and foreign investment while further entrenching ideals and practices of informal redistribution. The neoliberal ideal of private redistribution and low direct taxation is likely to produce overwhelmingly regressive social and economic outcomes while foreclosing more sustainable solutions to the complex political problems bequeathed by decades of authoritarian rule. For instance, in the wake of the purge and flight of more than 650,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh since mid-2017, the NLD has enlisted tycoons to clear previously occupied land and establish agribusiness initiatives, ostensibly as part of efforts by the government-run Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine to support repatriation and reintegration

of refugees.[228] The government has also placed economic concessions at the heart of its 'Business for Peace' scheme, encouraging armed groups to establish public companies that can tender for infrastructure projects and attract foreign investment to ceasefire areas, thereby ensuring "a steady source of income" for their social governance functions.[229] In addition to entrenching the economic and political dominance of commercial and armed elites, and legitimising past and ongoing dispossession experienced by ordinary people, these problematic initiatives also reinforce a cruelly optimistic ideal in which commercially-minded actors *voluntarily* deliver fair, efficient and politically sustainable outcomes in the 'public' interest – with minimal state involvement or formal regulation (see Berlant 2011).

There are pockets of resistance to the welfare capitalist ideals and practices that underpin the alliance between Myanmar's economic and democratic elites. U Win Thein, the Chief Minister of Bago Region who featured in the opening vignette to the dissertation, has faced calls from farmers and NLD members for his resignation in 2018 as a result of his government's slow progress in resolving land disputes as well as close links to economic elites.[230] Yet charting a course for a more progressive, inclusive and socially protective form of democracy requires proper critique of the broader logics and practices of welfare capitalism. Despite the constraints on civilian policy action imposed by the 2008 Constitution there is considerable scope for Myanmar's elected officials and vibrant civil society to challenge the systematic inequity produced by these logics and mechanisms. Activists and politicians genuinely committed to more progressive reform must take seriously the functional capacity and trust which mechanisms of non-state redistribution are perceived to possess. The practical and normative appeal of informal redistributive mechanisms derives from decades of experience of repressive action by state officials, memories that continue to imbue the work of many well-intentioned providers of informal welfare and redistribution. Yet a proper accounting of the exclusion or *problematic inclusion* produced by informal redistributive institutions is essential to imagining a more democratic and fair future. Perceptions of state institutions as inefficient, corrupt and devoid of concern for the welfare of citizens will prove difficult to shift. Yet only by imagining

[228] See Dunant, B. 2018. 'Tycoons on the Frontline of Rakhine Reconstruction'. Voice of America. 23 January. https://www.voanews.com/a/business-leaders-support-myanmar-reconstruction/4219898.html [accessed 24 January 2018].
[229] See Moe Myint. 2018. 'Analysis: Trading Armed Struggle for Battle in the Market Place'. The Irrawaddy. 25 July. https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/trading-armed-struggle-battle-market-place.html [accessed 28 July 2018].
[230] See Chan Thar, 2018. 'Bago chief minister faces call to quit'. The Myanmar Times. 15 January. https://www.mmtimes.com/news/bago-chief-minister-faces-calls-quit.html [accessed 21 January 2018].

less contingent ways of delivering social protection beyond the limits of welfare capitalism, and enacting reform accordingly, will it become possible to dissemble the vicious cycle of precarity, inequality and repression which has defined colonial, post-colonial and post-socialist governance in Myanmar for almost two centuries.

Appendix I: A Note on Language, Interpretation, Usage and Currency

Transliteration

In order to ensure the text is as accessible as possible for all readers I have endeavoured to use as simple an approach to transliteration as possible. In some cases, I have followed John Okell's Guide to Romanization. In others I have chosen to use the transliterations commonly cited by other scholars or which most sensibly reflect the phrasing of my interlocutors. In the of some complex phrases or metaphors I have cited the Burmese language text as well as transliteration to reduce the chance of interpretive ambiguities. A list of the key Burmese terms used throughout the text is included in Appendix II.

Names of people, country, towns and ethnicity

Throughout the text I use Burmese honorifics of 'U' (senior male), 'Daw' (senior female), 'Ko' (male of same age or status) and 'Ma' (female of same age or status) to refer to close interlocutors. I also use honorifics to refer to some historical personalities whose names are rarely cited without then (eg. U Nu).

Readers will note that names for cities and the country of Myanmar change depending on the period to which the text or maps are referring. For the pre-1989 period I use colonial era terms and thus refer to the country as 'Burma', the capital as 'Rangoon' and my primary site of research as 'Toungoo'. In referring to the period after 1989, when the military government changed the name of the country from 'Burma' to 'Myanmar' without public approval, I use the transliterated versions of the terms most of my interlocutors used in Burmese – 'Myanmar' for the country, 'Taungoo' for my primary fieldsite and 'Yangon' for the former capital. Throughout the text I also use 'Burmese' to refer to the citizens of the state or the majority language, and 'Bamar' to refer to the majority ethnic group. When referring to Karen people or the contemporary administrative territory of Karen State I prefer to use 'Karen' rather than the officially used 'Karen' as is this was the strongly stated preference of many of my Karen interlocutors.

Language acquisition and use of research assistants

The bulk of research for this dissertation was conducted in Burmese language. Prior to commencing field research, I completed the equivalent of a year and a half of Burmese language instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute and at the Australian National University. I also completed the intermediate stream of the John Okell Myanmar Language Course in Yangon in April 2015. Soon after I arrived in my fieldsite of Taungoo in February 2015 I also met a retired school teacher turned Burmese tutor with whom I spent an average of two or three afternoons a week between February and June 2015 focusing on spoken structure and phrasing as well as written language. We continued to meet an average of once a week between July 2015 and June 2016. However, I learned most of my *colloquial* spoken Burmese over many long evenings spent in dialogue at betel nut and tea-shops with interlocutors who often patiently explained vocabulary and language structure.

Throughout 2015 my conversational Burmese language ability improved. However, in-depth interviews on abstract topics such as social, spiritual or normative intentions of welfare work were almost always conducted with the support of native Burmese speakers. To assist during these more abstract in-depth interviews, especially during high-stakes one-off interviews with key religious authorities, politicians or business-people, I recruited research assistants with intermediate to advanced levels of English ability. I have withheld the identity of these research assistants for ethical reasons. These research assistants provided simultaneous translation during many high-stakes interviews as well as at public sermons or speeches by religious and political authorities where more complex vocabulary and formal registers were often used.

Where possible I attempted to ask most questions of interviewees myself in Burmese in order to ensure the interviews followed the semi-structured thematic schedule I had set out prior. Responses would then be orally translated by research assistants, and I would take simultaneous written notes in English with operative Burmese words, concepts or phrases included within the text. I clarified any ambiguities of translation directly with interviewees either during or following interviews. The exception to these rules were interviews conducted with Karen populations in Thandaungyi where Burmese language was less commonly spoken as the main language of communication. In these cases, I was always accompanied by a research assistant who spoke the relevant Karen dialect. Any interpretive ambiguities were clarified during or at the conclusion of all interviews with my research assistant and in some cases with the respondent. During the second phase of my research, especially in lower-stakes

interactions with interlocutors I spent considerable time with, interactions and interviews after occurred in Burmese without translators present. In some cases, with my interlocutors' permission, I would make an audio record of statements I did not fully grasp. I would then review these notes or recordings with research assistants later before deleting them as per my ethics protocol. The bulk of in-depth interviews, speeches and sermons quoted verbatim throughout the text of the dissertation were conducted with research assistants present or with their later assistance with clarification of translations. All remaining errors and ambiguities in translation or interpretation are my own.

Exchange rates

Throughout the dissertation I quote Myanmar kyat in US dollars to allow non-Myanmar specialists to compare the magnitude and value of amounts cited. For post-2011 amounts the rate has been calculated at the average market rate during my fieldwork between 2015 and late 2016: 1250 kyat to US$1. Unless otherwise noted historical rates for the SLORC/SPDC period are quoted as the official government rate in the late 1990s and early 2000s of 6 kyats to US$1. However the black-market rate throughout this period appreciated from around 100 kyat to US$1 in the 1996 to over 1000 kyat to US$1 after 2002 and was thus far weaker than the official rate suggested (see Kubo 2007: 290). Amounts cited must therefore be assessed alongside the black market value.

Appendix II: Glossary of Burmese Terms

Term in text	Burmese	English
Ahlu	အလှူ	Meritorious giving
Ahlushin	အလှူရှင်	Chief donor/patron. Literally 'master of the gift'.
Akhwint	အခွင့်	Opportunity, chance or right
Akun	အခွန်	Tax or payment to authority
Amyo	အမျိုး	Kind, kin
Amyotha	အမျိုးသား	Sons of the kind/nation
Agyanbyet-hmu	အကြမ်းဖက်မှု	Terrorise or coerce
Ahlubwe	အလှူပွဲ	Ritual of giving
Atta seit	အတ္တစိတ်	Self centredness. Reverse of *parahita seit*.
Byama-so taya	ဗြဟ္မာစိုရ်တရား	Meritorious practices of moral conduct or truth seen to bridge the mundane and supra-mundane realms.
Cedana	စေတနာ	Compassionate intentions, goodwill
Cheetoh	ချေးထုပ်	Obscene idiom to describe someone/thing

		as useless. Literally 'shit-bag'.
Dana	ဒါန	Meritorious donations
Dhamma	ဓမ္မ	The teachings and truths of the Buddha.
Dhammayone	ဓမ္မရုံ	Meditation hall
Dukkha	ဒုက္ခ	Suffering, 'misery' or 'unsatisfactoriness'
Gasineh	ကပ်စေးနဲ	Stingy
Karuna	ဂရုဏာ	Compassion. Buddhist concept also used by other adherents of other religions.
Kaungyi mingalar	ကောင်းချီးမင်္ဂလာ	Blessings or grace; similar to merit. Often used by Christians.
Kothu kotha, ko ah koko, kothamin kosa	ကိုယ်ထူကိုယ်ထ၊ ကိုယ်အားကိုယ်ကိုး၊ ကိုယ့်ထမင်းကိုယ်စား	Idioms of self-reliance. Literally 'stand on one's own', 'rely on one's own power', 'eat one's own rice'
Kutho	ကုသိုလ်	Buddhist concept of merit acquired through morally virtuous acts.

Lawki	လောကီ	The mundane, material world.
Lawkouttara	လောကုတ္တရာ	The supra-mundane domain beyond worldly attachments.
Lu-gyi	လူကြီး	Powerful or more senior people
Lu-myo	လူမျိုး	Kind/category of person
Lu-mu-yay	လူမှုရေး	Social affairs
Myitta (Burmese), metta (Pali)	မေတ္တာ	Loving-kindness
Myo mi myo pah	မြို့မိမြို့ဖ	Town elder
Naingan pwun pyo doh tat yay	နိုင်ငံဖွံ့ဖြိုးတိုးတက်ရေး	National restoration and development. Formal phrase commonly cited by elites to refer to Myanmar's reform process.
Nibbana (Pali), neikban (Burmese)	နိဗ္ဗာန၊ နိဗ္ဗာန်	The end of cycles of rebirth and suffering in Theravada Buddhism.
Parahita	ပရဟိတ	Work for the good or welfare others.
Parahita seit	ပရဟိတစိတ်	Social consciousness
Pyithu ludu	ပြည်သူလူထု	The people

Pyu pyin yay	ပြုပြင်ရေး	Reform and restoration
Sayadaw	ဆရာတော်	Buddhist abbot
Seh gweh sii	ဆိတ်ငြေးစေ့	Obscene colloquial idiom used to refer to people who regularly shift allegiances. Literally 'goat testicles'.
Si kan	စည်းကမ်း	Discipline
Sii sii lone lone	စည်းစည်းလုံးလုံး	Solidarity or togetherness
Studithar	စတုဒိသာ	Meritorious public feast
Taingyintha	တိုင်းရင်းသား	National races
Tatmadaw	တပ်မတော်	Myanmar's military
Tawun	တာဝန်	Responsibility, duty
Tayabwe	တရားပွဲ	Meditation festival
Thabu-oo	သပွတ်အူ	Loofa-like gourd. Metaphor used to describe Gordian knot of Myanmar's bureaucracy and political system.
Thathana	သာသနာ	The Buddhist religion or community
Tha ye na ye	သာရေး၊ နာရေး	Moments (events) of grief and joy

Appendix III: Methodology of Survey and Analysis

The overall sample of the 1000 household survey was stratified twice: firstly by urban (40 percent) and rural respondents (60 percent) to reflect Myanmar's predominantly rural population while maintaining a large enough urban sample to make meaningful comparisons and conclusions.[231] The rural sample was also stratified at the village level on the basis of receipt of substantive government assistance, with half of the rural sample comprising Department of Rural Development 'Green Emerald' villages.[232]

1002 households were interviewed for the survey, equally split between the two study townships. Respondents were recruited according to systematic random sampling at three levels: landmark sampling, interval sampling and household member selection (Kish grid). Interviews were conducted by trained researchers from Yangon School of Political Science, including specially recruited Sgaw Karen speaking enumerators. All interviews in Taungoo townships were conducted in Burmese language. Of interviews in Thandaungyi township 35 percent were conducted primarily in Sgaw or Bwe Karen and the remaining 65 percent in Burmese.

The survey instrument was developed by the author following the advice of my supervisory panel and a wide review of existing literature on survey methodology in political science. Chapter 8 of Diana Kapiszewski, Lauren MacLean and Benjamin Read (2015) proved particularly useful, especially the focus on the role of surveys in broader mixed-methods and interpretive research. The survey was conducted after a year of intensive qualitative fieldwork (in March 2016), when I felt I understood some of the key practices of reciprocity and interaction with the state in both townships and could benefit from a more systematic assessment of how these dynamics varied by poverty, region, religion and so on. Questions largely on measurable behaviours and practices of reciprocity and payment, and included a

[231] As a result of this sampling method, the overall sample is more urban (40 percent) than the relevant 2014 census data for Bago (22 percent) and Karen State (22 percent). See 'Population and Housing Census of Myanmar, 2014', Ministry of Immigration and Population. http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/myanmar/drive/Census_Provisional_Results_2014_ENG.pdf [accessed 23 January 2016].

[232] For more information on the 'Green Emerald' programme see Robinson et al. 2015. 'Local development funds in Myanmar'. Yangon: The Asia Foundation.

range of household level questions – including income, expenditure and wealth along with recent receipt of social assistance, payment of taxes and donations. The interview with the household head was then coupled with an individual social and political opinion survey, usually of another member of the household. Individual-level questions included religious and civic involvement, as well as opinions on a range of normative questions about the role that non-state and state institutions *should* play in welfare and public good provision. As discussed in Chapter One, after initial analysis key survey findings were then followed up with further interviews and participant observation so clarify potential interpretive ambiguities.

Sampling frame

The survey was conducted in both rural and urban areas of Taungoo and Thandaungyi townships in March 2016 by a team of twenty-six researchers recruited and coordinated by project partner Yangon School of Political Science (YSPS).

For the 500 households in each township, a simple 40 percent urban and 60 percent rural stratification was adopted. In order to achieve a relatively representative sample across both urban and rural areas, as well as to simplify the logistics of data collection, a simple sampling frame of 25 households in each selected ward or village was adopted. A total of 8 urban wards and 14 rural villages were thus selected in both Taungoo and Thandaungyi.

Urban sample

In Taungoo, urban wards were selected on the basis the number of households in each ward or village group listed in the 2014 census. The 8 most populated wards were then selected.

A slightly different approach was adopted in Thandaungyi, where as a result of differing settlement patterns the township contains four separate urban areas. In this case, the two most populated wards were selected from each of the four municipal areas – Thandaungyi, 13 Mile, Leiktho and Baw Ga Li (a KNU/Myanmar Government mixed-administered town).

Rural sample

In rural areas the sample was stratified further to capture whether receipt of significant government assistance in a particular village impacts indicators of civic participation, access to services as well as perception of the government in service delivery and taxation.

Selection of villages involved two stages. First, village groups in each township were ranked by population according to the 2014 census.[233] Then the seven most populated village groups which contained a village receiving assistance from the Department of Rural Development 'Green Emerald' village were selected.[234]

The Green Emerald project, run out of the Department of Rural Development, is a loans and community development scheme. Since 2013 the scheme has been providing 30 million kyats in loans and additional services to selected villages across Myanmar – both in Bamar-majority and ethnic-minority states. Importantly, the scheme operates in areas under mixed government and armed-group administration where ceasefires have been reached – including in Thandaungyi.[235]

Fifty (50) interviews were then conducted in each selected village group, twenty-five in the relevant Green Emerald village and twenty-five in a 'control' village in the same village group that was not part of the scheme.[236] This approach was designed to ensure comparison of like-with-like cases for both the treatment and control group when identifying the extent of the 'Green Emerald' effect.

Randomisation of Respondent Selection

Three methods of random sampling were deployed in data collection to ensure systematic randomisation: landmark, interval and – unless impossible due to unavailability of respondents – random selection of the gender and age of respondents using a Kish grid.

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[233] As of early 2016 the village group or tract level was the lowest administrative tier for which 2014 census data was aggregated and made publicly available. A single village group commonly contains numerous individual villages, each containing an average of around 100 households. This thus allowed us to select two villages within each village group for comparison - one on the basis of the treatment variable (Green Emerald) and another control village.

[234] For the 2013-2016 period, Taungoo contained 21 Green Emerald villages across 20 village groups. Thandaungyi contained a total of 17 individual Green Emerald villages, distributed across 12 village groups (thus five village groups contained two Green Emerald villages). This data was obtained from the township Department of Rural Development and General Administration Department offices in Taungoo and Thandaungyi. My thanks for their assistance.

[235] For more information see Robertson, B. et al, (2015), 'Local development funds in Myanmar', The Asia Foundation, Yangon.

[236] Upon arriving in a village, supervisors met directly with local village administrators to determine whether the village was or was not a participant in the Green Emerald scheme. In one village in Thandaungyi township the 30 million kyat in available loans provided to a village formally participating in the 'Green Emerald' scheme had been informally split equally with two other villages in the same village group, ostensibly by administrators in the interests of equality and community cohesion. Given the diffusion of the treatment variable in this context, interviewers then proceeded to the next most populated village group containing a Green Emerald village in Thandaungyi township.

Upon arrival in a village or ward, the supervisor for each team met with the village or ward headman and each interviewer was selected to determine the actual population in the village based on their own data. Based on the number of households, an interval between each household was calculated for that individual ward or village. In urban areas this averaged around 30 households, and in rural areas 3 or 4 households between each interview. If a refusal was encountered in an urban area where a full interval would require a significant walk (over 500 metres in some contexts) respondents continued their walk another two houses in order to conduct an interview in the area of the original interval.

Landmarks from which individual interviewers commenced their walk through a ward or village were chosen randomly accordingly to a grid of prioritised landmarks available in the area.

Upon arrival at the household, individual respondents were then randomly chosen on the basis of their gender and birthday according to a Kish grid. In the case of the selected respondent being unable for interview, the household head was selected instead.

Poverty indicators and quintiles

All respondents were allocated a poverty score on the basis of a series of household asset and wealth indicators recorded during the interview, which were then grouped into five 'poverty quintiles' for ease of analysis. The scorecard was adapted from a tool developed for the Myanmar context by development economist Mark Schreiner (2012).

Based on this poverty scorecard, middle-income households represented the largest segment of the sample (44 percent) followed by poor households (34 percent), rich households (14 percent) and poorest households (7 percent). Richest households comprised less than 1 percent of the sample. When urban and rural areas are differentiated, the poverty profile of rural respondents is of a comparable composition to the nationally representative Myanmar 2009/2010 Integrated Household Living Assessment.

Below are the poverty likelihoods for each quintile, based on the look-up table for scores in Schreiner (2012: 4).

- The median score for respondents in the poorest quintile (n=68) was 16. This means 75% chance of living on less than $1.25 per day and 33% chance of living below the USAID Extreme Poverty line.
- The median score for respondents in the poor quintile (n=343) was 32. In the poor quintile, there is 35.1% chance they will live on less than $1.25 per day, and 99% chance of less than $2.50. 13% likelihood of being below the USAID Extreme Poverty line.
- The median score for respondents in the middle-income quintile (n=441) was 50. For middle-income quintile, there is a 5% likelihood of living on less than $1.25 per day, 2% below the USAID Extreme Poverty line and 86% chance of living on less than $2.50 per day.
- The median score for respondents in the rich quintile (n=141) was 67. In the rich quintile, there is no chance of living below the USAID Extreme poverty line and 49.5% chance of living on less than $2.50 per day.
- The median score for respondents in the richest quintile (n=9) was 83. For this small group, there was no chance of living below the USAID Extreme poverty line and 19% chance of living on less than $2.50 per day.

Economic and poverty comparison of sample townships

The two townships surveyed for this study – Taungoo in Bago Region and Thandaungyi in Karen State – have significantly different economic structures but similar proportions of middle income households. Trade is a far more important source of income for households in Taungoo than in Thandaungyi which is much more reliant on agriculture.

The household survey conducted for this study included a number of instruments to elicit the proportional importance of key sources of household income and expenditure.[237] According to these answers, 41 percent of respondents in Thandaungyi reported crop-production accounting

[237] The sampling frame for the survey was stratified on the basis 60 percent rural and 40 percent urban in both townships. See the Appendix III for more information.

for between 30 and 50 percent of household income. This is compared with less than 7 percent in Taungoo who said crops accounted for 30% or more of household income, with 85 percent of respondents there saying crop production was less than 10 percent or a negligible proportion of their household income. Similarly, 44 percent of Thandaungyi households said that sale of livestock accounted for between 10 and 30% of household income, compared with less than 14 percent in Taungoo.

Similar proportions in both townships reported that agricultural labour accounted for all household income (6% in Taungoo and 4% in Thandaungyi). However, agricultural labour was much more important in Thandaungyi with 43% reporting between 20% and half of household income coming from agricultural labour, compared with 15% in Taungoo. These various indicators highlight the relative isolation of Thandaungyi from networks of trade in central Myanmar and thus reliance upon the agricultural economy compared with the more diversified household incomes of urban and rural populations in Taungoo.

Reflecting these structural differences, trade accounts for a larger proportion of household income in Taungoo than Thandaungyi. In Thandaungyi, 15% of respondents reported trade accounting for between 20% and 40% of household income. Only 3.5% of households said trade was more than 40% of income. In comparison, 15% of respondents in Taungoo reported trade in goods (excluding retail) accounting for between 50% and 100% of household income.[238]

Given these variations in economic structures, poverty analysis of survey respondents based on household assets (Figure 2) shows that the proportion of poor respondents is higher in Thandaungyi (37.5 percent) than in Taungoo (31 percent). However, middle-income households – the largest proportion of the sample in both townships – comprise a similar proportion of the sample in Taungoo (46.7%) compared with Thandaungyi (41%).

[238] Less than 25 people across the whole sample receives salary from the military; less than 60 receive a pension; 160 across the sample report receive salary from civil service with a slightly larger proportion in Thandaungyi than Taungoo.

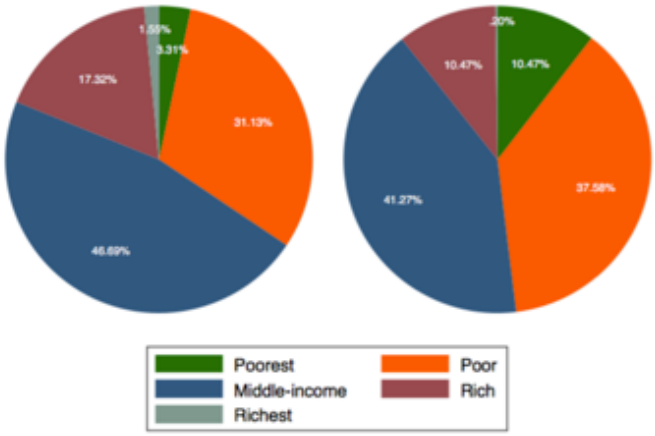

Figure 37 Poverty indicators for respondents in Taungoo (left) and Thandaungyi (right) township.

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