



BRILL

EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF  
EAST ASIAN STUDIES 17 (2018) 193–227

European Journal  
of  
East Asian Studies  
brill.com/ejea

# Postcolonial Capitalism and the Politics of Dispossession

## *Political Trajectories in Southern Myanmar*

*Geoffrey Aung*

Department of Anthropology, Columbia University

*gra2001@columbia.edu*

### Abstract

This article examines the trajectory of struggles over land and resources in Dawei, a town in southern Myanmar. The site of a major special economic zone project, Dawei has seen sustained mobilisation around displacement, dispossession and environmental degradation, against the backdrop of national political and economic reforms. Recently, scholars have argued that earlier visions of postcolonial transition have lost their empirical and political purchase, as farmers dispossessed of land increasingly become excluded from formal capitalist production. What happens to politics and political form if dynamics of exclusion, rather than transition, organise political activity under today's conditions of accumulation? Repurposing Kalyan Sanyal's concept of postcolonial capitalism, this article describes and theorises the politics of dispossession in Dawei. Tracing the political activities of activist groups and villagers, it argues that two contrasting political trajectories—one secular–egalitarian, one situational–differential—constitute a heterogeneous political field, reflecting the complexity of postcolonial capitalism itself.

### Keywords

dispossession – postcolonialism – special economic zones – civil society – Myanmar

## 1 Introduction

The site of one of the world's largest infrastructure projects lies on Myanmar's southern coast, near a town called Dawei. Plans for the Dawei special economic zone (SEZ) include a deep-sea port, a vast petrochemical estate, a dam and two reservoirs, an industrial zone for light industries, and road and rail links to Thailand. Requiring an initial \$8 billion in investment—and the displacement of over 20,000 people—the Dawei SEZ would be the largest SEZ in Southeast Asia, with a land area of nearly 200 sq. km. Implementation began in 2010, but after investment shortfalls and mobilisation by farmers, fishers, community leaders and activist groups, the Myanmar government suspended the project in 2013. Objections to land seizures, environmental impacts and employment provisions ranked high among critics' concerns. Meanwhile, the National League for Democracy (NLD) swept to power in 2015 and now leads the regional government in Dawei. Having earlier called for a reassessment of the SEZ project, the government now says it plans to resume the project in 2018.

Drawing on fifteen months of ethnographic research in Dawei, this article examines one of Myanmar's most prominent struggles against dispossession, asking what politics are being forged between a liberalising state apparatus and narrowing agrarian livelihoods. The article contributes to a critical scholarship emerging from South and Southeast Asia, which argues that as dispossession continues, earlier imaginaries of postcolonial transition—from farm to factory, peasant to proletariat, pre-capital to capital—now lack empirical and political purchase, creating an impasse demanding new knowledge and new politics.<sup>1</sup> For while a wave of land acquisitions has expropriated peasantries across the South,<sup>2</sup> declining absorption of their labour has rendered many of them surplus to the expanded reproduction of capital.<sup>3</sup> In Southeast Asia, scholars have

1 Partha Chatterjee, 'Democracy and economic transformation in India', *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, 16 (2008), 53–62; T.M. Li, *Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality, and Post-Colonial Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2007).

2 Saturnino M. Borras and Jennifer Franco, 'Global land grabbing and trajectories of agrarian change: a preliminary analysis', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 12, 1 (2012), 34–59; Derek Hall, 'Rethinking primitive accumulation: theoretical tensions and rural Southeast Asian complexities', *Antipode* 44, 2 (2012), 1188–208; Derek Hall, 'Primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, and the global land grab', *Third World Quarterly* 34, 9 (2013), 1582–604; Ben White, Saturnino Borras, Ruth Hall, Ian Scoones and Wendy Wolford, 'The new enclosures: critical perspectives on corporate land deals', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, 3–4 (2012), 619–647.

3 T.M. Li, 'To make live or let die? Rural dispossession and the protection of surplus populations',

shown how this exclusion dynamic pushes dispossessed producers towards employment in informal, low-wage and precarious labour.<sup>4</sup> This ‘agrarian question of labour’,<sup>5</sup> wherein farmers’ land is needed but their labour is not,<sup>6</sup> puts land politics at the centre of changing political modernities in the postcolonial world. After the telos of transition, what futures are at stake for postcolonial politics? For those facing dispossession and exclusion, what kind of mobilisations come to the fore, whether to halt dispossession or secure governmental interventions?

Against this backdrop, this article holds up Dawei as a place where, in the wake of long-held visions of transition, and in response to dispossession today, new political trajectories are being imagined, fought over and brought into being. Drawing on Chatterjee’s distinction between civil and political society—the latter, for Chatterjee,<sup>7</sup> names a key form of struggles against dispossession—two political trajectories are identified and associated with different actors in the Dawei area, one secular–egalitarian and one situational–differential. Yet rather than assimilating the two trajectories to a duality between civil and political society, respectively, the paper foregrounds the instability and interpenetration of these trajectories, arguing that a heterogeneous political terrain has emerged that corresponds to and reflects what Sanyal calls ‘postcolonial capitalism’.<sup>8</sup>

This article describes and theorises the politics of dispossession in Dawei. Repurposing the notion of postcolonial capitalism, it shows how villagers’ and

---

*Antipode* 41, 1 (2009), 66–93; Kanya Sanyal and Rajesh Bhattacharyya, ‘Beyond the factory: globalisation, informalisation of production, and the new locations of labour’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, 22 (2009), 35–44.

4 Dennis Arnold and Soe Lin Aung (Geoffrey Aung), ‘Exclusion to visibility, vulnerability to voice: informal economy workers in the Mekong countries’, discussion paper prepared for Oxfam-Solidarité, of Oxfam-in-Belgium (2011); Stephen Campbell, ‘Solidarity formations under flexibilisation: workplace struggles of precarious migrants in Thailand’, *Global Labour Journal* 4, 2 (2013); Stephen Campbell, *Border Capitalism, Disrupted: Precarity and Struggle in a Southeast Asian Industrial Zone* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Derek Hall, Philip Hirsch and Tania Li, *Powers of Exclusion: Land Dilemmas in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011); Li, ‘To make live or let die?’

5 Henry Bernstein, ‘“Changing before our very eyes”: agrarian questions and the politics of land in capitalism today’, *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4, 1–2 (2004), 190–225; Michael Levien, ‘The land question: special economic zones and the political economy of dispossession in India’, *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, 3–4 (2012), 933–969; Philip McMichael, ‘Peasants make their own history, just not as they please ...’, *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, 2–3 (2008), 205–228.

6 T.M. Li, ‘Centering labour in the land grab debate’, *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, 2 (2011), 281–298.

7 Chatterjee, ‘Democracy and economic transformation in India’.

8 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*.

activists' responses to the SEZ indicate fundamental shifts in the conditions and actualities of peasant politics, departing from earlier forms of postcolonial politics and theories of new forms more recently. First, scholarship on the politics of dispossession in colonised and postcolonial settings is considered. The paper then turns to the past and present of political activities around the Dawei SEZ, examining the work of the Dawei Development Association (DDA), the foremost organisation mobilising around the project, as well as other activities in the area. The data comes from ethnographic research conducted in Dawei from 2016 to 2018. The paper also draws on the author's experience working as a researcher supporting Dawei organisations between 2011 and 2013.

## 2 Politics and Political Form under Postcolonial Capitalism

Studies of the accumulation of capital have received fresh impetus since the early 2000s. A revitalised scholarship on dispossession has argued that a process Marx largely consigned to capital's prehistory<sup>9</sup>—'so-called primitive accumulation', or the separation of producers from the means of production—is in fact a persistent feature of the expanded reproduction of capital in the present.<sup>10</sup> Yet contrasting narratives have emerged over how and why, including where and with what political implications, dispossession persists. The most influential account belongs to Harvey: that is, 'accumulation by dispossession'.<sup>11</sup> Harvey argues that ongoing dispossession reflects crisis tendencies internal to capital, especially overaccumulation crises that require spatial expansion and intensification across North and South, urban and rural. Much has been made of Harvey's thesis, not least by scholars focused on Southeast Asia.<sup>12</sup> Less

9 Karl Marx, *Capital Volume One* (London: Penguin Books and New Left Review, 1990).

10 Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the 21st Century* (New York: Verso, 2007); Gillian Hart, 'Denaturalizing dispossession: critical ethnography in the age of resurgent imperialism', *Antipode* 38, 5 (2006), 977–1004; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Sandro Mezzadra, 'The topicality of pre-history: a new reading of Marx's analysis of "so-called primitive accumulation"', *Rethinking Marxism* 23, 3 (2011), 302–321; Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Jason Read, 'Primitive accumulation: the aleatory foundation of capitalism', *Rethinking Marxism* 14, 2 (2002), 24–49.

11 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.

12 Jim Glassman, 'Primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, and accumulation by "extra-economic" means', *Progress in Human Geography* 30, 5 (2006), 608–625; Hall, 'Rethinking primitive accumulation'; Hall, 'Primitive accumulation, accumulation

commonly discussed is the political vision that flows from Harvey's analysis. For Harvey, the rise of finance capital, which is intrinsically turbulent, means dispossession now permeates the space–time of capital, opening up deeply solidaristic political possibilities. Finance capital, he argues, provides an 'organic link', an 'umbilical cord' uniting the struggles of urban workers and those of farmers and peasants.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars working self-consciously in colonised or postcolonial settings have in many cases departed from Harvey's rendering, contending it is not any internal logic of capital that reproduces dispossession, but problems of politics, ideology and subjectivity. For Coulthard, an indigenous activist and theorist of struggles against dispossession in Canada, at issue is the making of indigenous colonised subjects, who by accepting and identifying with colonial power relations, ultimately accede to the dispossession of native lands.<sup>14</sup> Sanyal, on the other hand, writes in the wake of peasant movements against an SEZ project in West Bengal.<sup>15</sup> He argues that for various politico-ideological reasons—the need for elites to seek subaltern classes' consent to preserve fragile ruling projects; the normative legitimacy of 'development' in postcolonial states; the governmentalisation of state apparatuses across the decolonised world—continued dispossession would be untenable without programmes in welfarist governmentality that mitigate the force of primitive accumulation, hence sustaining its conditions of possibility. This scholarship<sup>16</sup> centres power, subjectivity and coloniality in understanding dispossession, implicitly—and sometimes explicitly<sup>17</sup>—troubling the systematising, economistic elements of Harvey's thesis.

---

by dispossession, and the global land grab'; Chris Sneddon, 'Nature's materiality and the circuitous paths of accumulation: dispossession of freshwater fisheries in Cambodia', *Antipode* 39, 1 (2007), 167–193.

13 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 179.

14 Glenn Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

15 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*.

16 See also Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Chatterjee, 'Democracy and economic transformation in India'; Julia Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Levien, 'The land question'; Li, *Land's End*.

17 Partha Chatterjee, 'Democracy, populism, and the political management of primitive accumulation', in *The Land Question in India: State, Dispossession, and Capitalist Transition*, eds Anthony P. D'Costa and Achin Chakraborty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Michael Levien, 'Special economic zones and accumulation by dispossession in India', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11, 4 (2011), 454–483.

In colonised and postcolonial settings, attending to the transit between dispossession and coloniality surfaces political aspects that might otherwise remain occluded. Or put differently: if Harvey's historicist reading of capital's 'organic unity' is what enables his vision of solidarity across struggles within expanded reproduction and against dispossession,<sup>18</sup> what alternative political trajectories might become legible if capitalist development is understood in more differential terms—as in scholarship sited in colonised and postcolonial settings? Sanyal's theorisation of postcolonial capitalism enters here. For Sanyal, capitalism in the decolonised world represents a 'complex hegemonic order' wherein a duality between capital and non-capital is perpetually produced and recreated.<sup>19</sup> Ongoing primitive accumulation dispossesses primary producers, while politico-ideological factors, such as those noted above, lead postcolonial states to mitigate its impacts through governmental interventions. These interventions enable basic subsistence for people dispossessed, who are increasingly likely to be excluded from the formal reproduction of capital. Sanyal argues that the economic activity of people excluded is irreducible to that which takes place within formal capitalist production, so he refers to their activity in terms of non-capital.<sup>20</sup> Unlike pre-capital in 'transition to capitalism' narratives, non-capital will not be overcome; it is produced and maintained by today's political economies in the decolonised world. Moreover, the ongoing process of exclusion that non-capital reflects means postcolonial capitalism, for Sanyal, fundamentally reproduces difference and heterogeneity—*contra* the unifying geography that Harvey, for one, projects.

At issue, here, is what kind of politics and political forms become visible if this linkage between dispossession and postcolonialism is taken seriously. As Sanyal suggests, a politics grappling with exclusion and heterogeneity, driven by ongoing dispossession, might diverge considerably from a more singular, unilineal politics of capitalist transition, which has dominated political imaginations for decades in postcolonial countries.<sup>21</sup> Struggles around or against dispossession, then, take on new importance as objects of inquiry in order to recognise political trajectories that older, historicist narratives of transition might otherwise obscure.

18 David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (New York: Verso, 2006), xix.

19 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*, 7–8.

20 In Sanyal's formulation, non-capital denotes a need economy based on survival, while capital denotes an accumulation economy based on conventional capitalist production, 'driven by a relentless urge for accumulation and expansion' (Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*, 211).

21 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*, 255; Sanyal and Bhattacharyya, 'Beyond the factory', 42.

This article builds on Sanyal's formulation, yet reconsiders two aspects in and through its transposition. First, state power in Myanmar reaches more widely and deeply than ever before, but the welfarist governmentality Sanyal identifies as part of dispossession's reproduction in India is, at most, at a nascent stage in Myanmar—and not necessarily on its way to any kind of completion as a process, as will be seen.<sup>22</sup> Second, Sanyal's binary theorisation of capital and non-capital has come under criticism in empirical and conceptual terms: stressing the distinction between the two, it threatens to overlook how forms of subordination and exploitation intrinsic to capitalist production might remain operative within the largely informal sector activities Sanyal considers under non-capital.<sup>23</sup> Sanyal's writings on postcolonial capitalism grew from struggles against an SEZ project in West Bengal. By resituating them vis-à-vis the Dawei SEZ project in Myanmar, some of their more dualistic aspects are revised in light of specific, grounded political activities, in line with how scholars in colonised or postcolonial settings tend themselves towards situated interventions that disrupt more systematising, economic conceptual frameworks.

If changed conditions of capital accumulation place in question longstanding accounts of postcolonial politics, then so too might peasant politics require rethinking.<sup>24</sup> Chatterjee,<sup>25</sup> for example, argues that fundamental changes have taken place in rural societies since theorists of peasant resistance in South and Southeast Asia contributed seminal works in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>26</sup> In Myanmar, these studies continue to set the terms for research on rural

22 See Elliott Prasse-Freeman, 'Power, civil society, and an inchoate politics of the daily in Burma/Myanmar', *Journal of Asian Studies* 71, 2 (2012), 371–397, for more on the abiding 'low infrastructural power' of Myanmar's postcolonial state, which resonates with how Scott describes the longue durée limits of the state in Myanmar and neighbouring countries (James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)).

23 Campbell (*Border Capitalism Disrupted*) offers a similar argument based on research on the Thai–Myanmar border.

24 Cf. Michael Levien, 'The politics of dispossession: theorizing India's "land wars"', *Politics and Society* 41, 3 (2013), 351–394.

25 Chatterjee, 'Democracy and economic transformation in India'.

26 Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852–1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974); Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protests against the European Colonial Order* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1983); James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

politics,<sup>27</sup> in part due to restrictions under military rule that for decades prevented sustained ethnographic research in rural areas.<sup>28</sup> As a result, transformations in rural life seen elsewhere regionally—the variable spread of governmental power, the growing reach of transnational capital, the allure of urban mobility and consumption<sup>29</sup>—have been slow to register in Myanmar's ethnographic archive. In Dawei, however, as will be argued here, agrarian subjects now encounter capital and the state not from a cohesive, oppositional outside, as in earlier accounts of peasant politics and moral economies,<sup>30</sup> but rather ambivalently from positions of implication and entanglement. The result is that alongside a contentious politics of protest and direct action, there has also emerged a more differential, fragmented politics of negotiation and compromise.

Notably, classic studies of peasant politics in many ways reflect historicist transition narratives. As tragedy or otherwise, such studies often stage peasant resistance and rebellion in opposition to forces of modernist transformation, among them capitalism, imperialism and elite nationalism. Here, then, post-colonial capitalism is taken not just as a provocation to rethink historicism and transition, but also assumptions about political form embedded in unilineal historical thinking. In that vein, Sanyal<sup>31</sup> and Chatterjee<sup>32</sup> have both proposed that Chatterjee's notion of political society<sup>33</sup> might heuristically open up the forms of politics and political activity that have emerged around processes of

27 Ian Brown, *A Colonial Economy in Crisis. Burma's Rice Cultivators and the World Depression of the 1930s* (London: Routledge, 2005); Victor Lieberman, 'Introduction: The ends of the earth', in *Strange Parallels, Vol. 1: Integration on the Mainland: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Prasse-Freeman, 'Power, civil society, and an inchoate politics of the daily in Burma/Myanmar'; Elliott Prasse-Freeman, 'Grassroots protest movements and mutating conceptions of "the political" in an evolving Burma', in *Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar*, eds Renaud Egretreau and François Robinne (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2015); Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*.

28 Cf. Ardeth Thawngmung, *Behind the Teak Curtain: Authoritarianism, Agricultural Policies, and Political Legitimacy in Rural Burma/Myanmar* (London: Routledge, 2004) for an exception.

29 Chatterjee, 'Democracy and economic transformation in India'; Andrew Walker, *Thailand's Political Peasants: Power in the Modern Rural Economy* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

30 Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

31 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*.

32 Chatterjee, 'Democracy and economic transformation in India'.

33 Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).



dispossession and exclusion under today's conditions of accumulation. Political society, for Chatterjee, refers to people who

do not relate to the organs of the state in the same way that the middle classes do, nor do governmental agencies treat them as proper citizens belonging to civil society. Those in political society make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations.<sup>34</sup>

The political society concept has engendered considerable debate, especially for maintaining too neat a separation between civil and political society,<sup>35</sup> as well as for being too broad as a concept to cover the specificities of struggles around dispossession.<sup>36</sup>

In the Dawei area, the two political trajectories identified could map easily onto a civil–political society distinction. Informed by debates over the political society concept, though, and following the empirical material itself, this article argues against reinforcing a civil–political society binary, describing the two trajectories instead as tendencies or dynamics that overlap. Amid such intermixing, neither civil nor political society exhausts the forms of political activity that have taken shape in Dawei. On the contrary, it is argued that a multiplicity of political forms reflects the heterogeneity of postcolonial capitalism. This construction points beyond current theorisations of the politics of dispossession, whether visions of a convergent anti-capitalism, in Harvey's thesis;<sup>37</sup> a more all-encompassing political society argument, in Chatterjee;<sup>38</sup> reassertions of agrarian radicalism;<sup>39</sup> or Sanyal's own speculations on postcolo-

34 Chatterjee, 'Democracy and economic transformation in India', 57.

35 Nikhil Anand, *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Ajay Gudavarthy, ed., *Reframing Democracy and Agency in India: Interrogating Political Society* (London: Anthem Press, 2012); Swagato Sarkar, 'Political society in a capitalist world', in *Reframing Democracy and Agency in India: Interrogating Political Society*, ed. Ajay Gudavarthy (London: Anthem Press, 2012).

36 Levien, 'The politics of dispossession'.

37 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.

38 Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*; Chatterjee, 'Democracy and economic transformation in India'.

39 Levien, 'The politics of dispossession'; Prasse-Freeman, 'Grassroots protest movements and mutating conceptions of "the political" in an evolving Burma'; Ananya Roy, 'The

nial political directions, which draw on and overlap with Chatterjee's.<sup>40</sup> This ethnographic rendering of political activity also departs from conventional accounts of Myanmar's shift towards civilian rule, which have often teleologically stressed the role of civil society to the exclusion of other political formations.<sup>41</sup> Yet even more critical appraisals of Myanmar's recent changes have emphasised political economic transformations more than changes at the level of grounded political struggles.<sup>42</sup> Grounded in Dawei, this article contributes to a re-scaled and explicitly political understanding of Myanmar's changing political economy. In particular, it tracks three moments in Dawei that crystallise a series of shifts and variations in political form: an initial moment of active mobilisation, a second moment where two political trajectories diverge, and a third moment of openly heterogeneous political activity. Today's differential, fragmented political field represents a challenge to fresh mobilisation amid government plans to resume the project.

### 3 Political Trajectories in Dawei: Three Moments

#### 3.1 *Moment 1: Initial Mobilisation around the Dawei SEZ*

In December 2011, a group of farmers, fishers, community activists and religious leaders from Dawei held a press conference in Yangon. Some hundred attendees, including this author, packed into the hotel conference room, milling about a photo exhibition featuring information about the Dawei SEZ. A year prior, the Myanmar Port Authority had signed an agreement with a Thai construction company, Italian–Thai Development (ITD), to be the lead developer of the SEZ. The agreement led to heightened media coverage and a growth in interest in the project, particularly given its vast scope and scale.

---

blockade of the world-class city: dialectical images of Indian urbanism', in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy (Malden: Blackwell, 2011).

40 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*.

41 Ashley South, 'Political transition in Myanmar: a new model for democratization', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 26, 2 (2004), 233–255; Thin Thin Aye, 'The role of civil society in Myanmar's democratization', conference paper given at the International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies, Chiang Mai, Thailand (2015).

42 Aung Soe Lin (Geoffrey Aung) and Stephen Campbell, 'The lady and the generals', *Jacobin* (2016); available at <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/01/aung-san-suu-kyi-myanmar-burma-elections-military-generals/> (last accessed 17 April 2018); Michele Ford, Michael Gillan and Htwe Htwe Thein, 'From cronyism to oligarchy? Privatisation and business elites in Myanmar', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46, 1 (2016), 18–41; Lee Jones, 'The political economy of Myanmar's transition', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 44, 1 (2014), 144–170.

As people took their seats in the conference room, Phyo Linn,<sup>43</sup> a Dawei youth activist, stood at the podium, flanked by villagers, two monks and a Christian pastor. The main purpose of the event, Phyo Linn explained, was to announce the founding of a network called the Dawei Development Association (DDA). Phyo Linn and the other speakers also began laying out core concerns about the SEZ project: concerns over displacement, with estimates indicating that over 20,000 villagers would be relocated, mainly smallholder farmers growing betel nut, cashews, rubber and seasonal fruit; over compensation, with worries that pay-outs would not be adequate to the livelihood challenges farmers would face after losing their land; over labour, given frustration that Thai and Myanmar workers at the project sites were receiving different wages for the same work; and over environmental degradation, with concerns over impacts from petrochemical industries, as well as the coal-fired powerplant then planned as the power source for the SEZ. A monk who spoke at the press conference urged villagers not to accept relocation plans. A farmer stressed he did not want to move, especially since compensation would be too low in comparison to the income he could receive from his orchards. Despite worrying messages from the podium, the energy in the room was upbeat, even optimistic. The event marked a kind of opening salvo, an indication that this massive project and the forces behind it would have to grapple with grounded opposition.

In the years that followed, these concerns over displacement and dispossession, land and labour and environmental impacts would remain central to campaigning and mobilisation around the SEZ, much—but not all—of it coordinated by DDA. But in the short term, the press conference set in motion a swift chain of events that would end with the cancellation of the coal-fired powerplant, removing the project's power source. Two weeks after the press conference, Phyo Linn and others from DDA visited Map Ta Phut, Thailand's largest industrial estate and a target of environmental activism. The Map Ta Phut trip, Phyo Linn told the author later, led DDA to pursue messaging and campaigning around 'dirty industry', especially through a 'No Coal in Dawei' slogan opposing the powerplant. After the Map Ta Phut trip, stickers and flyers bearing the No Coal slogan began appearing around Dawei. Then on Independence Day, 4 January, DDA organised a beach cleaning action at the popular Maungmagan Beach. People from DDA, with friends and volunteers, wore No Coal t-shirts while picking up trash and handing out flyers. Several days later, senior Myanmar and Thai officials visited the Dawei SEZ area, including Presi-

---

43 All personal names of Dawei-based interlocutors herein are pseudonyms.

dent Thein Sein and Prime Minister Yingluck. During the visit, DDA and other groups presented an open letter to their delegation calling for the cancellation of the powerplant. The letter, signed by hundreds of Dawei-area residents, cited concern that ‘we will lose our well-established livelihoods and have to start new lives should thousands of us be relocated.’<sup>44</sup> Two days later—and only weeks after the founding of DDA—the Myanmar government announced that due to projected environmental impacts, they were cancelling the powerplant.

The decision captured headlines around the country. It was quickly assimilated into a narrative of Myanmar’s burgeoning civil society finding its voice with the country’s shift towards civilian rule.<sup>45</sup> According to one official, the government decided by ‘listening to the people’s voice.’<sup>46</sup> Phylo Linn, for one, spoke proudly of using creative tactics: providing messages for both the brain and the heart, he said; staging public actions, but not in ways that would require obtaining advance permission; and giving chances for local people, as he put it, to speak out about their own situation.<sup>47</sup>

Between 2011 and 2013, the powerplant events drew the most attention, yet much else was happening besides. In the highland area where ITD planned to build the dam—to create a water supply for the lowland industrial estate—farmers persistently declined ITD’s multiple attempts to persuade them to accept relocation and compensation plans. Elsewhere, the roadlink corridor

44 Patrick Boehler, ‘Dawei power plant canceled’, *Irrawaddy*, 10 October 2012.

45 In Myanmar as elsewhere, the literature on post-authoritarian transitions and democratisation—which has justifiably generated substantial criticism for its triumphal teleologies and hubris (cf. Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, eds, *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); Stephen Collier, *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999))—has consistently stressed civil society as a factor producing and maintaining democratic transition (South, ‘Political transition in Myanmar’; Thin Thin Aye, ‘The role of civil society in Myanmar’s democratization’). For more critical analyses of Myanmar’s recent political and economic shifts, including from a political economy perspective, see Aung and Campbell, ‘The lady and the generals’; Ford et al., ‘From cronyism to oligarchy? Privatisation and business elites in Myanmar’; and Jones, ‘The political economy of Myanmar’s transition’. See also Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, eds, *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) for a critical review of civil society theorisations in scholarship on politics throughout Africa.

46 Gwen Robinson, ‘Myanmar cancels big power plant project’, *Financial Times*, 10 October 2012.

47 Geoffrey Aung, ‘Towards advocacy from below: democratizing advocacy on responsible investment in transitional Myanmar: case studies from Dawei and Kyaukphyu’, unpublished internal discussion paper for Paung Ku (2013).

cuts through highland Karen villages in territory partially controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU), an ethnic armed organisation. Building on prior associations formed around social welfare and religious activities, Karen farmers founded a network of village committees to respond to the SEZ. They arranged for KNU soldiers to be present during project consultations, which strengthened, they said, their compensation negotiations over land and crops seized or destroyed for road construction. Later, Karen villagers blockaded the road for several days, threatening to reoccupy road construction areas, due to frustrations with ITD delays in providing compensation.<sup>48</sup> In the same period, lowland villagers living in Nabule,<sup>49</sup> the main SEZ area, formed their own village committees, which they used to obstruct the eviction process: refusing relocation terms, rejecting compensation rates and criticising the housing in the resettlement area.<sup>50</sup>

Two main observations are worth noting about this early phase of struggles against the SEZ. First, although this moment includes radical tactics and actions—especially in comparison to more recent activity in Dawei—it also already differs from how peasant politics has long been understood. State and capital do not penetrate bounded social worlds, governed by moral economies or otherwise, but rather exist already within, are in fact already bound up with, social and political formations in these rural areas. In the powerplant campaign in particular, DDA and other groups articulated a conciliatory public discourse, prominently featuring concerns about environmental degradation, the need for ‘responsible’ investment and the importance of ‘green and sustainable development that reflects the desires and interests of local communities.’<sup>51</sup> This discourse neither rejects nor refuses governmental activity or capital investment as such. Far from either an evasive or rebellious rural politics, DDA and related networks did their utmost to reach out to and form relationships with, even while making demands of, state and capital—government bodies and officials, on one hand, and ITD, on the other. They approached both as grounds of possibility, not refusal or withdrawal.

A general politics of visibility underscores this point. From the press conference in Yangon to the beach action at Maungmagan, political activities here

48 Lawi Weng, ‘Thai–Burma road link blocked by Dawei protestors’, *Irrawaddy*, 18 September 2013.

49 With a population of some 32,000 people, Nabule is home to the most people set to be directly impacted by the SEZ.

50 Aung, ‘Towards advocacy from below’.

51 Dawei Development Association (DDA), *Voices from the Ground: Concerns over the Dawei Special Economic Zone and Related Projects* (Yangon: DDA, 2014).

include very demonstrative, almost performative attempts to display or make manifest what DDA framed as local interests and desires. In the surrounding highland areas as well, around the dam site and along the roadlink, villagers pointedly documented events like ITD visits and the road blockade, sending photographs to DDA and news media. Project consultations and compensation negotiations, whether with or through ITD, subcontractors or government agencies like the SEZ Management Committee, were also handled with the greatest seriousness. Nabule and Karen villagers treated these meetings as important opportunities to secure material benefits. At this stage, villagers often refused or rejected particular terms and rates, but not in fact the project overall or even the prospect of relocation.<sup>52</sup> As in the moment when DDA presented the letter to the government delegation, the tendency at this point is for political activities to approach state and capital as opportunities for negotiation and persuasion, for engagement and influence. They do so not in defence of bounded societies and the moral values thereof, but out of stated desires for expanded, if reformed, relations with government and business. This departure from earlier peasant political formations—from the rebellion and revolt, to everyday forms of resistance—apprehends state and capital in terms of possibility and opportunity. Moreover, as in Sanyal's formulation of postcolonial capitalism, ongoing dispossession combines with a normative legitimacy for developmental politics, changing how rural political subjects grasp and sometimes contest dispossession.

Second, despite a prevalence of explicit civil society discourse, including by DDA and other actors in Dawei, certain features of political activity already suggest the notion of civil society may not adequately capture the range of activities taking place. In liberal political theory, civil society describes free associational life that, while beyond state control, retains the power to substantially shape or influence state policy.<sup>53</sup> In Hegel and Marx, civil society

---

52 Apart from the lowland SEZ area in Nabule, which features the highest number of people set to be impacted by the SEZ, the villagers of the highland dam and roadlink areas have generally been less likely to accept the developmental premises of the project. Considering a similar highland–lowland difference in land politics in India, Levien invokes Scott (*The Art of Not Being Governed*) when noting the ‘inescapable observation’ that ‘more militant, non-compromising movements’ against dispossession tend to emerge in mountainous *adivasi* areas. In those areas, histories of resource extraction and state resistance help to explain ‘a higher than average unwillingness to compromise with dispossession’, in contrast to people in lowland areas (Levien, ‘The politics of dispossession’, 374–375).

53 Partha Chatterjee, ‘A response to Taylor’s “Modes of Civil Society”’, *Public Culture* 3, 1

refers to bourgeois society, a connotation Chatterjee<sup>54</sup> retains when speaking of individuals and organisations that claim the ethical significance and universalising writ of modern secular citizenship. It is in this sense that the homogeneous construct of nation is the domain proper to civil society.<sup>55</sup> In Dawei, however, organisations claiming the ground of civil society represent their activities, importantly and in a primary sense, as addressing Dawei-based issues on behalf of people living around Dawei. An insistent language of locality, replete with references to 'Dawei people', 'Dawei natives', 'Dawei society' and 'local desires', creates the impression of a deeply situated set of activities, apart from any homogeneous construct of nation.<sup>56</sup> In addition, there was no major attempt to influence policy at this stage. Activities did not target the policy context of investment in Dawei, which in the 2011 Dawei SEZ Law, created for the Dawei SEZ, explicitly provides for the legality of a coal-burning power source. In demanding the cancellation of the powerplant, and in negotiations over relocation and compensation, DDA and other networks in the area sought exceptions to legal frameworks, as well as situational compromises forged through visual and rhetorical displays of power, including appeals to local forms of identity.

At this stage, the politics of dispossession has already broken from the by-turns rebellious or evasive actions long emphasised in studies of peasant politics. More within than against capitalist development and its politico-ideological conditions, political subjects in Dawei have contested how, more than whether, the SEZ might proceed by actively seeking connections to state and capital. Yet against the telos of an emergent, universalising civil society, actions here suggest something more differential and heterogeneous, resembling the situational political activity that Chatterjee locates in political society.<sup>57</sup> Although Chatterjee regards political society as largely distinct from civil society, in Dawei the distinction does not always hold. Instead, there prevails a certain interpenetration and overlap between an explicit civil society discourse—as in DDA's overt self-conception as a civil society organisation—and a more exceptional, exclusive repertoire of political society-style politics.

---

(1990), 119–320; Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); Charles Taylor, 'Modes of civil society', *Public Culture* 3, 1 (1990), 95–118.

54 Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*; Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

55 Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, 36.

56 Cf. DDA, *Voices from the Ground*.

57 Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.

### 3.2 *Moment 2: Divergent Political Trajectories*

In late 2013, the Myanmar government quietly suspended the SEZ project overall, citing only limited investment, not grounded mobilisation, in its decision-making. A few years later, a group of farmers sat on the balcony of a monastery in the SEZ area with the author, all recently returned from a trip to Thailand, having visited Map Ta Phut, other industrial projects and activists organising against those projects. A Thai NGO, an ally of DDA, hosted the trip with the idea of inspiring Dawei villagers to fight the Dawei SEZ, which the Myanmar government had been discussing resuming of late. Yet outright opposition to the project had reached a low point. From the time spent by then in villages in the SEZ area, the author knew of many people who, while still critical of certain aspects of the project, now said they welcomed some of what they believed it would bring, especially jobs, physical infrastructure and financial compensation. Debriefing the trip, one farmer, Ko Tun, even described the SEZ as being 'like a dream': almost unreal—a fantasy at this point, given its suspension—but perhaps in fact an aspiration by now, too. Ko Tun's remark points to a split found to be taking shape then: between some villagers now willing to compromise on or accept the project, and activist networks struggling to accommodate villagers' views, and thus reconsidering direct organising in the SEZ area.

Much scholarship on SEZs, grappling with the history and politics of capitalist enclaves and zonal-spatial infrastructures, has understandably echoed the concerns of activists and other critics in emphasising the exclusive, extractive and exploitative nature of SEZs' political and economic logics, in Southeast Asia and beyond.<sup>58</sup> Another strand of SEZ scholarship, however, stresses that SEZs

58 Dennis Arnold, 'Spatial practices and border SEZs in Mekong Southeast Asia', *Geography Compass* 6, 12 (2012), 740–751; Dennis Arnold, 'Export processing zones', in *International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment, and Technology*, eds D. Richardson, N. Castree, M.F. Goodchild, A. Kobayashi, Weidong Liu and Richard A. Marston (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017); Campbell, *Border Capitalism, Disrupted*; James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Patrick Neveling, 'Free trade zones, export processing zones, special economic zones, and global imperial formations 200 BCE to 2015 CE', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, eds I. Ness and Z. Cope (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Patrick Neveling, 'The global spread of export processing zones and the 1970s as a decade of consolidation', in *Changes in Social Regulation—State, Economy, and Social Protagonists since the 1970s*, eds Knud Anderson and Stefan Müller (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017); Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); Aihwa Ong, 'Gradu-



are also spaces of imagination that reflect, or even cultivate, desires and aspirations: hopes for the future, modernist fantasies and expectations of growth and transformation.<sup>59</sup> In the Dawei area, there had always been villagers who expressed support for the project, particularly in Nabule, the main SEZ area. But it appeared that, over time, their numbers were increasing, as some began to anticipate what the project might offer: employment, which is especially attractive given that high percentages of working-age people from Nabule have moved to Thailand as migrant workers; physical infrastructure, which villagers say the Nabule area lacks, particularly in comparison to road upgrades in surrounding areas; and financial compensation, which has created support in Nabule for the project since its earliest years, but more so recently as damages from previous stages remain uncompensated. In discussions with villagers, many were found who felt that unless the project resumed, they would continue to receive no payment for project damages, and young people would continue to seek work abroad without job opportunities or infrastructure development in Nabule. At least for some, the SEZ had become a vehicle of aspiration—a kind of dream, in Ko Tun's parlance—that might deliver financial stability and social cohesion.

With the project on hold, DDA also changed its structure and activities significantly. In its early activities, DDA effectively amounted to a loose network lending coherence to an otherwise disparate set of activities, the powerplant campaign being foremost among them. After the SEZ's suspension, though, issues like mining and agribusiness became more immediately pressing in the region, and nodes within DDA had become strong enough to organise themselves and act independently. DDA stepped back from its network-oriented coordinating role—with nodes in Nabule, the dam area and the roadlink area—and restructured itself as a formal organisation, with an office, staff, donors and project cycles. In this professionalised capacity, DDA continues to coordinate with people in the SEZ project areas, but their relation to DDA now is more ambiguous.

---

ated sovereignty in Southeast Asia', *Theory, Culture, and Society* 17, 4 (2000), 55–75; Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Pun Ngai, 'Women workers and precarious employment in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, China', *Gender and Development* 12, 2 (2010), 29–36.

59 Geoffrey Aung, 'The thick and thin of the zone', *Limn 7: Public Infrastructures/Infrastructural Publics* (2017); available at <https://limn.it/articles/the-thick-and-thin-of-the-zone-2/> (last accessed 24 June 2018); Jonathan Bach, '"They come in peasants and leave citizens": urban villages and the making of Shenzhen, China', *Cultural Anthropology* 25, 3 (2010), 421–458; Jonathan Bach, 'Modernity and the urban imagination in economic zones', *Theory, Culture, and Society* 28, 5 (2011), 98–122; Jamie Cross, *Dream Zones: Anticipating Capitalism and Development in India* (London: Pluto Press, 2014).

Phyo Linn acknowledges that these institutional shifts have meant departing from grounded organising work. Instead, he and other DDA staff, as they can now be called, describe their focus today as policy facilitation, or trying to ‘grasp the politics of process’, as Phyo Linn put it one afternoon in the office.<sup>60</sup> DDA aims to work with ‘all stakeholders’, he said, including the government—despite the risks, he specified—and to emphasise mechanisms that promote collaboration. He cited a mining monitoring mechanism the government had recently approved, which DDA helped design in order for villagers living around mining sites to be able to report incidents and concerns directly to government. With the SEZ on hold, meanwhile, DDA has played an active role in monitoring and contesting SEZ environmental impact assessments (EIAs), submitting case studies about ITD for Thailand’s National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to review, and participating in regional development planning processes, including government workshops and policy reviews. When Phyo Linn was asked if he considers DDA’s activities to be activist work, he replied, ‘It’s difficult to say what’s really activist work.’ Some people see DDA as ‘hardline’, he explained, and some people see DDA as ‘softline’. ‘We still have strong commitments,’ he said, but compared to before, ‘maybe our working style is different’.

At times, the risks of DDA’s shifting structure and approach have been stark, even as the hardline–softline distinction has not always seemed clear. One morning in mid-2017, DDA hosted a strategic planning meeting at their office, as they do periodically, bringing together organisations and individuals working on the SEZ based in Thailand, elsewhere in Myanmar and in the Dawei area. The topic of moving forward with the NHRC generated much discussion. U Sein, an activist and community leader from Nabule, helped found DDA and thus has long-standing ties to the organisation. He shared his concern that the NHRC process arguably extracts information from Nabule, sends it abroad, and does so with little assurance of subsequent action. He emphasized that long-term processes, based on abstract principles, should be secondary to more direct engagement in Nabule. The group tabled the NHRC process in the short term. But if that exchange suggests DDA had become too ‘softline’ in its approach—remote, somewhat passive, and geared towards relatively abstract processes—other exchanges made clear that some see DDA as too ‘hardline’. Interviews and discussions in Nabule included a number of villagers who expressed reservations about DDA’s approach. In an interview in a teashop in one of Nabule’s

---

60 All interviews with Phyo Linn were conducted in English, whereas other interviews were conducted in Burmese or Dawei, occasionally with the help of an interpreter.

larger villages, U Yaza, a former village head, discussed whether the SEZ might resume. He described DDA as being too strong in their opposition to the project. The SEZ is needed to create jobs, he stressed. One morning in another village, a group of friends explained that they don't identify with how DDA criticises the project, focusing on policy concerns without addressing tangible issues like employment and compensation. A lot of young people are actually well educated, they said, but they can only find 'basic work' in the village. They talked about wanting more job training, and said that if the project moves forward, they hope there will be plans for career development.

Over time, a bifurcation became clear between the kinds of issues and activities that DDA would emphasise in comparison to people in Nabule. DDA has increasingly worked on policy-oriented political processes, alongside an emphasis on liberal principles like participation, transparency and accountability. Meanwhile, villagers in Nabule—people like Ko Tun, U Yaza and others—have placed growing stress on material concerns around labour, income, financial security and physical infrastructure. In addition, villagers often say that under an NLD government, they believe government actors will handle compensation, resettlement and livelihood concerns appropriately. During a visit to Ko Tun's village, a neighbour of his named Myint San spoke of his confidence that the new government will attend to or take care of villagers (*g-yu saik mè*), taking responsibility (*taa wun yu mè*) as necessary for these kinds of basic needs.<sup>61</sup> His remarks do not, of course, index the expansive governmentality that Sanyal and Chatterjee, for instance, recognise in India as part of what sustains dispossession by enabling survival for people expropriated. Yet Myint San's confidence in the government would have been almost unthinkable under Myanmar's authoritarian governments in decades past. Realistic or not, his expectations of a governmentalising—if not deeply governmentalised—state apparatus show that some consent has emerged for the project, helping to secure the conditions for dispossession in the Dawei area.

With villagers turning attention to material concerns like income and employment, DDA, by contrast, has hewed more closely to liberal theories of civil society: attuned to state policy and the shaping thereof, geared towards enabling participation in government and, more reflective, thus, of a universalising ethic of citizenship. An insistence on local forms of identity remains, but the shift towards policy facilitation is marked. Assisting DDA with their

---

61 In some places, transliteration for Burmese words has been provided according to the BGN/PCGN 1970 Agreement, with some light modifications.

activities, the author attended numerous workshops in Dawei town focused on topics like responsible investment, reforming land laws, evaluating EIAs and engaging regional government. Topics like employment and compensation were seldom discussed, while DDA staff, having moved away from direct organising work, now visited the SEZ area less frequently. At the same time, this change in political strategy has not quite followed from an orderly, rational decision-making process, much less any inevitable emergence of civil society within Myanmar's liberalising scenario. Phyto Linn is wont to lament a lack of clarity since the NLD came to power in 2015. Before 2015, as he put it once, the political landscape was more clear, with the military and a military-backed government on one side and civil society on the other. 'Civil society was like an enemy before,' he said, 'but it was better, we were opposite—simple!' Now, though, 'we have to think, it's the NLD'. Complicating matters, the NLD has proven surprisingly hostile to civil society organisations, even as civil society organisations have felt new pressure to engage. In Dawei, DDA has felt its way across shifting political terrains, testing out various strategies and adapting to changing realities. To the extent there has emerged a recognisable, if not exhaustive, civil society logic to their work, they have arrived there through contingent events rather than any underlying process of rationalisation. Ma Ohnmar, another DDA staff member, described the NLD's accession and its significance for DDA as all somewhat bewildering. The last few years have been confusing, she explained once—a situation of disorder (*payanpataa*), a haphazard (*kamaukkama*) time overall.

After the foment of initial activities and the suspension of the SEZ, this second moment marks a divergence: between those villagers, on one hand, who have come to desire certain aspects of what they imagine the project might bring—employment, compensation, infrastructure—and DDA, on the other hand, which has contingently formalised itself as an organisation working along civil society lines, especially policy processes geared towards pursuing liberal principles like transparency, accountability and participation in government. DDA's activities represent one of the two political trajectories that have emerged around the SEZ. The political activities villagers have pursued around more direct material concerns is the other trajectory, detailed below. Crucial to their divergence, here, is the extent to which some villagers now associate the project with potential material progress, locating their relation to the project within rather than against the politics and ideology of capitalist development. This shift lends credence to Sanyal's sense of postcolonial capitalism as a hegemonic order: dispossession proceeds through subjects' consent to capitalist development, helped along by an expectation that a governmentalising state apparatus will protect and provide for villagers' basic subsistence. DDA also

works within an overt development ideology, but their embrace of a civil society politics effectively prioritises universalising policy processes over addressing specific material needs, leading their activities in a different direction from the situated concerns and aspirations encountered so often in the villages of the SEZ area. This divergence, in turn, shapes the contours of the heterogeneous political field that, in Dawei, reflects conditions of accumulation under present forms of capitalist development. While this divergence was taking place, meanwhile, the Myanmar government and private developers were moving decisively towards restarting the project after its long period of suspension.

### 3.3 *Moment 3: a Heterogeneous Politics*

Towards the end of the fieldwork, when driving to Nabule by motorbike, the author had begun avoiding the rough access road that runs along the coast, entering instead via an inland route. But recently there had been intriguing reports that the coastal road had improved. Villagers in Mudu, a village of 2,000 people at the end of the road in the SEZ area, had complained bitterly that with the project suspended, neither project contractors nor the government would repair the road. The contractors, like ITD, had been ordered to cease activities, while the government demurred from spending public funds on infrastructure to be used mainly for the SEZ. Who then would have been upgrading the road? One morning, driving out to investigate proved that it was true: the gnarled surface of the road—ruttled, rocky and slow to navigate by motorbike—had been covered by a layer of earth allowing vehicles to glide along smoothly. Moreover, periodically there were large construction vehicles: backhoes, dump trucks, bulldozers—all of them emblazoned with the orange ITD logo, and all of them busily repairing the road. Somehow, an agreement had been struck to fix the road, if not resume the SEZ project overall.

This third moment underlines the divergence in politics and political form that the article has been tracking. The contingent shift towards more formalised, professionalised civil society activities is one direction in this process, as in DDA's political trajectory over time. The other primary trajectory—the second trajectory legible in Dawei—is the messier, situational political activities villagers have pursued around basic material concerns. Within this third moment, the article follows the politics of the three areas of material concern found to be most prominent in terms of what villagers expect the project might bring: physical infrastructure, as in repairs to the road; financial compensation; and job creation. The hierarchical, differential politics villagers pursue around these issues are not entirely exclusive of the more egalitarian, universalising logics of DDA's civil society politics. Yet the two trajectories display some tension and contrast with one another. In so doing, they delineate a heterogeneous

political field brought into being by a form of capitalist development that, rather than creating unified resistance, in fact secures its expansion in complex hegemonic terms. Across the Dawei area, political responses to the SEZ take place within the politics and ideology of development, but the two main tendencies within this field—one universalising, as has been seen, and one differential, as will become apparent—appear largely at odds with each other.

Road repairs, it turns out, had followed a suitably convoluted process. Villagers in Mudu, led by their current village head, had managed to convince ITD to commit the vehicles and labour to fix the road so long as the government would fund it. The regional government agreed, providing for the expenditure in their annual budget. At the national level, however, the Finance Ministry initially rejected the allotment, restating the position that private investment is more appropriate for a road that is integral to a private sector project likely to resume. Additionally, U Sein, the DDA activist who lives in Nabule, interceded strenuously against the village head. He was concerned that if villagers saw ITD vehicles returning to construction activities, they would think the SEZ had resumed. Given growing support for the project by this time, he worried that enthusiasm over the project's perceived return could turn the climate of opinion further against stopping the project for good. For years, U Sein has pushed DDA to pursue and expand grounded organising in Nabule. But even for him, this kind of politics around the road had to be refused; the broad objective of defeating the project had to stand. Regardless, for reasons that remain murky, the objections of the national government and U Sein were overcome, or perhaps circumvented. (Rumours focused on a monk in Mudu taking up a private collection to fund the repairs.) The road is now in excellent condition, much to Mudu villagers' satisfaction.

This kind of politics, opaquely interwoven with government administration and private companies, fits poorly the ideals of transparency and accountability that now characterise much of the work of DDA and similar organisations. Comparable situations have emerged around compensation. One morning in 2017, a lawyer's group led by young women left Dawei town at sunrise—then another of the main Dawei organisations working on the SEZ. At their land law workshop, held at a monastery in the village next to Ko Tun's, lawyers from the organisation presented Myanmar laws and international guidelines on land acquisition and resettlement. People from the two villages nearby responded enthusiastically, especially about compensation. Kyaw Htet, a trader from Ko Tun's village, spoke powerfully about the importance of a fair compensation process. He also made clear he supports the project. As other participants nodded, he described the SEZ in terms heard repeatedly during the fieldwork: as a matter of national needs, critical to Myanmar's development. It was after Kyaw

Htet's contribution that Myint San, a friend of his, shared his belief that with the NLD in power, the government would take responsibility as necessary for the project. His views echo those of two farmers interviewed later in another village. As long as relocation and compensation were handled appropriately, they declared, they would be willing to move for the project. *Shwe pè mè, shwe pè mè*, they said: we will move, we will move.

It was not always obvious what it might mean to handle these processes appropriately. But over several visits to Myint San's village, it was possible to gain a better idea of what this means for different people. During a thunderstorm one afternoon, Myint San sat drinking tea in his home, with his family and some friends. They explained that some months ago, in early 2017, the village head had formed a committee of five people to handle interactions with ITD, other contractors and the SEZ Management Committee vis-à-vis relocation and compensation. Committees had been formed in the other villages designated for relocation as well. Myint San and his friends described feeling reassured by this, but it became clear that news about this committee spread unevenly—and not everyone was reassured. A couple of months later, U Myo, a landless worker from the same village, was interviewed over M-150, a popular Thai energy drink, at a cold drinks shop owned by Myat Thu, an older friend of U Myo's. The discussion moved to speculation that the project would resume soon, speculation spurred on by a recent visit of NLD officials to the village. Eventually the question was raised of whether they had heard anything from the committee Myint San had described earlier. The mood soured; the committee was news to them. Myat Thu frowned, and U Myo became agitated. They didn't know any details, they said, but it shouldn't be like this. It must be all 'the village head's people', U Myo said angrily, adding that it's dangerous to talk like this—like walking on a knife edge, he said. Myat Thu interjected: he had heard that people involved in relocation plans would get a better house and even a car at the new site. 'Maybe that's why the NLD came to the village,' U Myo remarked bitterly.

The visit to U Myo and Myat Thu clarified a few things about village social formations in Nabule, as well as how displacement and dispossession actually take place. The term they used to describe people engaged in certain activities around relocation was *pwè za*, a common term for 'broker' that carries negative connotations. Other villagers had frequently described how *pwè za*, usually traders or other wealthy individuals, were engaged in land speculation across Nabule.<sup>62</sup> They would persuade farmers to sell at low prices before

62 Levien identifies similar dynamics around the presence and activities of brokers (*dalals*) in the context of land struggles in India. See Levien, 'The politics of dispossession', 363.

arranging another sale of the land once values had risen due to the SEZ. It was rarely clear to villagers who was acquiring the land at any stage, whether private individuals, project contractors or an arm of the government. In fact, the line between formal land acquisition and outright land speculation—the former with, in theory, a compensation process attached—was often not obvious to villagers. More evident, however, was how differentiated Nabule villages can be, featuring hierarchies of power and wealth, political activities entangled with state and capital at multiple scales, and reflecting, in part, diverse livelihoods ranging from landless labour and small-scale farming to cash crop trading in regional markets—for example Kyaw Htet, the trader to whom U Myo sells the forest products he collects. Differentiation creates multiple relations to the SEZ project, with some villagers standing to benefit greatly if the project moves forward. For U Myo and Myat Thu, those who stand to benefit are likely close to the village head and probably on the committee obscurely addressing relocation and compensation. Despite frustrations, U Myo and Myat Thu did stress they are not against development per se, and they believe the SEZ could be a good thing, if managed fairly.

It became clear that infrastructure, on one hand, and the cluster of issues around land acquisition, relocation and compensation, on the other hand, are areas of dense, ambiguous and hierarchical political activity. Such activity proliferates beyond the more obvious, more visible secular–egalitarian tendencies prevalent in the activities of groups like DDA, which have largely refrained from working on infrastructure and compensation. This disparate political landscape diverges again over job creation. Job creation remains a key justification given for the project by the government. In an interview at the offices of the Tanintharyi Regional Government, the Chief Minister, Daw Lay Lay Maw, spoke of the importance the project owes to the number of people working in Thailand. ‘We’re trying to bring in investment to bring migrant workers back,’ Daw Lay Lay Maw said. For the SEZ, therefore, ‘employment opportunities will be the most important’. Her comments echo statements from national government officials and representatives from the SEZ Management Committee. DDA, for its part, has restricted its stance on employment to calling on the government to forego misleading job creation claims. From DDA’s standpoint, evidence from Map Ta Phut, in Thailand, and Thilawa, an SEZ near Yangon, demonstrates that people displaced by projects such as these are rarely the people they employ.<sup>63</sup>

---

63 Thai NGOs maintain that in Map Ta Phut, the industrial estate avoids hiring locally in order to prevent information circulating in the area about what is happening inside the zone. On a visit to Thilawa, meanwhile, it was learned that only about twenty individuals, of some 300 displaced thus far, have managed to gain employment within the SEZ.



Regardless of its truth value, this argument—that the SEZ stands to bring home migrant workers—carries weight in Nabule. By villagers' estimates, some 50 per cent of villages' working-age populations have migrated to Thailand, mainly into low-wage, undocumented, informal work in sectors like seafood processing. This labour flow hardly began with the SEZ, but since its inception villagers point to land consolidation, a sustained lack of employment opportunities and the suspension of the SEZ itself—which in its earlier phases had in fact provided a limited number of jobs locally—as factors leading more people to move to Thailand. Many now hope the SEZ might reunite families. In one of the larger villages in Nabule, an older farmer said he believes that if the project starts again, 'People who've gone to work in Thailand will come back. They'll get to live together with their families again.' In Mudu, a villager whose daughters are working in Thailand said that they 'went over there to work because there is no work in the village. They want to live with their mother, but if they come back to the village, there's no work at all.' Elsewhere, a farmer named Zaw Win suggested the SEZ had to be part of the explanation for heightened migration. 'There are whole families who have moved to Thailand because they lost their plantation land,' he explained at his friend's home one day. He was unsure migrants would return for the project. 'If they come back and there is no work, they will be in serious trouble,' he averred.

Zaw Win was not the only person in Nabule to share scepticism about SEZ job prospects. Although the government's promises around job creation were found to resonate widely, some villagers worried that higher wages in Thailand might lead migrants to stay there, that employers in the SEZ might hire migrants from elsewhere rather than people from the area or that, regardless, work in the SEZ could never replace existing livelihoods. A neighbour of Zaw Win, an older farmer, said he could hardly imagine working in a factory. 'Older people like me won't be able to work any more,' he said. 'Only young people from the village will be able to.' U Myo also expressed concern about changing livelihoods. As a landless worker, his main income comes from collecting and selling forest products to Kyaw Htet. 'Why would I want to move?' he asked. 'In our area, the bamboo, the mushrooms—I know where they grow. Earning a living is easy. But there will be difficulties with moving to another area—with water, with electricity, with food and clothing.' He did specify that, like many people in Nabule, he also hopes to get work from the project. But he worried the factories in the SEZ would not be labour-intensive. 'If it's factories that only work with computers,' he said—more technical, automated, capital-intensive—'people like us won't have the chance to work.' Overall, he said darkly, 'I think that the people's situation won't improve, but the company and the nation's will. The people will just become poorer.'

Almost seven years since the opening excitement of that press conference in Yangon, the political field in Dawei is now fragmented between competing, if not always distinct, political tendencies. DDA focuses on broad participation in policy processes, forging a secular–egalitarian politics of citizenship along civil society lines. In the villages of Nabule, by contrast, the pursuit of material concerns—better infrastructure, more compensation, employment opportunities—yields a situational–differential politics that is less attuned to policy processes or ideals of transparency. Yet for all its tensions and dissonance, this heterogeneous political terrain is not without its openings. U Myo makes clear that even for those who accept certain developmental premises, there remain fundamental reasons to maintain reservations about the project. Central, for him, is the possibility the SEZ might not reintegrate migrant workers, but rather deepen processes of exclusion and abandonment: capital-intensive factories, he worries, could mean no work for people like him, only greater poverty as state and capital enrich themselves. Until now, this discussion has drawn on the notion of postcolonial capitalism to understand how and why dispossession takes place, particularly matters of politics and ideology that secure conditions for capitalist development. U Myo, however, finally raises the problem of what might happen to people dispossessed, including the making of surplus populations. Sanyal theorises emergent surplus populations under the heading of non-capital, that ‘wasteland of the dispossessed’ wherein survival is in question, while economic activity is irreducible to that of formal capitalist production.<sup>64</sup> He suggests it is here, around new borders to capital—created by value production’s declining dependence on basic human labour—that postcolonial politics will find its most important battlegrounds to come, as struggles take shape around and against the making of surplus populations.

In Dawei, it is possible that a more radical phase of struggles may emerge if resettlement plans move forward. But for now, as shown across three moments of political activity in Dawei, two contrasting political trajectories map the contours of a heterogeneous terrain in the present. In effect, this divided, differential political field has become a challenge to mobilisation efforts.

---

64 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*, 255.

#### 4 Conclusion

Postcolonial capitalism creates challenges for forging political struggles around or against dispossession. In politico-ideological terms, the 'postcolonial economic', as Sanyal occasionally puts it, thrives on the normative legitimacy of development in postcolonial nations. Even in their early years, DDA's public rhetoric embraced the discourse of sustainable development, while today, villagers like Kyaw Htet speak passionately on the importance of national development, even when it takes the form of a project set to dispossess his friends and family. Villagers also maintain a certain level of confidence in how the government will handle relocation and compensation, amid the government's job creation claims and desires for better infrastructure. Dispossession stands to proceed on these politico-ideological grounds. *Shwe pè mè, shwe pè mè*, the two older farmers intoned. We will move, we will move, they said, so long as we are treated fairly.

The difference with earlier forms of peasant politics and more recent treatments of agrarian radicalism is stark. Whether in the DDA office or in the fields and villages of Nabule, political activities in the Dawei area approach state and capital not as objects of rebellion or evasion, but rather as sites and possibilities for negotiation, persuasion, engagement and compromise. Policy workshops and project consultations have become spaces of encounter and potential mutuality, while earlier, more antagonistic, even in some cases militant, tactics have fallen away. Yet the coherence or cogency of the present political landscape should not be overstated. Far from a rationalisation of political form, in line with grand narratives about democratisation and an emergent civil society, instead a bifurcation has occurred: between a secular-egalitarian dynamic, on one hand—stumbled upon, contingently, within the disorder of a bewildering period—and on the other hand, a tendency towards situational exercises of political power and negotiation, often ambiguously around material concerns. But rather than a strict divergence or separation of civil and political society, as it is tempting to assert, this article prefers a less closed, less rigid language of trajectories and tendencies, since each category, as it were, contains elements of the other. Despite its avowed civil society approach, for instance, DDA maintains a committed rhetoric of 'Dawei natives' and 'local desires', brushing against the universalising grain of civil society logics' homogeneous structure. Nabule villagers, meanwhile, pursue messy, opaque negotiations around relocation, compensation and infrastructure—the kind of situational, differential politics Chatterjee theorises as political society—but they do so through frequently egalitarian references to nation, development and fairness, even across lines of power and hierarchy. U Myo, notably, angrily rejected the compensa-

tion committee that had been formed, even while he and Myat Thu shared the emphasis on development and fairness that people like Myint San, welcoming the committee, had used.

Indeed, the split in political tendencies in the Dawei area is best understood as opening up not a transitional, rationalising political field, but rather one that is multiple and fragmented, like postcolonial capitalism itself. For if the latter signals 'how capital successfully lives in (a) world of difference',<sup>65</sup> then the political trajectories tracked here correspond to that world of difference. The secular–egalitarian tendency at work in DDA's activities, in this sense, need not be seen as likely to displace or overcome the situational–differential dynamic at work in Nabule. Appeals to principles like transparency and accountability are ill suited to address basic material needs, while the politics formed around such needs will not be adequate to the universalising demands of DDA and groups like them. But if neither stands to exhaust the other, nor are they mutually external: each features shades of the other. Mirroring postcolonial capitalism, the politics of dispossession becomes its own 'complex hegemonic order', reflecting a world of difference. This formulation points beyond existing theories of the politics of dispossession, whether in Harvey's notion of a unified anti-capitalism to come;<sup>66</sup> Chatterjee's more exhaustive account of political society;<sup>67</sup> rediscoveries of rural radicalism, in Myanmar and neighbouring countries;<sup>68</sup> or indeed Sanyal's visions of coming postcolonial political struggles,<sup>69</sup> intersecting substantially with Chatterjee's.

Reorienting civil and political society in more heterogeneous directions, this analysis of their instability, and sometimes interpenetration, as categories—unsettling the trope of two politics, to paraphrase Anand,<sup>70</sup> among others who have debated the notion of political society<sup>71</sup>—is more than an argument about the complexity of concepts on the ground. It is also an attempt to take seriously scholarship rooted in colonised and postcolonial settings, as well as struggles located therein.<sup>72</sup> This scholarship stresses problems of power,

65 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*, 7.

66 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.

67 Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*; Chatterjee, 'Democracy and economic transformation in India'.

68 Levien, 'The politics of dispossession'; Prasse-Freeman, 'Grassroots protest movements and mutating conceptions of "the political" in an evolving Burma'; Roy, 'The blockade of the world-class city'.

69 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*.

70 Anand, *Hydraulic City*, 68.

71 Cf. Gudavarthy, *Reframing Democracy and Agency in India*.

72 Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*; Chatterjee, 'Democracy and economic transformation in

subjectivity and coloniality in grappling with dispossession, disturbing more systematising, economistic accounts, such as Harvey's,<sup>73</sup> which can flatten or homogenise struggles around dispossession. Elaborating a located, differential analysis of capitalist development, including the specificity of the struggles to which it gives rise, requires equally agile and sited concept work, with a willingness to trouble binary themes. It follows that Sanyal's theorisation of postcolonial capitalism, premised on a duality between capital and non-capital, might itself benefit from greater situated specificity.

U Myo's comments about exclusion open up this last point. Postcolonial capitalism secures and legitimates ongoing dispossession through politico-ideological means, which in Dawei has had important effects on the making and management of political struggles around the SEZ. But for Sanyal, the postcolonial economic also describes a situation where ongoing dispossession does not lead to proletarianisation, but rather the growth and persistence of a need economy premised on survival more than accumulation, beyond formal capitalist production. This rupture between the farm and the factory, the peasantry and the proletariat, breaks the actualities of postcolonial capitalist development apart from historicist, teleological narratives of capitalist transition. However, U Myo's concerns, residing precisely in this rupture, suggest the space of exclusion and abandonment is not one fully beyond class and exploitation, per Sanyal's dualist rendering of capital and non-capital.<sup>74</sup> U Myo declares, on the contrary, that 'people like us', beyond land and labour, will become ever poorer, as 'the company' and 'the nation' advance. A certain relationality is at stake. He describes his coming impoverishment not as separate from or unrelated to the enrichment of state and capital, but as correlated with it, closely if not causally. He offers a kind of caution, in other words. As scholars track emerging processes of exclusion, they risk figuring new surplus populations as radically exterior to capital in ways that might obscure their ongoing vulnerability to capitalist logics of exploitation and impoverishment. Indeed, U Myo's comments trace the contours of a possible surplus population to come. Whether the heterogeneous politics of the present will be adequate to that conjuncture, or whether other tendencies will take shape in the meantime, remains to be seen.

---

India'; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*; Li, *Land's End*; Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*.

73 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*.

74 Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*, 259.

## References

- Adas, Michael. *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852–1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974).
- Adas, Michael. *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protests against the European Colonial Order* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).
- Anand, Nikhil. *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
- Arnold, Dennis. 'Spatial practices and border SEZs in Mekong Southeast Asia'. *Geography Compass* 6, 12 (2012), 740–751.
- Arnold, Dennis. 'Export processing zones'. In *International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment, and Technology*, eds D. Richardson, N. Castree, M.F. Goodchild, A. Kobayashi, Weidong Liu and Richard A. Marston (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).
- Arnold, Dennis, and Soe Lin Aung (Geoffrey Aung). 'Exclusion to visibility, vulnerability to voice: informal economy workers in the Mekong countries'. Discussion paper prepared for Oxfam-Solidarité, of Oxfam-in-Belgium (2011).
- Arrighi, Giovanni. *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the 21st Century* (New York: Verso, 2007).
- Aung, Geoffrey. 'Towards advocacy from below: democratizing advocacy on responsible investment in transitional Myanmar: case studies from Dawei and Kyaukphyu'. Unpublished internal discussion paper for Paung Ku (2013).
- Aung, Geoffrey. 'The thick and thin of the zone'. *Limn 7: Public Infrastructures/Infrastructural Publics* (2017); available at <https://limn.it/articles/the-thick-and-thin-of-the-zone-2/> (last accessed 24 June 2018).
- Aung, Soe Lin (Geoffrey Aung), and Stephen Campbell. 'The lady and the generals'. *Jacobin* (2016); available at <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/01/aung-san-suu-kyi-myanmar-burma-elections-military-generals/> (last accessed 17 April 2018).
- Aye, Thin Thin. 'The role of civil society in Myanmar's democratization'. Conference paper given at the International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies, Chiang Mai, Thailand (2015).
- Bach, Jonathan. "'They come in peasants and leave citizens": urban villages and the making of Shenzhen, China'. *Cultural Anthropology* 25, 3 (2010), 421–458.
- Bach, Jonathan. 'Modernity and the urban imagination in economic zones'. *Theory, Culture, and Society* 28, 5 (2011), 98–122.
- Baviskar, Amita, and Nandini Sundar. 'Democracy versus economic transformation?' *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, 46 (2008), 87–89.
- Bernstein, Henry. "'Changing before our very eyes": agrarian questions and the politics of land in capitalism today'. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4, 1–2 (2004), 190–225.
- Boehler, Patrick. 'Dawei power plant canceled'. *Irrawaddy*, 10 October 2012.

- Borras, Saturnino M., and Jennifer Franco. 'Global land grabbing and trajectories of agrarian change: a preliminary analysis'. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 12, 1 (2012), 34–59.
- Brown, Ian. *A Colonial Economy in Crisis. Burma's Rice Cultivators and the World Depression of the 1930s* (London: Routledge, 2005).
- Burawoy, Michael, and Katherine Verdery, eds. *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).
- Byrd, Jodi. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
- Campbell, Stephen. 'Solidarity formations under flexibilisation: workplace struggles of precarious migrants in Thailand'. *Global Labour Journal* 4, 2 (2013).
- Campbell, Stephen. *Border Capitalism, Disrupted: Precarity and Struggle in a Southeast Asian Industrial Zone* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).
- Chatterjee, Partha. 'A response to Taylor's "Modes of Civil Society"'. *Public Culture* 3, 1 (1990), 119–132.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
- Chatterjee, Partha. 'Democracy and economic transformation in India'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 43,16 (2008), 53–62.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
- Chatterjee, Partha. 'Democracy, populism, and the political management of primitive accumulation'. In *The Land Question in India: State, Dispossession, and Capitalist Transition*, eds Anthony P. D'Costa and Achin Chakraborty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- Cohen, Jean L., and Andrew Arato. *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).
- Collier, Stephen. *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
- Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff, eds. *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- Coulthard, Glenn. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
- Cross, Jamie. *Dream Zones: Anticipating Capitalism and Development in India* (London: Pluto Press, 2014).
- Dawei Development Association (DDA). *Voices from the Ground: Concerns over the Dawei Special Economic Zone and Related Projects* (Yangon: DDA, 2014).
- Elyachar, Julia. *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
- Ferguson, James. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

- Ferguson, James. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
- Ford, Michele, Michael Gillan and Htwe Htwe Thein. 'From cronyism to oligarchy? Privatisation and business elites in Myanmar'. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46, 1 (2016), 18–41.
- Glassman, Jim. 'Primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, and accumulation by "extra-economic" means'. *Progress in Human Geography* 30, 5 (2006), 608–625.
- Gudavarthy, Ajay, ed. *Reframing Democracy and Agency in India: Interrogating Political Society* (London: Anthem Press, 2012).
- Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1983).
- Hall, Derek. 'Rethinking primitive accumulation: theoretical tensions and rural South-east Asian complexities'. *Antipode* 44, 2 (2012), 1188–208.
- Hall, Derek. 'Primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, and the global land grab'. *Third World Quarterly* 34, 9 (2013), 1582–604.
- Hall, Derek, Philip Hirsch and Tania Li. *Powers of Exclusion: Land Dilemmas in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).
- Hart, Gillian. 'Denaturalizing dispossession: critical ethnography in the age of resurgent imperialism'. *Antipode* 38, 5 (2006), 977–1004.
- Harvey, David. *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- Harvey, David. *The Limits to Capital* (New York: Verso, 2006).
- International Herald Tribune*. 'An industrial project that could change Myanmar', 26 November 2010.
- Jones, Lee. 'The political economy of Myanmar's transition'. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 44, 1 (2014), 144–170.
- Kaviraj, Sudipta, and Sunil Khilnani, eds. *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Kyaw Hsu Mon. 'In Dawei, ITD projects suspended, not terminated: minister'. *Irrawaddy* 3 December 2013.
- Levien, Michael. 'Special economic zones and accumulation by dispossession in India'. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11, 4 (2011), 454–483.
- Levien, Michael. 'The land question: special economic zones and the political economy of dispossession in India'. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, 3–4 (2012), 933–969.
- Levien, Michael. 'The politics of dispossession: theorizing India's "land wars"'. *Politics and Society* 41, 3 (2013), 351–394.
- Li, T.M. 'To make live or let die? Rural dispossession and the protection of surplus populations'. *Antipode* 41, 1 (2009), 66–93.
- Li, T.M. 'Centering labour in the land grab debate'. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, 2 (2011), 281–298.



- Li, T.M. *Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
- Lieberman, Victor. 'Introduction: The ends of the earth'. In *Strange Parallels, Vol. 1: Integration on the Mainland: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- McMichael, Philip. 'Peasants make their own history, just not as they please ...' *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, 2–3 (2008), 205–228.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume One* (London: Penguin Books and New Left Review, 1990).
- Mekong Watch. 'Dawei SEZ fact sheet' (2016); available at <https://mekongwatch.wordpress.com/2016/12/23/dawei-sez-factsheet/> (last accessed 17 April 2018).
- Mezzadra, Sandro. 'The topicality of pre-history: a new reading of Marx's analysis of "so-called primitive accumulation"'. *Rethinking Marxism* 23, 3 (2011), 302–321.
- Mezzadra, Sandro, and Brett Neilson. *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).
- Mizzima. 'Dawei port: villagers protest land confiscation', 16 December 2011; available at <http://archive-1.mizzima.com/news/myanmar/6287-dawei-port-villagers-protest-land-confiscation> (accessed 19 August 2018).
- Mukherjee, Sanjeeb. 'Civil society in the East, and the prospects of political society'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, 5 (2010), 57–59, 61–63.
- Neveling, Patrick. 'Free trade zones, export processing zones, special economic zones, and global imperial formations 200 BCE to 2015 CE'. In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, eds I. Ness and Z. Cope (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- Neveling, Patrick. 'The global spread of export processing zones and the 1970s as a decade of consolidation'. In *Changes in Social Regulation—State, Economy, and Social Protagonists since the 1970s*, eds Knud Anderson and Stefan Müller (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017).
- Ong, Aihwa. *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).
- Ong, Aihwa. 'Graduated sovereignty in Southeast Asia'. *Theory, Culture, and Society* 17, 4 (2000), 55–75.
- Ong, Aihwa. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
- Perelman, Michael. *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
- Prasse-Freeman, Elliott. 'Power, civil society, and an inchoate politics of the daily in Burma/Myanmar'. *Journal of Asian Studies* 71, 2 (2012), 371–397.
- Prasse-Freeman, Elliott. 'Grassroots protest movements and mutating conceptions of "the political" in an evolving Burma'. In *Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar*, eds Renaud Egretreau and François Robinne (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2015).

- Pun Ngai. 'Women workers and precarious employment in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, China'. *Gender and Development* 12, 2 (2010), 29–36.
- Read, Jason. 'Primitive accumulation: the aleatory foundation of capitalism'. *Rethinking Marxism* 14, 2 (2002), 24–49.
- Robinson, Gwen. 'Myanmar cancels big power plant project'. *Financial Times*, 10 October 2012.
- Roy, Ananya. 'The blockade of the world-class city: dialectical images of Indian urbanism'. In *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy (Malden: Blackwell, 2011).
- Samaddar, Ranabir. 'Development, democracy, governmentality, and popular politics'. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 33, 3 (2010), 468–486.
- Samaddar, Ranabir. 'The politics of a political society'. In *Reframing Democracy and Agency in India: Interrogating Political Society*, ed. Ajay Gudavarthy (London: Anthem Press, 2012).
- Sanyal, Kalyan. *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality, and Post-Colonial Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2007).
- Sanyal, Kalyan, and Rajesh Bhattacharyya. 'Beyond the factory: globalisation, informalisation of Production, and the new locations of labour'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, 22 (2009), 35–44.
- Sarkar, Swagato. 'Political society in a capitalist world'. In *Reframing Democracy and Agency in India: Interrogating Political Society*, ed. Ajay Gudavarthy (London: Anthem Press, 2012).
- Scott, David. *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- Scott, James. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).
- Scott, James. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
- Scott, James. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
- Sneddon, Chris. 'Nature's materiality and the circuitous paths of accumulation: dispossession of freshwater fisheries in Cambodia'. *Antipode* 39, 1 (2007), 167–193.
- South, Ashley. 'Political transition in Myanmar: a new model for democratization'. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 26, 2 (2004), 233–255.
- Taylor, Charles. 'Modes of civil society'. *Public Culture* 3, 1 (1990), 95–118.
- Thawngmung, Ardeth. *Behind the Teak Curtain: Authoritarianism, Agricultural Policies, and Political Legitimacy in Rural Burma/Myanmar* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

Walker, Andrew. *Thailand's Political Peasants: Power in the Modern Rural Economy* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

Weng Lawi. 'Thai–Burma road link blocked by Dawei protesters.' *Irrawaddy*, 18 September 2013.

White, Ben, Saturnino Borrás, Ruth Hall, Ian Scoones and Wendy Wolford. 'The new enclosures: critical perspectives on corporate land deals.' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, 3–4 (2012), 619–647.