Aid and Development at the Thailand-Myanmar Border:
Mapping humanitarianism as a settler colonial construct

by

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Abstract

This study maps Western humanitarianism as an imaginary that positions the Western world as superior to other places. Humanitarian and international development activities work to recruit local populations into Western worldviews and economic practices, instead of meeting them on their own terms. In placing the focus on the supposed deficiencies of the peoples and places they work in, Western humanitarianism evades and actively obscures how global economic forces–originating in and supported by the West–are the reason why people face challenges of conflict, poverty and displacement.

I learn from the context on the Thailand-Myanmar border, site of some of the world's longest civil wars and land sovereignty struggles, where exploitative development projects are accelerating. I conducted interviews with 33 humanitarian workers in that region to learn how they understand humanitarianism, and what their organizations are doing or not doing about land theft. I combine the results with a review of historical and current literature, analysis of INGO annual reports, and theorizations from across the fields of critical humanitarian studies and Black and Indigenous Feminist Studies. I observe that the problem of land confiscation is largely ignored by INGOs in the Thailand-Myanmar border region, and this is also true of humanitarian practices globally.

I trace how INGOs self-define their work, constructing concepts of an international humanitarian community that is separate from communities in the places they work, that is accountable not to those communities but to Western audiences: *humanitarians report*. I

consider how humanitarianism idealizes a certain type of human: civilized, developed and progressive: *humanitarians are human*. Humanitarian projects exoticize and pathologize places that Westerners travel to, conceiving of those places as open to exploration: *humanitarians travel*. When they arrive in places, they reinforce models of extractive capitalism imported from the West: *humanitarians create economies.* Finally, they ignore local relations to land, avoiding support for land sovereignty struggles, and in doing so reproduce settler colonial ways of being: *humanitarians settle.* This work also considers questions of research ethics and suggests practices of refusal in research. The final chapter incorporates suggestions from participants on how academic research might be more useful.

Acknowledgments

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systems we are in, this work is dedicated to you.

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Introduction

"Burgers for Burma"

"Come celebrate America's independence day… for whoever dares, we will have [a] '…Monster Burger Challenge Spectacular'!!! Starting at 7pm, whoever finishes the Monster Challenge first gets their meal for free (and a special place on the Monster Burger plaque!!)"

This announcement was posted in 2013 by American missionaries in Mae Sot, Thailand, as part of their "Burgers for Burma" campaign, which involves running a hamburger restaurant that raises money for their work with migrant children from Myanmar (also referred to by its anglicized name, Burma). I saw this post after it met some fervour on the Facebook forum "What's happening in Mae Sot," which hosts around 25000 members who currently live in, or have travelled through, the town of Mae Sot, Thailand (see Figure 1). Those responding to the "Burgers" post were mostly from the secular nonprofit/international nongovernmental organization (INGO) community, who pointed out that an eating competition to benefit people for whom malnutrition is endemic was highly inconsiderate. Five years later, the same missionary group, now well-established in the area, had another fundraiser. This time, it was to buy a new Mitsubishi Pajero Sport SUV as "a rescue vehicle to transport abandoned refugee babies to safety." Once again, people in the INGO community protested the group's lack of financial accountability, and their categorization of children as abandoned, which implies that parents and relatives in the area are negligent. The missionaries responded by explaining that this language came "from a place of hope & naivieté," drawing on a well-worn tactic of white innocence that excuses the outcomes of harmful and violent actions as well-intentioned. This positioning of innocence allows white people to "remove involvement in and culpability for systems of domination" (Mawhinney, 1998, p. 17) through claims that they are simply learning along the way. Innocence is elaborated by Tuck and Yang (2012) as "strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve… feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (p. 10).

I was home in Canada when these online debates occurred, after years living in Mae Sot and working in the nongovernmental sector, which at its height comprised dozens of international agencies, and many more local groups, serving a community of about half a million

undocumented migrants and refugees from Myanmar. I easily joined in the ire toward the missionary workers. It is easy to be angry with them, with their blatant condescension toward those they claim to help, obnoxious importing of American culture to Mae Sot, and most of all, because they represent the global missionary community, whose abuse of Indigenous peoples is well documented. Yet the lines are not clear where missionary work stops and INGOs begin. While missionary-ism requires deep critique and protest by those in INGOs and the general public, in Mae Sot, four decades of aid infrastructure had been built by missionaries and INGOs alike. INGO workers also live in blatant inequity in relation with those they help, in terms of living conditions and salary. INGOs also bring the influence of Christianity, of American empire. Despite being more conscientious about ethical practices and approaches, the end results of humanitarian projects did not seem much different from missionary ones: both brought help from the Western world, which is the source of colonial policies, of extractive capitalist projects, of the weapons manufacturers that supply the relentless conflicts that just kept on hurting the people we were there to help.

It seemed that the bubbling up of anger toward that missionary group was also a form of frustration with all humanitarianism. It was an attempt to define the difference between projects and practices that provide adequate solutions, and ones that do not. Defining how to do things right in humanitarian work is a major preoccupation of the industry, which is in a constant process of justifying itself. However, the main way we know that humanitarianism is successful is through its own self-congratulation, not from those it is supposed to be accountable to. This dissertation is a long-form inquiry on the limits of humanitarianism.

The paradox of humanitarianism

Over a century of organized, global humanitarian work, and decades of focused, funded aid and international development have not lessened the crises they counter. Hunger, disease, displacement and war are as present as ever in our world, and no amount of campaigning or public awareness seems to be able to stop them. Yet, humanitarian agencies maintain that the answer is more aid, with the UN claiming "record numbers" of people in need of assistance, and appealing for more development projects as the solution (OCHA, 2018).

Figure 1: Map of Thailand-Myanmar border region and refugee camps

Where Refugees Call Home

Color	Percentage
	< 1%
	1 - 5%
	6 - 10%
	> 10%

▲ Refugee camp

State-Region/ Township	# of Refugees
Ayeyarwady	
Pathein	241
Bago East	
Htantabin	23452
Kyaukkyi	2,242
Kyauktaga	329
Nyaunglebin	2,001
Phyu	286
Shwegyin	340
Taungoo	4,132
Thanatpin	324
Kayah	
Bawlakhe	293
Demoso	1,344
Hpasawng	2,080
Hpruso	1,264
Loikaw	1,523
Shadaw	5,516
Kayin	
Hlaingbwe	19,229
Hpa-An	5,758
Hpapun	14,672
Kawkareik	8,722
Kyainseikgyi	4,746
Myawaddy	804
Thandaunggyi	317
Mon	
Bilin	3,985
Kyaikmaraw	159
Mawlamyine	387
Paung	249
Thaton	824
Ye	256
Tanintharyi	
Dawei	3,915
Myeik	1,584
Palaw	663
Tanintharyi	170
Thayetchaung	1,140
Yebyu	156
Yangon	
Yankin	231
Others	3,025
Total	**86,864**

Camp population figures are TBC verified caseload for December 2018.

Figures for where refugees call home are derived from the TBC Annual Population Verification in October 2018.

Townships of origin of less than 150 refugees have been excluded from the map.

Map Production Date: 20 February, 2019
Thematic Data: TBC
Boundaries & Symbols: MIMU, OCHA
Projection/Datum: UTM Zone 47N/WGS 1984

Disclaimer: The names and boundaries used here do not imply endorsement by TBC.

Refugee camps:
- Ban Mai Nai Soi (8,782)
- Ban Mae Surin (2,176)
- Mae La Oon (8,571)
- Mae Ra Ma Luang (9,460)
- Mae La (32,562)
- Umpiem Mai (9,224)
- Nu Po (8,426)
- Ban Don Yang (2,334)
- Tham Hin, (5,329)

This map is produced by the The Border Consortium, one of the biggest refugee servicing organizations on the Thailand Myanmar border. I have added a red triangle to indicate the location of Mae Sot.

Organized, Western-based humanitarian response, however, follows a circular form of logic, what Chouliaraki (2013) names as "the paradox at the heart of the field" (p. 7): "the fact that global inequality, which humanitarianism seeks to alleviate, is simultaneously its very condition of possibility" (p. 22). Chouliaraki observes that humanitarian and international development agencies and organizations find themselves in a self-perpetuated loop, with little incentive to solve the problems they exist to respond to. My work in this dissertation shows that this is not just an issue of incentive, but an issue of limits to analysis and imagination caused by white supremacist logics that deem some humans as in need of aid, and others able to give it. When humanitarians arrive in places as part of an international community, they need to identify those locales as sites of crisis, in need of intervention from abroad: to do this, they infer that the people in those places were not sufficiently doing the work of solving their own problems. So, much of humanitarianism is based in the perspective that local populations and local governments are unable to help themselves, are incompetent. Yet in order to legitimize its work, the humanitarian field also needs to show it is "working alongside" and "empowering" local groups. Still, no amount of empowerment seems to be slowing the need for aid from abroad.

Contemporary commentary on the international aid and humanitarian industries are tinged with a sense of existential implosion (Bellamy & McCloughlin, 2018, p. 201; Doane, 2016). A search of the failures of INGOs conjures swaths of cultural and anecdotal commentary, as well as writing and presentations by INGO workers about the need for the field to more openly address its shortcomings (Wintour, 2021; DiCampo, 2018; Damberger, 2011). A 2016 global convention on the topic of humanitarianism's effects concluded that faced with record numbers of displaced people worldwide, "today's humanitarian institutions are in dire need of reform… [and] no longer effective" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016, p. 1). This type of language assumes that there was a time when aid work was effective, and assumes that there is consensus on what "effective" means. Decisions on what aid work is needed, when and where, and what good outcomes look like, has often been steered by the agencies that fund that work, rather than by those who supposedly benefit from the work.

Scholars have critiqued INGOs and non-profits for failing to effect authentic social change, for stymying social movements, creating class stratification by nurturing categories of "professionals" among communities they are embedded in, and capitulating to neoliberal logics

(Kothari, 2005; Smith, 2007). Coordination between organizations has been chaotic and unclear, hindering their effectiveness (Kopinak, 2013). Because they are situated within economies of scarcity in which they compete for funding, INGOs prioritize compliance with Western demands over real needs in the global South (Choulariki, 2013, p. 6). They imitate market logics, and promote depoliticized managerialism and corrosive competiveness (Cooley & Ron, 2002). Projects focused on bringing so-called underdeveloped peoples and places into markets and global economics ignore the ways that markets–tied as they are to extractive capitalism–are responsible for creating many of the social problems people face. People in the international development field are trained to ignore the social effects of capitalism: Chouliaraki accuses Development Studies programs in universities of "largely abandoning critical perspectives of political economy" and focusing on micro-economics rather than structural change (2013, p. 7). Anishinaabe scholar Hayden King outlines the systemic omission of Indigenous perspectives in international development theory, which is an effect of its reliance on colonial/modern nation-states and their borders (Persaud & Sajed, 2018; King, 2018).

Black, Indigenous and nonwhite peoples around the globe are the main targets of aid relief. Yet, they are often not fulsomely consulted and included in the management of Western humanitarian projects taking place on their lands. Numerous volumes written on humanitarianism and international development are void of the voices of stakeholders/aid recipients (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011, p. 28). Mohanty (2003) has argued that INGO projects remove power from women of colour who are forming oppositional alliances against oppressive state systems. Roy (2014) levies searing critiques at INGOs as "a hazard facing mass movements… [that] defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right." In Roy's analysis, humanitarianism both intentionally and inadvertently works in tandem with imperial powers, tempering discontent with governments that neglect the social sector. Atanasoski (2013) attributes today's iteration of humanitarianism–what she calls humanitarian imperialism–to the US assent as global superpower after the Cold War and the fall of the USSR. She observes that humanitarianism makes "certain parts of the world become legible as landscapes of atrocity, while others become spaces of humaneness and humanization" (2013, p. 2).

While scholars such as Chouliaraki (2013), Atanasoski (2013) and Roy (2014) have attended to the ways that humanitarian aid fuels and supports Western neoliberalism, military

violence and imperialism, this dissertation explores humanitarianism through analyses that come from Black and Indigenous research methods and theory. Black and Indigenous feminist theories provide some of the most cogent analyses about whiteness and Westernity[1], which constitute humanitarianism through constructing the "otherness" that is its focus. These theories attend to how making people and places into commodities is integral to Empire-building, which in turn continues to influence the workings and motivations of humanitarian funding. Reading across Black Studies and Indigenous Studies, with emphasis on the scholarship of Sylvia Wynter, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Saidiya Hartman, Katherine McKittrick, Eve Tuck, Mishuana Goeman, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Michelle Murphy, Hayden King, and many others in these fields, this dissertation explores how the shortcomings of humanitarianism, and the directions in which it expands and thrives, are linked to colonialism, orientalism, imperialism, antiblackness and Indigenous erasure. Beginning in the Thailand-Myanmar border region and weaving the situation there with the global history of humanitarianism, I map a "humanitarian imaginary," a paradigm that productively masks the destruction and harm perpetuated by the West.

Mapping the humanitarian imaginary

Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman (2008) observes that in colonial logics, places and spaces only have meaning within nationalistic discourses. Through a survey of Indigenous women's writings, Goeman shows how Indigenous peoples re-map nationalistic discourses and settler colonial logics, disrupting the notions of race, legal infrastructures, and geographies that institute borders across and within Indigenous lands those logics rely on. Goeman defines "colonial spatializing" as

> nationalist discourses that ensconce a social and cultural sphere, stake a claim to people, and territorialize the physical landscape by manufacturing categories and separating land from people… colonialism has mapped Native lands and peoples by instituting Native and non-Native places and bodies. (2008, p. 295-6)

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[1] The concept of Westernity will be defined further in the following pages as well as throughout this dissertation; I especially learn from Stuart Hall's definition of Western.

Colonial spatializing describes the way power systems and structures use identities and territories to reinforce themselves. The nation-state depends on categories of white/nonwhite/Indigenous, which in turn define geographies and who gets to be in spaces. The functioning of the nation-state's economy, meanwhile, stakes out who, what and where is considered consumable: some are the owners of lands, properties and wage labour, while others are the labourers, the ones whose lands must be taken for use by the nation-state and economy.

Grounding this research in the particular land and context of the Thailand-Myanmar border, where land is under direct assault, both through its commodification by extractive capitalism and through its appropriation into the nation-state formation, I explore how colonial spatializing animates humanitarian work. Indigenous peoples[2] along the Thailand-Myanmar border (and across other border areas of Myanmar) are actively contesting land loss and the capitalist development projects that destroy and mutate their lands. Their struggles for sovereignty and land are part of global resistance to settler colonial and racial capitalist structures that attempt to make Indigenous peoples into subjects of the nation-state while removing their lands. However, the international community that works with them has not robustly supported their struggles for autonomy, but instead is working to help amalgamate them into Myanmar governance. Further, humanitarian and international development organizations largely ignore local relations to land and place, which is a major part of Indigenous identity. I argue that the humanitarian regime ignores, or fails to address, the ongoing problem of land loss and confiscation (theft) because of its dependence on settler colonial logics, which are constituted by theft of Indigenous lands and erasures of Indigenous ways of knowing.

In this dissertation, I stitch together theorists from across humanitarian studies, political economy and Black and Indigenous studies, to write against the normative story of humanitarianism and international development as progressive solutions to social problems. Weaving data from interviews with humanitarian workers in Thailand and Myanmar, historical literature review, and description of place, I map five elements of humanitarianism: 1) its method

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[2] I define Indigenous peoples in Myanmar here as ethnic national groups (also called ethnic minorities) *who refer to themselves* as Indigenous. I elaborate more on this in a section in the Methodology chapter, *Indigeneity in Myanmar.*

of reporting; 2) the way it makes the human; 3) the way it tours and travels; 4) its creation of economies; and 5) its dependence on settler colonial logics.

Humanitarians report. They generate multimedia including texts, websites, videos and advertisements to share their activities and account for their spending, and make the case for needing more support. They convene with other humanitarian groups to define and redefine what they are doing and why. They are accountable to each other, to their perceived publics, and to potential or actual funders. The authors of humanitarian reporting are seldom its beneficiaries: they are often objectified as grateful recipients of the help.

Humanitarians are human. They help other people to become more like successful Westerners, who are career-driven and business minded, and capable of offering help to others so that they too can advance. Humanitarians consider themselves the best kind of human; they are peaceful and benevolent, bringing progress and development to needy others.

Humanitarians travel. They are adventurous explorers, on a journey to change their own lives by discovering places and people that are dangerous and exotic. Humanitarians are hyper-mobile, able to go anywhere, visiting people whose mobility is restricted. They travel to make friends, fall in love, to be edified and educated, while also teaching and helping. They collect souvenirs and pictures to take back home so they can educate those who didn't travel about the plight of the people they met.

Humanitarians create economies. They support local economies by spending money in places they occupy, and by creating employment. Along with aid, they bring development projects based in models of profit-making, training local peoples to be entrepreneurs. The economies humanitarians create are accountable to funders from abroad, who export rational, logical worldviews along with material aid. Humanitarian economies use nation-states as their focal point and recruit people into systems of trade, wage labour, market efficiency.

Humanitarians settle. They import religion, culture, food, goods from home. They stay in the places they work for the long-haul, expanding their projects as they hire up local peoples. They buy up land and real estate while ignoring the local people's relations to land. Humanitarians replicate the laws, policies and logics of the colonial places they come from, which make lands into property, people into workers, and nonhuman persons into commodities.

In the next sections, I outline how humanitarian aid flows from north-to-south and grounds Western identity. I then move to a summary of my experience in Mae Sot, where I first began thinking about the humanitarian imaginary, and scaffolds all the decisions made for the research I describe in this work. I end with an overview of chapters, which threads together each component of the humanitarian imaginary, from the theories that underpin it to the results from my data.

Humanitarianism constitutes Western identity

The idea that there is a need for humanitarianism and development work, delivered by people from wealthy nations to those in "poor" ones, is integral to Western culture, to the story of who Westerners are and strive to be, as progressive, helpful people who contribute to a better world (Jefferess, 2021). Large-scale, European and American-based humanitarian organizations were first established in the 19th century, synonymously with nascent concepts of an "international community" that could respond to emergencies and alleviate poverty, hunger and disease (Barnett, 2011). Early humanitarian activities were rooted in the idea that there was a moral responsibility to intervene when people needed help, and that nations and peoples could organize to act apolitically, across national borders, to provide help. These ideals were rooted in Christian religious traditions and colonial tropes, which viewed those being helped as inferior. Alongside the formation of modern nation-states and their projects of multicultural liberal democracies, humanitarian organizations concretized into massive international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), promoting projects of civilization and later human rights and globalization. These operations mainly flow from North-to-South, their workings directed from powerful governments and government groups toward those in "developing countries" or "emerging economies." Over the past 30 years, humanitarianism has become increasingly regimented, shifting from a collection of independent ad-hoc responses to human suffering, to an organized and bureaucratized set of actors across the world (Bellamy & McLoughlin, 2018). Humanitarianism has become a "regime," a set of "policies and organizations that govern international humanitarian prevention efforts and responses" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016, p. 1). Now distanced from the notion of an apolitical international community, INGOs follow and promote state agendas, and have moved to the project of

international development alongside or in addition to aid and relief, prioritizing economics as the way to bring development (Barnett, 2011).

Global public humanitarian aid spending is around 30-billion USD annually, with the US donating a third of that amount (Development Initiatives, 2021). So, the financing of humanitarian aid operations is sourced from the Global North and spent in the Global South, or from the Western world outward. The biggest funders of aid and international development projects come through the governments of member countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which has a "Development Assistance Committee" (DAC) comprised of 24 high income countries and on which the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) hold observer status. Each year the DAC lists countries considered "least developed" and "lower income" in order to allocate funding. Tied aid, which comprises nearly 60% of all aid (OECD, 2006), secures aid and development as an industry that can manipulate the economic and political behaviour of countries to which donations are given. Donor countries, especially the US, continually use aid as a reason to engage governments that are clearly oppressive toward their populations, but are cooperative to the interests of the West.[3] In general, notions of foreign aid are often mired in the self-interest of nation-states and their politics (Malik, 2018).[4]

Proponents of humanitarian aid such as Development Initiatives and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report that there is an urgent need to increase humanitarian response. They categorize 250 million in poverty and 740 million people as living in extreme poverty as a reason for funding humanitarian work (Development Initiatives, 2021). The assumption that more aid will solve the problem of poverty, and global inequity, evades the fact that Global North countries are only prosperous because of their parasitic relationship toward the Global South. Debt payments, income from investments in developing countries, and capital flight from south to north total in the trillions of dollars, essentially creating aid in

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[3] This happened in Honduras, where the US backed a coup then rewarded the new government with aid (Long, 2010).

[4] European countries are actively trying to stymie emigration from Africa through foreign aid (Clemens & Postel, 2018). The UK has been clear that its aid must be in the interest of the UK's economy (Sabbagh, 2018).

reverse, meaning "rich countries aren't developing poor countries; poor countries are developing rich ones" (Hickel, 2017). Humanitarianism and international development projects help Western nations occlude the realities of how inequities arise in the first place, by flipping the story of inequity. The Global North can pose as the provider of change through acts of charity and compassion that cover over the real story of callous greed and excessive consumption.

West and the rest; third world and the global south

In his pivotal essay "The West and the rest" (1992), Stuart Hall defines the concept "Western" as a material and discursive sociohistorical process. While it originates in Europe, Hall defines the "West" as not geographic, but a set of mythologies and historical processes that took place with the fall of feudalism and the beginnings of capitalism in the 17th century. "Westerners" are those who have passed through Europe's Enlightenment period: they define themselves as having superior systems and ways of life. Hall calls the West a discursive practice, both "the organizing factor in a system of global power relations and the organizing concept or term in a whole way of thinking and speaking" (Hall, 1992, p. 143). The idea of "West" shapes concepts of globalization as a whole, which in turn constitute ideals of the human, a humanitarian community, and human rights. In encompassing the world, the West hides that it is a particular way of being while posing as universal; its ideals are underwritten by race and racializing processes, what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls "strategies of engulfment" in which race and the color-line are found within every part of the political–juridic, economic and symbolic–and make the nation-state itself a racial figure, deploying notions of the (white, Western, liberal) human "as the governing global ethical principle" (2015a, p. 33-34).

Scholarly literature on international development, and within the field, currently use the terms Global North and Global South. However, these terms inadequately characterize the places they describe, while also siphoning those places into definitions that are narrowing and stereotyping. The terms came into popularity as replacements for First, Second and Third World, which were considered less useful analytical frameworks as places traditionally understood as Third World grew economically through the 1980s and 1990s (Horner, 2020, p. 421). Global South is a way to describe countries considered "underdeveloped"; those with less financial resources, with a history of colonial rule and weaker democracies, or no democracies. Global

North represents countries that are "developed": rich, democratic, and thus able to help countries in the South. The notion of development is incepted from teleological understandings of progress that assume being financially wealthy and possessing technologies is desirable and a better way of being human. It is an inherently Western notion. When I refer to development in this thesis, it is to refer specifically to the arrival of international capitalism and its attendant commercial interests. As I explore in Chapter 6 (Humanitarians create economies), development as the bringing of capitalism and connecting beneficiaries to markets is often the goal of international development aid.

The terms Global North/South do not actually refer to geographic location, but to nation-states assumed to be advanced and able to provide actions, advice and research to help the South develop (Hollington, Tappe, Salverda & Schwarz, 2015). Global North countries are not all inhabited by white people, and did not all pursue European imperialism. However, because no countries largely inhabited by Black/brown peoples are characterized as "North," there is a case to make that countries discursively considered North are characterized by whiteness, that is to say, by racializing processes that treat darker-skinned peoples as second-class citizens or in pejorative ways. This is something to be further explored, but in this dissertation, I focus on the effects of European, and in particular British, colonial rule in creating white subjects, white property owners, as superior. I explore how whiteness functions as a discursive hierarchical process that imagines a certain type of human as teleologically, geographically and evolutionarily "ahead," and how humanitarianism is both born from and supports that process. Except when directly referencing from the literature, in this dissertation I refer mainly to the term "Western" when writing about the ways that aid and development projects are shaped, because the impetus to help has been a defining feature of Westernity from its inception. I consider this work an analysis of the humanitarian regime, which is Western humanitarianism.

Humanitarianism has been integral to shaping of the idea of the West, and Western identity: those who provide aid, and those who receive it, evoke a range of values and characteristics that shape the way Westerners are taught to view the world and foreign peoples. They produce a Western imaginary in which the bringing of so-called help establishes who has more: help comes from places with morally advanced peoples, with technologically superior and developed systems. They are places ahead of time, in the realm of the modern. In the words of the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, humanitarian aid work secures "the forward march of

human progress" (Lowcock, 2021, p. 6). These discourses are part of what Jefferess (2021) has called an orientation of whiteness, a discourse producing relations for white Westerners in which "the relationship between themselves and the global South is now defined, overwhelmingly, through the story of development aid" (p. 424). I stepped directly into that story, working in Mae Sot and in the refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border, in 2004 as part of a six month voluntourism project organized by teachers in my university community, then from 2006-2008 with World Education in Umpiem Mai refugee camp, then again from 2011-2012 with the CBO Youth Connect. In Mae Sot, I was exposed to the contrast of charity models that centered Western values and often condescended to local populations, and the ground-up movements those populations were a part of, which resist and transform political structures. Living in Umpiem Mai refugee camp, I was immersed in a powerscape of international agencies, local community groups and leadership that together managed a diverse population in a highly complex situation. I learned that INGOs could act in sometimes fickle and arbitrary ways, that INGO donors tended to be out of touch with the reality of the context on the border, and that organizations that actually listened to local leadership and communities did the most impactful work. In the next section, I outline the context there, and how my experiences nourished analysis of humanitarian aid and its relationship to travel and global capitalism.

Mae Sot: Learning at the nexus of travel, humanitarianism, migration and land confiscation

Mae Sot is a small town situated in the province of Tak, Thailand. A bridge called "Friendship" conjoins it to the town of Myawaddy in Myanmar. Across the border in Myanmar, some of the longest-running civil wars and sovereignty movements in the world are being waged, especially in border zones, where ethnic nationality[5] groups have battled to hold their

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[5] The term "ethnic minority" is still commonly used across a variety of fields. Walton (2013) notes that the use of the term "minority" "re-inscribes the position of non-Burmans as peripheral." In this dissertation I refer to ethnic groups in Myanmar as "nationalities." I explain further my use of this term, and the specific context of ethnicity, in the Methodology chapter, in the section on *Indigeneity in Myanmar*.

territories from the Myanmar military dictatorship for decades. Violence by Myanmar's military displaced millions through the 1980s and 1990s, making Mae Sot home to tens of thousands of migrants seeking work, schooling, housing and safety in the region; many live and work in Mae Sot without status, and others live in refugee camps along the borderline. To the north and south of Mae Sot there are hilly mountain ranges plush with forest. These are dotted with hilltribe villages, and nine official UN-designated refugee camps populated by people from all over Myanmar, but who are mainly from Karen State, which runs North to South on the Eastern side of Myanmar, bordering three provinces of Thailand, of which Tak sits in the center (See Figure 1, p. x). The area's diverse natural environment, the kind that profit-seeking corporations would call "resource-rich," combined with a highly vulnerable population, make the region a target for rabid forms of capitalism: hydroelectric dam projects that will displace thousands, drown some habitats while draining the water from other ones; factories rife with abuse of workers; mining projects that destroy forests while tethering communities to low-paying wage labor in dangerous conditions. Local community-based organizations (CBOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) are supporting communities' consistent battles against development, labour and human rights abuses.

When international nongovernmental organizations arrived in the 1980s to support the first refugee camps, community-based groups had already been long established in the region, many as civilian branches of the armed resistance. INGOs worked with local groups in ways that respected their autonomy and community-led management (McConnachie, 2014). A respect for local governance and leadership by INGOs, combined with the protracted conflict in Myanmar that has made the refugee camps some of the oldest on Earth, have resulted in the refugee camps having "their own cultural geography, architecture, markets, infrastructure, social services, schools, facilities and resettlement programs" (Horstmann, 2016, p. 173). Over time, INGO presence expanded along with community-led projects, to serve migrant populations that were much broader than those in the camps. Oh (2016) and Horstmann (2016) characterize humanitarianism across the Thailand-Myanmar region as an economy: INGOs and CBOs work with Thai, Myanmar and local non-state ethnic governments to meet material needs, as well as provide services to populations. Mae Sot became a center of organized resistance, with communities creating sophisticated schooling networks for the children of migrant labourers (Kook Lee, 2014), "countless agentive moments in which individuals have intervened and

influenced the process of Mae Sot's regulatory transformation" within the labour regime (Campbell, 2018, p. 13), and numerous local organizations reporting on and actively resisting human rights abuses.

Reforms began to sweep Myanmar's political landscape after 2010. Aung San Suu Kyi, the long-imprisoned Nobel peace-prize-winning symbol of democracy, was freed along with hundreds of other political prisoners. In 2015, Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won elections after 25 years of exclusion from political participation. Many of Myanmar's most powerful ethnic armed organizations had signed ceasefire agreements by 2015. Following these changes, Western governments ended 20 years of sanctions placed upon Myanmar (Bünte & Portela, 2012; Quinn & Eckert, 2012). Considering the country now "open," international donors pulled massive quantities of funding from the border region and began transitioning their work into Myanmar, abandoning hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants. This change happened quickly, as the EU, a major multiple-agency donor, and other major funders pulled their support from the region and moved organizations into Myanmar. The refugee camps, which were still housing over a hundred thousand people, lost about half their funding sources. Massive portions of funding were also swiftly withdrawn from some of the most important organizations in Mae Sot, including the Mae Tao Clinic, the major health care center for migrant workers. A service sector that had been built over 25 years was left flailing. Numerous community-based organizations and their leadership tried to fill the gaps they left, despite overwhelming budget cuts.

In Karen State, just over the border from Mae Sot, the pressures of land acquisition were ramping up, just as the support of INGOs were being removed. In 2015, the government passed two land laws designed to facilitate the seizure of lands from millions of people across Myanmar, in order to make way for development projects that would destroy lands and displace communities. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) had by then been created on either side of the border. SEZs are areas designated with laws outside the purview of the state in order to encourage economic activity from foreign investors (Farole & Akinci, 2011). They are notorious for being established with little local consultation and accountability, for being terrible for the natural environment, and for displacing local populations without redress; their main goal is "to facilitate global free trade and integrate developing countries into global production and distribution networks" (Thame, 2017, p. 3). SEZs help facilitate land theft by creating industry

that masks as "better than a farming job": when communities are pushed out of their traditional territories to make way for government and corporations, they are told they will have new jobs that are preferable to their so-called subsistence living. Local populations are critical of the SEZs, arguing they push people off their lands and out of their livelihoods, into wage labour.

Land grabs in Myanmar are part of a global trend. After the 2008 recession, which began in the US then reverberated across the world, financial firms and corporations, bolstered by governments, began a mass-scale quest for land acquisition, inciting what is now termed the "global land rush… a spate of cross-border land acquisitions by sovereign wealth funds, private equity funds, agricultural producers, and other key players" (Arezki, Deininger, & Selod, 2013). White, Saturnino, Hall, Scoones & Wolford's (2012) study finds the majority of corporate land grabs are aimed at establishing large-scale agricultural production or other forms of extraction such as mining, and are designed to guarantee corporate access to the products of that production while both preying on and creating large "surplus" populations at the sites of extraction. Land grabs rely on "a diminution of state capacity, the privatisation of previously public assets and the financialisation of economic networks, linked to a new form of global capitalism" (White et. al., 2012, p. 627) characterized by "a largely unaccountable political and economic elite" (p. 622). Sassen (2014) observes that the "large-scale commodification of land," in which foreign investors are rapidly and rabidly buying up land for future use, leads to expulsions of small farmers and villages, toxicity and the death of lands (p. 81). They also eradicate traditional, local rules of governance (p. 115). Modern land grabs and the laws that facilitate them are directly inherited from British colonialism and long traditions of Indigenous dispossession, and target communities that govern via common land laws, many of whom are Indigenous (Dell'Angelo, D'Odorico, Rulli & Marchand, 2017; Ferguson, 2014). In Myanmar, development agencies and economists have pushed for privatization of lands as a way to ensure that local communities have control over their lands; however, this has further entrenched inequities (Mark, 2016).

The 2010s also saw a disturbing acceleration of migrant deaths, as people from across the planet travelled to neighbouring countries to find refuge, and found themselves blocked by a combination of border laws and harsh landscapes. Drownings in the Mediterranean Sea, and death by dehydration and heat stroke in the desert between Mexico and the U.S. became regular events. Rohingya refugees fleeing to Bangladesh from Myanmar accounted for some of the biggest numbers of refugees to die in boats; in 2015 alone, an estimated 25 000 Rohingya fled by

sea, and at least three hundred drowned (Tan, 2015). Countries began erecting walls at their borders at an unprecedented rate (Vallet, 2022); border crossings have become increasingly militarized through the arming of border guard forces and surveillance technologies and infrastructures that extend far beyond the border (Pollozek, 2020;; Lindsay, 2019). Mass incarceration and detention of migrants who are able to make crossings has become the norm in many places.

As local peoples in Myanmar and so many other places faced increased coerced and forced displacement from their homelands, a boom in cheap flights meant tourism and travel was on a major uptick around the world. Those who sought ways to make travel more meaningful and supposedly ethical found an answer in the niche market of voluntourism. Voluntourism is tourism for the purposes of doing work that is charitable: the visiting of communities for the short term to engage in projects perceived to be helpful, such as teaching or construction. There is not necessarily a screening process for engaging in these activities, and often the travel and projects are funded by the voluntourists.

I witnessed an increase in voluntourism projects in Mae Sot, as people–mostly Westerners–began visiting the town for short periods to take on (sometimes laughably unhelpful) construction jobs, or to offer their services as a "teacher" for a week. While those who'd been working in the area for years chafed at these new visitors, the presence of aid agencies facilitated their arrivals. Some INGOs directly encouraged voluntourism, while indirectly, the sector had generated a growing middle class of local and international employees who supported better travel access into Mae Sot and more Westernized businesses, like air conditioned coffee shops and restaurants with English menus, that made it easier and more desirable for short-term travelers to visit. The people from Myanmar we were working with had massive restrictions on their movement: they had to be constantly vigilant of deportation, extortion and harassment by authorities. But Westerners were hyper-free in a setting where they had the money and the documents to move around.

Working in Mae Sot facilitated a particular set of observations about the relationship between extractive capitalism, humanitarianism, migration and tourism. Mae Sot is a place political economist Saskia Sassen would call a "systemic edge": a place where the "intersection of complexity and brutality as filtered through national political economies" creates a "logics of

expulsion" that puts local peoples and lands at the mercy of global capital (Sassen, 2014, p. 121). Sassen's studies trace how what look like more efficient or refined economic processes at surface level (in the stock value; from the point of view of faraway profit-makers), in reality incur the expulsion of the biosphere and people: what is called "development" hides mass destruction of lands. Development buries its true cost–climate change and the ruin of major parts of the biosphere–under complex multilevel and multigovernance systems (Sassen, 2014). Sassen's comprehensive record of destruction events reveals how expulsions have been accelerating from the 1950s, but have taken their largest toll in the 2000's. In this dissertation, I explore how the humanitarian and international development industrial complexes are part of those systems, not a foil to them or a part of the resistance. Along the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands, millions had been suddenly abandoned by international aid at the exact moment the Myanmar government accelerated the acquisition of their lands, lands many who were served by humanitarian aid had been waiting decades to return to. Having observed the changes in and around Mae Sot over a decade, I am compelled to explore whether the fields of humanitarianism and international development address the confiscation of lands and the human displacement it causes.

The Thailand-Myanmar border, where I was recruited into humanitarian work, is where I first saw the fissures, failings and possibilities in that work. It is also where I learned that Indigenous theories and practices of aid work and land sovereignty provide important interventions into Western humanitarianism and international aid. I continue to learn from this regional context and from my colleagues there. In 2019, I returned to the region to interview 33 employees of INGOs, CSOs and CBOs. Their thoughts and theorizations have contributed to the larger aim of this work, which is to understand how we got to an apex of land theft and unprecedented human displacement, while there is a multibillion dollar, globally present field of humanitarian work and international development.

Chapter layout

Chapter 2: Methodology outlines the major theoretical frameworks that ground my approach, data collection methods and a summary of participants. I take as a starting point Lisa Lowe's (2014) observation that history informs the present in a way that is palimpsestic: what came before is just under the surface, continually informing what is emerging today. Throughout

this dissertation, I track how major activities of colonialism–a trade in enslaved peoples, an accumulation of wealth through the theft of lands, the creation of mobilities for some while immobilizing others–underwrite many of the contemporary social formations we live with today, formations which produce the humanitarian imaginary.

I begin with an analysis of academia as an institution grounded in and continually profiting from antiblackness and Indigenous erasure. Reading the work of Black feminist scholars Christina Sharpe (2014), Saidiya Hartman (1997) and others, I discuss how these profits culminate a white/Western way of being, characterized by doublespeak, disavowals, denials and erasure. This way of being is key to the humanitarian imaginary, which creates an illusion of benevolence in a society that is structured by violence. I describe how theories of border imperialism (Walia, 2013), plantation economics (McKittrick, 2013), and critical place inquiry (Tuck & McKenzie, 2014) inform my analysis of the humanitarian imaginary.

Learning from Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck's (2009; 2014) writing on refusals in research, I explain my choices around what to write and not write about, what questions to ask or not ask. I outline how I use terms "Indigenous" and "ethnic" in reference to Myanmar people. I explain my position that scholars outside Myanmar communities should not pontificate about "who is Indigenous," especially when they are not reading Indigenous theory, which explains clearly that indigeneity is an analytic and not an identity (Arvin, 2015). Refusals as method helped to inform who I chose as research participants, and their contributions to this work. I provide rationale for these choices and summarize my participant data pool. I describe how I went about recruitment and my responsibilities to the research participants. I list the questions I asked for the research, describe the methods that informed data analysis, and discuss ethical challenges.

Chapter 3: Humanitarians Report documents how key aspects of the humanitarian imaginary manifest in INGO reporting. My results on the Thailand-Myanmar border revealed that INGOs were not working on the problem of land confiscation, and that there are very different notions of what humanitarianism is between local and foreign respondents. To help me understand how these results related to the larger global context of humanitarianism, I employ a specific research method for this section, to inform how INGOs define and understand certain concepts. I searched specific terms in the annual reports of eight of the world's largest INGOs:

OXFAM, World Vision, Care, Save the Children, Médecins Sans Frontiers, Caritas and Action Aid. I searched the terms Human; Land; Communities; Local; Place; Environment.

INGOs produce annual reports to justify to funders and the general public (who may be funders) that the work they are doing is urgent and necessary. Taken together, these reports illuminate how the humanitarian regime conceptualizes and justifies its own existence and its projects. In describing the results of this term search, I lay out how I map the "humanitarian imaginary" through the rest of the chapters. I find that humanitarian organizations take for granted a specific concept of the human, one that is based in Western and Christian ontologies. They produce narratives of peoples and places deemed underdeveloped, as needful, exotic or pathological, and incapable of creating their own networks of care. They also rely on notions of progress that are economically based. While local communities were fetishized as the biggest priority for INGOs, and reference to cooperation with beneficiary communities was used to legitimize their work, all the INGOs except Action Aid and Oxfam almost entirely ignored communities' land rights and relations to land.

Chapter 4: Humanitarians are Human explores how the modern humanitarian is constituted by the concept "human" as a hierarchical discursive formation. I begin with a discussion of results from my research on the Thailand-Myanmar border, where I asked INGO and CBO workers what the term humanitarian means to them. This was the only instance in my study where there was a distinct difference between the responses of participants who were locally born and those who were foreigners. Most locally born participants conceptualized humanitarianism as something you just do, everyday, and proposed an array of concepts of what it means to be human. Most of the foreign participants had a more cynical imagining of humanitarianism, describing it as a careerist, managerial and heavily Western-influenced field of work.

To understand these different responses, I trace the history of humanitarianism as it came about, alongside the notion of the human, through the 17th-19th centuries. During this time, scientific and technological changes, colonial domination and the beginnings of modern capitalism led Europeans to redefine their relationship to the divine, to the nation-state, and to their ideas of what it meant to be human. I read histories of humanitarianism, from its loose origins as a framework for compassion, to its growth into a governing regime (Barnett, 2011),

alongside Sylvia Wynter's (2003) theorization of the modern human, or Man2, as a construct of Western, white and Eurocentric ways of being. I argue that humanitarianism reinforces an ideal of humanity based in white/Western supremacy. These constructs also idealize geographies as habitable or uninhabitable, paradigms that continue to inform where humanitarians go to work.

Chapter 5: Humanitarians Travel explores humanitarianism as a form of travel inherited from colonial and imperial legacies. Building on Chapter 4's analysis, in which Man2 is imagined to be at the very top of the human hierarchy, and thus the one who is entitled to and poised to help, Chapter 5 examines how this human is entitled to travel, and how travel, colonial conquest and the white gaze are integral to humanitarian aid.

I begin with interview participants' discussions about how foreigners often have their first humanitarian work experiences during their vacations or travels. This reflected my own experiences on the Thailand-Myanmar border, where I observed, and was a part of, increased short-term travel to the region by people who wanted to "help." Reviewing literature on the history of travel as colonialism, I trace how European identity is constituted by travel as a project that objectifies the other in order to define the European. White Westerners have always understood themselves as permitted to, and culturally obliged to, move around to tour and discover other peoples and places, and to collect photos and souvenirs from those others. They are considered mobile, while other places are static. While Man2 is destined to actively "conquest," the other is the passive object of conquest, to be visited upon and consumed. I explore how these relations are replicated in humanitarianism. As I found in the INGO annual report analysis in Chapter 3, the humanitarian regime actively pathologizes and exoticizes other peoples and places in order to justify its work of bringing so-called progress. I consider how humanitarianism has historically, and presently, produced media that creates notions of pain and suffering, or redemption and heroism, in order to have its publics "travel" to those othered peoples and places. Humanitarianism's entwinement with travel–whether through tourism or the consumption of products that travel–supports a culture in which individualistic support through monetary donations, rather than structural change, are presented as the answer to alleviating the problems people face.

Chapter 6: Humanitarians Create Economy tells the story of how the Thailand-Myanmar border region became a site of humanitarian activity. Blending literature from the field with

results from interview data about the successes and challenges that organizations face in the region, I provide a historical overview, including the formation of the KNU and how Mae Sot came to be a hub for INGOs, CBOs and CSOs all working together as a "humanitarian economy" (Oh, 2016; Horstmann, 2016).

Political dictatorship in Myanmar–and the resulting conflicts, human rights abuses and oppressions–was named as the biggest challenge organizations faced, and a major reason for displacement of local populations. A closer look reveals that capitalism and the control of territory have always been driving forces for the dictatorship. Together these have caused many of the contextual challenges participants discuss, the most glaring of which was donors' hasty changes after Myanmar's reforms starting in 2010. International funders rushed to move support away from the border and into central Myanmar on the grounds that it might be able to support state-building there. This was contrary to all evidence that that would be possible: after decades of violence and human right abuses perpetuated by the Myanmar military regime, it should have been clear that sudden reforms would not lead to democracy or even relative peace, especially for ethnic populations. Participants spoke of the phenomenon of both funding cuts and the movement of INGOs over the border as a sign that donors were "out of touch" with the context of Myanmar. They also were facing pressures from donors to repatriate refugees back to Myanmar, while refugees were greatly hesitant to go back, due to the instability they knew was still a problem there. Local civil society and community-based organizations had to fill the gaps left by INGOs, and continued to adapt to changes by building sustainability through a focus on locally generated funding. Analyzing these conversations, I conclude that the humanitarian regime overly relies on the nation-state and capitalism as the focal social arrangements around which development work happens. INGOs promote economic solutions to social problems: they aim to bring so-called underdeveloped communities into global markets, even as the exploitative practices of those markets cause many of the disasters they respond to.

Chapter 7: Humanitarians Settle presents results from interview discussions about the importance of land to local communities, and how INGOs and CBOs on the Thailand-Myanmar border are responding to land confiscation. I review the historical and ongoing threats to land ownership in Myanmar, including ceasefire agreements, the establishment of SEZs, and newly created land laws that facilitate land theft. The rampant destruction and theft of lands in Myanmar was difficult to learn about alongside participants' unanimous agreement that land is of

high importance for Karen communities, as well as ethnic/Indigenous groups across Myanmar. They discussed the multitude of meanings lands have for community identity, culture, heritage, and spirituality. Participants also discussed the importance of autonomy and sovereignty over lands, the notion of livelihoods as both a part of culture and a way to make income, and people's ability to return from Thailand to Myanmar. I survey the impending Vacant, Fallow and Virgin (VFV) land law as a product of colonial laws inherited from the British. I then present participants' discussions on organizations' work on land rights issues. My findings are that CBOs on the Thailand-Myanmar border are actively confronting land loss as a problem, while INGOs are barely considering it. INGO's elision of land on the Thailand-Myanmar border was mirrored in my findings from INGO annual reports, presented in Chapter 3. I argue that INGOs ignore ongoing threats to land, and the resistance efforts of Indigenous peoples, because their work actively takes part in settler colonial formations in which land is understood as property, as capital resource. I analyze capitalist development in Myanmar as a form of settler colonialism, and local resistance to it as part of the global Indigenous movement to prevent the destruction of lands, culture and lifeways outside Western nation-state logics.

Chapter 8: Ethical dilemmas and ethical practices in qualitative research interviews on the Thailand-Myanmar border departs from the mapping of the humanitarian imaginary, and from analysis of the global humanitarian regime, to present data from discussions with participants about the usefulness of research. Learning from Tuck's (2009; 2019) scholarship on how academic study has too often been carried out in extractive ways: "on" communities, rather than alongside them, I built this question into the research as a way to understand the effectiveness and necessity of my own PhD research project.

Discussions with participants revealed that organizations along the border are doing huge amounts of research to inform their work. Both INGOs and CBOs train and work alongside communities to conduct research. They believe in the importance of both academic and community research, and expressed that there are diverse needs for research that can and should be undertaken by academics and their institutions. However, they offered robust critiques about academic careerism, and the way academics often parachute into the region for their research. They noted this type of research is supported and replicated by INGOs, which bring consultants to engage in research for a very short time, and focus on acquiring funding through research reporting. The swift extraction of information, rather than slow, long-term relationship building

and movement support, reveals how research in INGO and academic culture is informed by a logic of extraction. Participants offered insights about what is truly needed (and not) from academic researchers. They set out guidelines for how to move away from damage-centered practices and toward research practices that can more effectively benefit communities. This chapter joins Myanmar scholars such as Chu May Paing and Than Toe Aung (2021) who ask for serious reflection within the field of Burma Studies around how research helps and affects local communities.

Chapter 2
Methodology

Extractive histories and the cringe-worthiness of academic research

I started this research with a cringe. Who am I to be doing this work, to be asking these questions? Why should I take up people's time with my research; what can I ultimately contribute, and will it be helpful, or aren't there more effective ways to help? I continue to cringe as I write and think through each aspect of this work. I consider cringing to be a healthy reflex, a natural reaction to the blunt reality that in doing this work I draw authority from and bolster the authority of academia, whose institutions are based in white supremacy, colonialism, Eurocentrism, and capitalism. I feel wary about academics, especially white academics, who do not experience cringing as they go about their work: they seem to feel equipped to ask questions of marginalized peoples because they are professionals who are "trained" by the university. Anyone going about academic work in a critical way knows that feeling supported by the academy should be cringeworthy at the very least. In this section I outline my ethical approach to academic work, one that starts with a cringe.

Academic researchers should begin their study with a lot of existential searching, hesitation, and a hearty critique of the University and its role in validating and legitimating knowledge. Who is hired or not, who is privileged to make knowledge or not, what research is, and who is considered a "researcher" is deeply influenced by settler colonial logics in academic knowledge systems (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Tuck, 2009; Wilder, 2013; Stein, 2016; Patel, 2017). Many universities operate from a white supremacist perspective, most blatantly in cases of scientific studies that have used the bodies of nonwhite peoples as fodder for research. While those practices are now blocked by research ethics boards, many social science studies continue to be built around the study of the "other," and operate with the assumption that white life is the normative standard, and racialized peoples are outside that standard, curiosities to be studied. These studies can be problematically presented as objective, and can be dehumanizing or romanticizing. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) explains in detail the harmful effects of academic research on Indigenous populations, and academia's assumption,

rooted in colonial beliefs, that it can know and benefit Indigenous peoples. This assumption legitimized policies that were not informed by community desire, but rather by ideologies perpetuated by Western academics. Since Tuhiwai Smith's seminal work, many scholars have highlighted how "the Western academy [is] an institution born from–and premised on–knowledge theft, muzzling, and selective storytelling… that helped draw up the first blueprints of colonization" (Sium, Desai & Ritskes, 2012, p. iv).

The most powerful academic institutions have deep settler colonial and extractive capitalist histories, and are often founded on profits gained from the theft and destruction of lands and from the slave trade, making the university a direct perpetrator of Black enslavement and Indigenous colonization (Wilder, 2013; Patel, 2017). Stein (2016) provides a comprehensive review of how this violence is ongoing, documenting how universities across the U.S. underpay and exploit Black professors, while their campuses contribute to the gentrification of communities inhabited by people of colour. This demonstrates how universities continue to profit from and perpetrate Black subjugation. Meanwhile, university-issued apologies for a past rooted in slavery and antiblackness are mainly performative (Stein, 2016). Gahman and Legault, settler scholars who purposefully learn from Indigenous and Black scholarship, note that in Canada, "universities are disciplinary apparatuses that reaffirm (neo)colonial social relations, often imperceptibly, as well as reproduce an illegitimate white supremacist settler state" (2019, p. 66). The imperceptible nature of colonial relations is highly important to my study of humanitarianism. Like the university institution, which creates "knowledge" while actively harming, or passively benefitting from past and present harms, humanitarianism builds up an image of Western countries as benevolent while providing cover for their insidious activities, convincing publics their governments and private entities are "doing good" while they are not.

Academics and humanitarians as tourists

My suspicion of academia fomented while I was living on the Thailand-Myanmar border. Over my years there I witnessed academic researchers treating communities as objects of study, visiting the area for a very short period with little contextual knowledge, yet wanting to meet with and interview those who had been through trauma, and/or service workers who were very

busy. These researchers where complemented by other types of visitors to the area: tourists who wished to take tours to the refugee camps or hillside villages, and tourists who, with the intention to stay for short periods (from a few days to a couple of weeks), were seeking volunteer positions. I began to think about how it could be that travelers from the Western world felt empowered to "tour" the homes of people they didn't know, to "teach" in schools they knew nothing about, and to take pictures of it all, without a hint of shame. These travelers often acted as if the people in the countries they visited were there for their entertainment, education or edification.

The INGO sector played a role in supporting tourism, research and visits that can be objectifying to local people. INGOs often hire research consultants who visit for extremely short time periods, who might lack context and cultural experience, and are doing work that local CBOs have already done or could just as easily do. INGOs often also allow funders, who sometimes are insensitive or culturally unaware, to do "field visits" where they may treat people in condescending ways. I had a number of such encounters while living on the border, especially during my time in Umpiem Mai refugee camp, working for the INGO World Education. My first experience was when two white female Americans who represented a foundation that was providing funding visited our school. Upon arriving in our beautiful thatch-hut classroom, which we had decorated with much pride, one of the women looked around and began to sob. I suppose the place looked poor to her. This confused the students: we were in a stunning location on top of a hill at the most prestigious school in the camp; our building was warm and welcoming; why was she crying? Another time, a white American conducted a Photovoice workshop at our school. While visiting over a three-day period, she took a lot of pictures of the students. Later, I learned she'd published a photography collection in book form, using some of the student's images without asking for consent. This was a betrayal of trust because we had no idea there was an ulterior motive for being at our school, and some students had worked in political organizations that could make it dangerous for them to have their images published. On another occasion, World Education sent someone to spend an afternoon with us under the guise of doing some sort of research. We were instructed to show him around the camp. As we walked around, he pointed his long camera lens into people's homes, taking pictures without asking permission. The school coordinator, a Karen woman, and I looked on in horror, discussing in hushed tones that we should tell him to stop, but not mustering the confidence to do it.

These incidents happened frequently and casually. In Mae Sot, Westerners arriving to volunteer spontaneously and for short periods became so common, there were often tense discussions on the local Facebook forum, "What's happening in Mae Sot?" People discussed what to do with these people, whether to connect them to local communities or not, and what makes them feel they will be any better at working in schools or on other projects than local people. I noticed a pattern in arguments defending behaviour that is objectifying to local communities: it was often excused as well-intentioned, under the guise of being "humanitarian." When people thought they were helping, they had trouble understanding that what they were doing was consuming.

The project of supposed helping and development are synonymous with civilizing, a foundational project of colonialism. As Europeans arrived in new lands, they excused the brutality and displacement inflicted on local people with the idea they were doing good and bringing civilization. My work traces how in the Western world, humanitarianism functions as a paradigm that productively masks the destruction and harm perpetuated by the West with the idea that the Western world is "humanitarian." Humanitarianism functions as a kind of active evasion or disavowal of the way Western cultural and economic structures are responsible for inequities, wars, and climate disaster. Centering whiteness as the enactor of change, humanitarianism covers over the real story of root causes of injustice while making it seem that white people are innocent. In the following sections, I elucidate how evasions, disavowal, doublespeak and the notion of white innocence are integral to white supremacy.

Disavowal, doublespeak and evasion secure white innocence

White innocence is a central facet of white society, and is secured through not-knowing and not-talking, what Spivak calls "sanctioned ignorance" (1985, p. 6), what Mills calls "white ignorance" (2013) and what Alcoff calls "collective amnesia" in which ignorance is used strategically to uphold power (2013). Tuck and Yang (2012) lay out the moves that white settlers make to secure their innocence, especially through the use of language as metaphorical and abstracting. They observe a trend in references to decolonization as a part of other projects of social justice. Using decolonization as metaphor evades its true project in the settler colonial context, which is the specific act of returning stolen lands to Indigenous peoples. Tuck and Yang

observe the tendency to abstract/evade across fields of education, humanities and social sciences. Bonds & Inwood (2016) document how geography studies has largely avoided analyses on white supremacy, and takes settler colonial logics for granted. Pulido (2018; 2019) has noted that theorizations of the Anthropocene similarly eludes questions of the role of racism and the way it has shaped global structures, and social science scholarship in general avoids critiques that connect environmental studies, Indigenous erasure and projects of decolonization. Tuck and McKenzie observe that social sciences cover over the interconnectedness of people with the land and the environment. They argue that social science researchers have a habit of making reference to places and ecologies metaphorically, rather than fully considering places (2015, p. xv); likewise, scholars of neoliberalism and capitalism tend to skip over land and the environment (p. 4). These omissions are epistemological cornerstones of colonial logics, ones born from intimate relationships, as illustrated by Lisa Lowe's (2014) study of modern liberal society.

Lowe traces the notion of modern freedom to social relations in the colonies, "in which forms of [the] liberal subject… are possible only in relation to laboring lives in the colonized geographies or 'zones of exception' in which they coexist, however disavowed" (Lowe, 2014, p. 16). Relationality between colonizers/oppressors and "others" fostered a tradition of obfuscation and disavowal of oppression while simultaneously depending on entanglements between highly unequal others. Liberal thinking "supplement[s] forgetting with new narratives of affirmation and presence" (p. 40) and creates a structural paradox that requires "the burial of more complex currents of the transatlantic world on which that freedom rests" (p. 50). Disavowals, which are foundational to whiteness and Westernity, hide deep paradoxes and foreclose our ability to study the deeper structures that make our world.

S. Lily Mendoza (2013) explains how liberalism functions to create the notion of the civilized, developed and progressive world through discursive formations imagined against Indigenous inferiority. It has

> a way of turning every native subjectivity that fails to conform to its normative prescription of human *being* into a type of savagery. Through a rhetoric of doublespeak, it deploys a discourse of egalitarianism and respect for individual rights, at the same time that it hides at its core a patently exclusionary dynamic." (Mendoza, 2013, p. 11)

This doublespeak extolls a version of humanity that is supposedly superior but at the same time predates on othered places and peoples, and cannot understand itself without the notion of others

as less-than. As Edward Said analyzed, 19ᵗʰ century colonizers lived in a reflexive relationship with those they colonized: Western notions of the fantastical, imagined "Other" produced constraining binaries in which European peoples and nation-states imagined themselves as superior, and "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said, 1978, p. 2). Colonial projects were viewed as necessary improvements for non-European races, creating cultural tropes that "acted dynamically along with brute political, economic, and military rationales" (Said, 1978, p. 12). Throughout this project, I trace humanitarianism as a colonial project that at the very same time pretends to not be so, by calling itself cooperative with local communities and trying to empathize with those communities. The notion of good intentions obscures a project of centering whiteness and white ownership over nonwhite peoples. In the following section, I learn from Christina Sharpe and Saidiya Hartman, who trace how cultural, relational and economic norms set down during the era of chattel slavery continue to inform the centering of white subjectivity.

Sharpe and Hartman on white evasions in practice

Christina Sharpe's essay, "The lie at the center of everything" critiques the accolades given to Valerie Martin's (2003) book *Property,* which purports to centers Black characters in the context of slavery. Sharpe observes that even as Martin writes in a way that attempts to empathize with Black characters, she insists on imagining that her white characters have suffered in the same way as Black ones. The result is a disavowal that negates the possibility of Black existence and experience. This disavowal, when combined with a long silence about Black scholarship from the book's critics, coheres a violent romanticizing of "a better world" without consideration of the current and historic material realities of Blackness (Sharpe, 2014). Noting that the characters in the book extend power through first the optic and then the haptic, Sharpe argues that this desire to see first, then touch their slave subjects, is characteristic of white ownership. Whiteness is always striving toward possession, whether through the securing of property, capital, or the "other." Often, the possession of the other comes through a form of rescue, in which whiteness tries to heal or empathize with the pain of the other. But even in the act of rescuing/helping, white subjecthood is always prioritized, and seemingly incapable of authentically relating to Blackness on Black people's terms.

Sharpe learns from Saidiya Hartman's (1997) seminal study in *Scenes of Subjection*, which traces the construction of white subjectivity. Hartman's history of the plantation explains how "relations of mastery and servitude… determined the meaning of white identity" (1997, p. 29). Hartman traces the production of cultural norms in which pain and pleasure on the Southern U.S. plantation were juxtaposed as normal, necessary, and entwined. These norms worked to make slavery's past palatable, and continue to ground a range of cultural and political constructs. White subjecthood became constituted by the exhibition of Black suffering and produced a culture where "power extended itself in recreation… [with white] pleasure as a productive force" presented as a public good (p. 44). Witness to, and participation in, the *relief of violence* Black people were subjected to is key to white identity-making: taking pleasure in helping and in the idea that Black peoples were in good relation with their sympathetic white saviours covered over the ways that white society benefitted from slavery.

My analysis is informed by these cornerstones of whiteness theorized by Hartman and Sharpe. The work of humanitarianism relies on a simultaneous insistence on the goodness of white Western culture, and a disavowal of the history, context and lives of the people that humanitarianism is supposed to be helping. Humanitarianism covers over the role of white Western societies in causing the problems its beneficiaries endure; it does not consider the ongoing ways Western society benefits from colonial past and imperial present.

Methodologically, I am always returning to the act of *covering over*, which is a major component of white life and cultural production. I read at the intersections of several theoretical frameworks, but these ones underpin every other, because they explain how white identity is tethered to an optic and haptic subjugation of Black peoples, and racialized others writ large. White society and cultural productions rely on a structured disavowal of white violence, which requires active projects that make it seem like white people are always doing some form of progressive good.

Pushing back on settler evasions

I follow scholars like Gahman and Legault (2019), who argue that scholarly work needs to be situational, relational and discursively and materially practiced, "continually foregrounding

Indigenous ontologies and engaging in a conscientious process of accountability" (p. 57). I also learn from Vimalassery, Hu Pegues & Goldstein (2017) who "emphasize the importance of situating settler colonial formations within the broader global entanglements of empire(s) and racializations and to underscore the specificities of such formations" (p.1042). They advise starting with the question: "What does a practice of study that centers grounded collective Indigenous relations of care alongside and in relation to the fact of Blackness, look like?" (p. 1049). In answer to this question, I center racial capitalism, Black and Indigenous feminist geographies, theories of border imperialism and Indigenous critiques of research in my reading of humanitarianism in the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands. In the following sections, I outline how these theories are germane to my study, and how they influenced decisions in method.

Plantation economics

Katherine McKittrick (2006) theorizes geography as alterable terrain, seeking out the ways "our present landscape is both haunted and developed by old and new hierarchies of humanness" (p. xvii) to "expose domination as a visible spatial project that organizes, names, and sees social differences" (p. xiv). McKittrick's work is dedicated to identifying the ways that space and place organize colonial logics, hegemony and concepts of "normalcy" written across bodies; and, how places and spaces have also always contained dissent and otherness; how undermining "normal" geographies can morph and rewrite the taken-for-granted socio-spatial ordering.

The plantation, for McKittrick, is both specific place and "conceptual palimpsest" that continues to shape and inform economics today (2013, p. 5). The plantation "generated North Atlantic metropolitan wealth and exacerbated dispossession among the unfree and indentured… [and] instituted an incongruous racialized economy that lingered long after emancipation and independence movements in the Americas" (2013, p. 3). While the plantation was created to order and discipline landscapes and peoples to generate profit for the rich, geographies of "uninhabitable" lands became conceptualized in colonial ideals as places of otherness, filled with "bodies occupying or residing outside the lowest rung of humanness and thus inhabiting what most consider inhuman or uninhabitable geographies. This is the mutual construction of identity and place" (McKittrick, 2013, p. 6). The colonial ideal of uninhabitable lands cements the

"interlocking workings of human worth, race, and space … [that] still holds currency in the present and continues to organize contemporary geographic arrangements" (McKittrick, 2013, p. 6). The plantation, a concentrated site of racial capitalism (Robinson, 1983), is also the site where land, place, and conceptions of the human are linked; and it is a place that exceeds all these things, a place that for McKittrick compels us to "demand decolonial thinking that is predicated on human life" (2013, p. 3). McKittrick identifies the continuities between past and present and how legacies of history are held in places. Learning from this method, I am interested in how borderlands as places both push against and contain colonial histories, how the colonial project lingers through humanitarian work, and how humanitarianism trickily covers over its imperial tendencies by obfuscating local lands and places in favour of global endeavours.

While McKittrick's texts mainly address Black and Indigenous peoples in the Americas and in Africa, her theories are salient for what's happening on the Thailand-Myanmar border and in Karen State. Lands there are being massively co-opted from Indigenous peoples for agricultural and resource extraction projects that are global in scale; to claim authority over these traditionally Karen lands, the Myanmar government and its partner corporations are using laws handed down from the British colonial system that follow logics of "uninhabited lands" (Ferguson, 2014). And, there has been long been a simmering, thriving refusal of these logics. I read McKittrick's theories alongside political economists such as Saskia Sassen. Sassen observes "the beginnings of large-scale commodification of land" (2014, p. 81) and shows how capitalism destinates some places and peoples as expendable. Her theory of expulsions helps me analyze what's happening in Karen State as part of a continuing colonial project. I also understand the inability of INGOs to address land confiscation as an effect of relationships to land and place that are rooted in concepts of racial difference, identities as understood by nation-state, and hierarchical concepts of the human.

Border imperialism and the nexus of mobility on the Thailand-Myanmar border

In her germinal book "Undoing Border Imperialism" (2013), Harsha Walia argues that the imperial agendas of Western powers are constituted by the fortification of borders and extractive capitalist projects that cause violent displacements. Border imperialism relies on racialized

hierarchies, validated by national identities, that criminalize migrants in particular. The border defines the nation-state "as both a power-laden condition and relationship… that everyone is in… regardless of consent or dissent" (Gahman & Hjalmarson, 2019, p. 111). Slicing across the homelands of local communities who didn't agree to them, borders cut across people's bodies, cultures and identities. They define Western worldviews, patriarchy and empire; they are both "a material and discursive mechanism" that subjects people to colonial power (Gahman & Hjalmarson, 2019, p. 112). Like the plantation, borderlands are constructions of colonialism that are at once physical locations and conceptual tools for theorizing the connection between capital, nation-state, identity and land.

The theory of border imperialism suffuses my work as I build on scholarship that considers how the Thailand-Myanmar borderland both exceeds colonial geographic space and is contained by it. This region is known as a "porous" border zone: people have long crossed the border surreptitiously (or not so surreptitiously) outside official routes. The economy in this region, across local, state, and multinational enterprises, relies heavily on the labour of undocumented "stateless" peoples. These stateless peoples are very often ethnic/Indigenous, with sovereign governments who are struggling against the central Myanmar government. The Thailand-Myanmar border is thus both a site of imperialism and resistance to it: it is a place that is permeable, yet defined by boundaries; a place where nation-state and nonstate actors converge.

In this place, I became deeply immersed in the ways that geographic spaces, access to places, mobility and identity are inextricably tied to one's status as "citizen," "noncitizen" "migrant," "displaced," and "refugee." As described earlier in this chapter, this is a region where travelers from all over visit refugee camps; some of the most mobile people in the world "tour" or "research" in places where people's movement is most restrained; INGO consultants fly in for 72 hour periods to conduct needs assessments on refugee camp communities who had been restricted in their movement for decades. The intersection of different travelling subjects' mobility is a key component of the humanitarian imaginary: humanitarian and international development aid workers are very often hyper mobile subjects, while those they "help" must remain static.

The Thailand-Myanmar border region is where I first observed the dynamics that I have come to call a nexus of (im)mobilities: the collisions, relationalities and intersections between

hyper, compelled and forced mobile subjects (Toomey, 2021). *Hyper mobile subjects* are allowed to, and encouraged to, move around at leisure, whether it be for work, pleasure, to be with family. *Compelled mobile subjects* are coerced or required, by design, to migrate for purposes of industry and the global economy. *Forced mobile subjects* are discouraged or barred from movement despite it being necessary for their survival; after fleeing their homelands in a fight for their lives, they often end up contained, incarcerated or detained. White Westerners are most likely to be hyper mobile: bearing passports that allow them greater rates of access to the world, they experience immense privilege and ease in travel. With greater imprisonment and forced displacement rates than any other group, Indigenous and Black peoples around the world are most likely to be forced or compelled mobile subjects; they are also most likely to defy the logics of colonial borders. Thinking at the nexus of (im)mobilities obviates how mobile subjects are co-constituted: some of us are hyper mobile because others are forced or compelled to move, or not. By making it seem like white travelers "cross borders" by bringing help to, and making friends with, forced and compelled mobile subjects, humanitarianism as a field can obscure the ways some people's mobility relies on other's immobility. Considering how humanitarians are hyper mobile illuminates the field's reliance on colonial nation-state borders, and on historic norms in which whiteness is constituted by travel and narratives of discovery.

Critical place inquiry

Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie (2015) posit that social science does not passively observe or study settler colonialism, neoliberalism, globalization and environmental destruction, but is coproduced with it; the coproduction of social science research and societal phenomena "comprises both the barrier and the possibility for making the changes needed for the sustainability of (human) life on the planet" (p. xiv-xv). How we study is as important as what we study. Tuck and McKenzie advocate paying attention to place in research: places have "multidimensional significance… as sites of presence, futurity, power, imagination, and knowing" (p. xiv). Their methodology, critical place inquiry, engages human relationships to place, and the ways that land and the environment intersect with our social worlds (p. 2). They call on scholars to "elaborate and address the embeddedness of social life, including economic policy, with land and environment" (p. 5). I have taken up this call. Land and place is at the forefront of fieldwork in the border region, because there is no one working on the border who is

not in some way contending with and/or directly affected by the issues of land rights, land loss, and land destruction. Relationships to land are an integral part of Karen culture (Rajah, 2008) and there is much to learn from the long-time land sovereignty movements in that region. And yet, as I explore through both my interviews and analysis of the global humanitarian regime, much of INGO work does not address land and place.

The tradition of thinking of land as empty, property, dead or invisible is a core part of settler colonial culture and society. Carole Pateman (2007) has traced how the British legal system used the concept terra nullius to justify widespread encroachment on Indigenous lands, and genocide of Indigenous peoples; the idea that the land was empty was in the first place an illusion and a lie. Goenpul scholar Aileen-Moreton-Robinson (2015) explains the connection between white patriarchy, racism, the colonial courts and property law: in settler colonial nation-states, Moreton-Robinson argues, citizenship rights become a kind of pathology placed upon the Indigenous subject that asks that they be "good citizens." Being "good," however, demands an investment in a nation-state built upon stolen lands and notions of land as property that Indigenous people do not share. The result is asking Indigenous people to invest in a world built on the notion they are less than human because they don't share in white patriarchal logics of property ownership.

As the first person in my family born in Canada, I am attentive to my own training in "good citizenship" and to the narrow notion of land as property, existing for either resource extraction or purchase, but never having its own agency or lifeway. Immigrants to new lands all over the world are forced or coerced into settler epistemologies, but have perhaps never before had such opportunity to learn from and fight alongside the Indigenous peoples whose lands we are on. As climate catastrophe escalates all around us, the stakes have never been higher for what it means to believe that land is only there to be exploited for resource extraction and capital. Throughout this work, I center land and place in my research and theory. I posit that humanitarian agencies have not been able to address the loss of land because of their inheritance in settler colonial logics, which ignore the presence and significance of land and place.

Ethics of refusal

Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2007) critiques the way that academic researchers have historically acted as, or imagined themselves to be, the "voice" of those they are researching (p. 67). Simpson introduces the idea of refusal to provide both researchers and communities with a way to contend with knowledge-building in the academy, to question the legitimacy of that knowledge and to resist the epistemological violence academia can inflict when it essentializes, objectifies and categorizes research subjects. Simpson's framework for refusal in ethnographic work includes questions to allow for both researcher and the researched to refuse to ask or answer certain questions, and to decide together what knowledge gets shared with the academy. Tuck & Yang (2014a) advocate a practice of refusal in social science research as a way to counter the settler colonial logics that permeate academic research activities. They argue that the academy has used a flawed theory of change, one which believes that showcasing damage will prove to outsiders that reparations are deserved: thus the work of the academy becomes to reproduce pain stories in its own voice (p. 227), and "much of what counts as voice and what makes voice count is pain" (p. 229). Tuck and Yang argue that settler colonial logics infuse damage-based research, and that these theories of change do not lead to the kinds of authentic changes that are needed. They insist that refusals are not subtractive, but are generative and expansive: a redirection to unacknowledged ideas (2014a, p. 239), and "new representational territory… [that] refuses to play by the rules of the settler colonial gaze, and… refuses to satisfy the morbid curiosity derived from settler colonialism's preoccupation with pain" (p. 241). For refusal to work, Tuck and Yang insist it must first be "grounded in a critique of settler colonialism, its constructions of Whiteness, and its regimes of representation. Second, refusal generates, expands, champions representational territories that colonial knowledge endeavors to settle, enclose, domesticate" (p. 242). As a framework for research, "refusal turns the gaze back upon power, specifically the colonial modalities of knowing persons as bodies to be differentially counted, violated, saved, and put to work. It makes transparent the metanarrative of knowledge production" (Tuck and Yang, 2014b, p. 817).

I follow Tuck and Yang's call to "embed refusal throughout the research process…" and deliberately shift analysis "away from people… and to study instead institutions and power" (2014b, p. 815). My data collection centers the analysis and organizational aspirations of my participants as experts. My questions are designed not to describe the hardships of individuals or

their communities, but rather emphasize participant's understandings of the structures they describe. Rather than solicit information that I then go on to analyze without them, I co-theorize with participants. They have had the chance to read and approve their direct quotes, as well as drafts of this writing.

I refuse to draw on scholars who recount pain stories about Karen people. The reference I make to the difficulties experienced by Karen people has been documented explicitly by local Karen researchers/organizations such as the Karen Human Rights Group, who document human rights violations in a way that focuses on the desires and agency, rather than on the vulnerability, of community members (KHRG, 2018). I follow Tuck and Yang's prompting to focus on desires in research, refusing "the telos of colonial future" (2014a, p. 243). Situating analyses in both the past and the future (p. 231), desire acts as "a counterlogic to the history that hurts. Desire invites the ghosts that history wants exorcised, and compels us to imagine the possible in what was written as impossible… desire expands personal as well as collective praxis" (p. 235).

I refuse to discuss land claims disputes that might be happening between Karen peoples and the Karen National Union (KNU). I am not in a position to analyze Karen sovereignty politics. I am informed of the political situation between groups within Karen State; it would be irresponsible for me not to have studied the history and context of a place where I conducted research. However, as a foreign researcher, and as a colleague and friend to many who live there, it is not my place to write about the internal politics of Kawthoolei (Karen State). Kawthoolei is not an object for me to study. For similar reasons, I refuse to engage in theoretical discussions about whether or not Karen peoples are Indigenous. I now elaborate on this point and explain my use of the terms ethnic minority and Indigenous in the context of Myanmar.

Indigeneity in Myanmar

About 30-40% of the 60 million people in Myanmar are part of what are called "ethnic minority groups," making Myanmar one of the world's most ethnically diverse nations. The ethnic majority, Bamar, are mostly Buddhist and historically lived in the central plains and valleys. Ethnic minority groups historically lived in the mountainous regions at the borders and are traditionally animist or Buddhist, and in the case of the Rohingya, are Muslim; after active missionizing by visitors, many have more recently taken up Christianity and Buddhism. The

larger of these groups are the Chin, Kachin, Mon, Karen, Shan, Pa-O and Palaung (Buchanan, Kramer & Woods, 2013, p. 13). These groups have traditionally been, and still are, referred to as ethnic minorities or ethnic nationalities. In recent decades, some have begun to take up the term "Indigenous" to describe themselves. Ethnic nationalities in Myanmar are comprised of vibrant and diverse groups of people. There are multiple languages spoken and diverse religious and cultural practices and traditions within each group; there is nothing uniform about these groups. They live throughout Myanmar's towns and cities; they do not solely live at the borders in the states named for their group.

The geographic context of my research takes place in and around Karen State. The Karen are variously referred to in the literature, and by themselves, as an ethnic group, a nation, a hilltribe, and as Indigenous. The Karen National Union first made a statement to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations on its own behalf in 1987 (Dunford, 2019). Many of the organizations I interviewed for my research also refer to Karen peoples as Indigenous. Throughout this work, I refer to Karen peoples as they refer to themselves: as both Indigenous and ethnic.

It is often pointed out that identifying ethnic groups as Indigenous peoples in Myanmar might not make sense because Bamar people have also lived in Myanmar for thousands of years. It is true that Bamar people have lived in Myanmar for as long as those in the borderlands; they are not settlers in the same way as Europeans who occupy North America are. However, as Matthew Walton argues, though the bulk of the Bamar population endures terrible oppressions from the Myanmar dictatorship, they are represented by the central government; their culture and traditions make up the hegemony against which "ethnic minorities" have been defined. Therefore, Bamar identity operates in a similar way to Whiteness: "a system of ethnic superiority… invisible to itself" (2013, p. 6).

Ethnic nationalities in Myanmar face a set of typically settler colonial forms of oppression handed down from the British, but actively pursued by the Bamar government: their lands are being seized from them; the Bamar worldview is being imposed on them via an education system that erases their diversity of language, clothing, belief systems and cultural practices. Walton pins the beginnings of the differences between ethnic groups to the British occupation, when colonial bureaucrats meticulously categorized Myanmar's population into differing groups.

Walton argues that the crystallization of the Burman nation-state occurred by pushing ethnic "others" outside the definition of what it meant to be Burman/Bamar; eventually, a process of "Burmanization" or "Myanmafication" in the borderlands (deliberately replacing ethnic cultures with Bamar culture) would become a concrete goal of the central government (2013, p. 11). Jane Ferguson (2014) documents how the British introduced the idea of "waste lands": lands that were not being used for agriculture, private property or other purposes were deemed fallow or vacant. The British used the notion of waste lands to requisition land as property to the colonial government so they could ostensibly be "put to use." Ferguson shows how this process undermined Indigenous autonomy over the lands, and tied ownership and control over land to power, a legacy which continues today. In Chapter 7 (Humanitarians settle) my data finds a process of settler colonialism occurring in Karen State and other ethnic/Indigenous areas, both through land acquisition (theft) and an encroachment of Bamar culture along with land loss.

This study aims to consistently recognize settler colonialism as a multifaceted, ever-mutating structural underpinning not only of political systems, but also of how scholars think and theorize. Scholars who are not Indigenous and who are not from Myanmar debating "what is/is not Indigeneity in Myanmar?" are following settler colonial ways of thinking when they engage this debate without referring to actual Indigenous scholarship that theorizes what indigeneity means. Rather than pontificating about whether or not Karen and other ethnic groups are Indigenous, we should do work in ways that holds space open for people's self-determination. Trying to think through "who is and isn't" is often done within a framework that thinks of modern nations-states as finished projects, as formations we are tethered to, when Indigenous peoples around the world remind us that this project is very much unfinished. Numerous scholars have noted that debates around ethnicity and Indigeneity must include how these concepts are themselves colonial (Barnd, 2017; Arvin, 2015; Teves, Smith & Raheja, 2015; Sium, Desai & Ritskes, 2012; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012; Tallbear, 2001). They maintain that specific identities are Indigenous, while "indigeneity" is an analytic that intervenes on and is articulated against colonialism and racism.

Indigeneity as analytic, not identity

Indigeneity is an unwieldy concept, and at once depends on and precedes settler colonial structures; it "originates in and relies on colonial interventions and acts of racialized differentiation, yet also overlaps with self-definitions from those whose ancestors were present on the continent before European arrivals" (Barnd, 2017, p. 3). Colonial nation-states define Indigeneity through traditions of classification meant to reify communities and identity-groups, often with the goal of rendering them powerless, to police borders and mark out territorial boundaries in order to "divide and conquer, disenfranchise, and steal land" (Sium, Desai & Ritskes, 2012, p. vi). Indigeneity and ethnicity are sometimes related terms: "ethnicity" is "often a residual of colonialism… that exists as part of the state's vocabulary to measure, contain and control colonized peoples" (Sium, Desai & Ritskes, 2012, p. vii). Indigeneity and ethnicity both get subsumed within a "multicultural" whole that satisfies the project of the nation-state, where the aim is to bring all groups within the control of colonial-created borders and government (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012).

With the United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the UN has made a "space for indigenous peoples to develop a global movement, but at the same time it relies on a legal framework that limits the political aspirations of that movement" (Teves, Smith & Raheja, 2015, p. 112). It defines Indigenous peoples as minorities within a multicultural nation: even when they in fact might make up the majority, under colonialism they are sequestered as minorities. Frameworks such as the one used by the UN also define Indigenous peoples in ways that are essentialist, through a traditional/modernist dualism in which people cease to be Indigenous when they enter the modern; this incepts the notion that they were always vanishing anyway (Teves, Smith & Raheja, 2015, p. 112). Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear warns against subsuming all Indigenous peoples into one category, and viewing them an interchangeable, which "says much less about tradition, than about the common politics of colonialism." This focus on identifying the veracity of a specific people's claim to their identity is a part of the colonial project (TallBear, 2001, p. 170).

Native Hawaiian feminist scholar Maile Arvin (2015) contrasts the difference between "Indigenous" as identity and the theory of indigeneity "as the term [that] fosters an understanding of how power shapes specific identities through various discourses" (p. 120) Since "projects that have attempted to shore up indigenous authenticity–from blood-quantum regimes

to 'culture cops'–have too often furthered the vanishing of indigenous peoples," Arvin argues for a theorizing of "indigeneity as an analytic of contemporary forms of colonialism" (p. 120):

> Viewing indigeneity as in articulation with raciality and coloniality–and thus different parts of the lives of indigenous peoples, with different determinations—allows me to see indigeneity as not just a category determined by racism and colonialism but also by the knowledge and praxis of indigenous peoples. This indigenous knowledge and praxis can be either anticolonial or participatory in colonialism; similarly, it can be either anti-racist or participatory in racism. (Arvin, 2015, p. 121)

Indigeneity as an analytic opens the way to understanding how colonialism persists within nation-states, but is also imposed on people, whose identities and realities are entangled with policies, social structures and economies formed by colonialism and racial capitalism. Arvin writes with da Silva's (2015a) work on globality as raciality, which shows how Enlightenment Europeans' establishment of themselves as *the* different and distinct humans, "in self-productive transparency," into which "all 'others' as affectable, exterior-determined things" will eventually be subsumed, is the excuse for previous conquest and current globalization (Arvin, 2015, p. 124). Showing how this view has been taken up by social scientists, Arvin argues that "Indigenous studies theories are relevant to all fields" because they challenge formulations of racial subalterns as well as the institutions, culture and politics that depend on those formulations (p. 126). In this study, Black and Indigenous theories deepen the account of how humanitarianism is pervaded by colonial structures and upholds power relations set down by Enlightenment theories that reproduce categorizations of people as less than human, as vanishing, or as needing to be appropriated into the multicultural nation-state. Obviating the ways that the humanitarian regime relies on a logics of raciality and coloniality, as well as capitalism, Black and Indigenous studies also point the way out, to possibilities to do humanitarian work otherwise.

Research in the Myanmar context

Along the border and throughout Myanmar, decades of experience have taught communities and organizations whether and how to trust and accept foreign researchers. Researchers who visit the border without enough context–particularly short-term consultants hired by INGOs–have in the past made recommendations that can influence funder's opinions, sometimes having devastating results for organizations. Anne Décobert, longtime researcher and fieldworker on the Thailand-Myanmar border, discusses how academic researchers have earned a

deep distrust from local communities, because they contribute to the debate around humanitarian aid in Myanmar in ways that have had harmful consequences for organizations on the borders (2014, p. 40). For example, after Cyclone Nargis, humanitarian aid agencies began to see working with the government as an opportunity to gain access to the inside of Myanmar, despite the central government's continued human rights abuses. As reforms began and major funders lent more legitimacy to the central government and began to move funding away from organizations at the borderlands, their moves were reinforced by researchers (p. 46). Décobert addresses the ethical dilemmas she encountered in trying to be "neutral," as academia and anthropology had taught her to be, which clashed with the on-the-ground reality of working for an organization day to day. She concludes that objectivity in field research is impossible but also unethical, and that more attention must be paid to the "intellectual and ethical debts to research participants" (p. 53).

Décobert's stance resonates with how I approach my project. I returned to the border to better understand the humanitarian imaginary and to continue learning from my friends and colleagues because this project could not exist without them. Their work and theorizing, prior to my visiting for research, already informed a lot of my ideas. I am quite the opposite of neutral in this project: I am not detached from participants in this study. I love a number of them; some have been mentors and bosses; I have deep admiration and respect for the work they've been doing for years, many for decades, and count a few of them as among the great friendships of my life. Precisely because of my respect for their work, it felt urgent to go about my research in a way that is highly conscious and considerate of the stakes for participants, for the context on the border, and for theory that comes with and through the work of Indigenous organizations and peoples. I resolved to research with, and not on my participants, thinking alongside them in real time during the interviews.

Recruitment & Data Pool

The participants are all professionals working in the sphere of service provision, human and civil rights in Myanmar, and are accustomed to thinking and talking about these issues. The CBO participants are part of organizations that comprise a movement that has actively contested the dispossession of the lands of local people since long before international development

organizations arrived. The INGO workers in this region are in a critical position to explain how their mandates are supporting local communities' rights to their lands, or how their activities could be improved, within changing circumstances.

I recruited participants using a snowball sampling technique (Cohen & Arieli, 2011), beginning with four participants who then referred me to a few people that I contacted via email or text; at the end of each interview I informally asked if the participant had anyone further to suggest. I aimed for 30 interviews and in the end conducted 33, with three over the phone. I travelled to Bangkok, Mae Sot and Chiang Mai in Thailand, and to Pyin Oo Lwin in Myanmar to conduct one-on-one, thirty-minute interviews with participants speaking to their experience. Participants came from 22 organizations: 13 CBOs and 9 NGOs. Eight participants have been working in the region for over 25 years, 23 participants have been working for 10 years or more, and two had worked in the area for less than five years. Nearly all the organizations people work for have been operating for 10 years or more. These lengths of time ensure a contextual expertise on the part of the participants. In finding research participants, I was highly aware of taking the time and effort of people living and working in a place that already requires a lot of energy. Though I had the chance, I refused the opportunity to interview powerful female leaders in the community, in recognition that my dissertation does not warrant the time away from their demanding schedules. As a result, my data pool is skewed towards male participants. **Appendix A** includes a detailed summary of participants, their names and their organizations (where applicable/where they are not anonymous), the length of time they have been working, and their locations. In this text, I identify their country or state of origin, names, organizations, and years experience when I reference them.

Interviews & Ethical challenges specific to Myanmar

I followed Kvale's (1996) understanding of semi-structured lifeworld interviews, "whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena," using open-ended questions that guide, but do not script, the conversation (p. 6), and trusting the participants to be capable of interpreting the meanings of the phenomena they are describing. This approach legitimizes conversation between peoples as a source of knowledge: dialogue between interviewer and interviewee produces

meaningful knowledge about "the multitude of subjects' views of a theme and to picture a manifold and controversial human world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 7). I did not ask any personal questions but rather focused on theorizing with participants. Interviewees were encouraged to add, alter or refuse to answer questions as they wish. Nothing was hidden from the participants. My questions were as follows:

1. What does the term "humanitarian" mean to you?
    a. (If applicable, to help the conversation: What kind of person is the humanitarian? Where do humanitarians come from?)

2. How, if at all, is your organization responding to the challenge of land confiscation in this region?

    a. How are the people you work with being affected by this issue, if at all?

    b. What are the opportunities around this issue?

    c. What are the challenges?

    d. Would you say your organization consults and works with local people on this issue? Explain why and how it does or does not

3. Is land important to the people you work for? How/why? Please use description of the geographic region, if you like.

4. Name one major challenge your organization faces.
    a. Is this challenge coming from the organization itself (ie. the bureaucracy/administration, external funders and politics) or from regional issues (like the monsoon/weather, local politics)
    b. What could change to help your organization do better?

5. What is the name of your organization? Please explain some of the main activities you do.

6. What is the most important problem your organization seeks to solve? How successful has it been in doing so?

7. How can this research be helpful to your organization or the issues faced by your community? Is there something I can do to make this research useful to you in the future?

8. Do you have any additional questions or comments?

A list of questions along with pre-interview script can be found in **Appendix B.**

The interviews took place at a mutually agreed upon time and location, at the offices of the participants, in tea shops, restaurants, schools or homes. I did not offer renumeration for these

interviews but purchased whatever I could for them depending on where we were (lunch, dinner, tea/coffee, snacks). Participants were free to pause and also end the interview at any point.

Beyond the major ethical issues on academic research discussed at the beginning of this chapter section, I was attentive to specific ethical challenges presented by doing research in this region: language and translation, the consent process, power asymmetry, and the white gaze.

Burma studies scholar and educator Rosalie Metro (2014) writes that during her dissertation research in Myanmar, she had to completely eschew her university's IRB process. This was because of the forms themselves, and the difficulty of translating the formal language of informed consent forms. Living under a dictatorship, people are (rightly!) scrupulous about being asked to sign forms. Moreover, the translation on these forms, context-driven as they are, turned out awkward at best:

> phrases like 'the right to confidentiality' are specific to a Western legal framework that assigns a positive value to individuality and privacy, whereas in Burmese cultures these concepts can carry a negative connotation of underhandedness… Moreover [with Burmese translation, the phrase] 'I waive my right to confidentiality'… came out more like, 'I give up my opportunity to be secretive.' (Metro, 2014, p. 176)

I used consent forms approved by the University of Toronto's ethics board, but took care to talk through the forms with participants beforehand, and also showed them the questions before the interview. Participants chose whether they wish to remain confidential in the data, and in any publications that will be produced from the data (including the dissertation). Their choice about confidentiality was emphasized in the email recruitment text (see **Appendix B**) and prior to our conversation. In cases where participants were quoted directly, I sent them portions of my writing so they could make any adjustments or choose to remain anonymous. Some participants are public figures in this field: they are often interviewed for news media, have an online presence, and are accustomed to public participation in research.

In the Thailand-Myanmar border region there are dozens of languages spoken. Organizations operate mainly in Thai and Burmese, along with English, but staff use many languages. There are three official Karen languages: Sg'aw, Pwo, and Pa'o, all of which are used within Karen organizations. The vast majority participants I interviewed, both foreign and locally born, have been deeply entrenched in the communities they work with for more than a decade, and speak multiple languages that allow them to communicate with their stakeholders. However,

to avoid translation dilemmas including privileging one language over another, I conducted the research in English. This privileged members of organizations who are English speakers, and skewed toward participants from Myanmar with a particular level of status and education. This worked in favour of the design of the study: senior representatives of their organization have much less risk in participating. For a project in which I was present in the region for only a short time, asking for consent from those who are in positions of power made more sense. See **Appendix C** for a copy of my consent form.

Regardless of the high status of interview participants, there is still an asymmetrical power relationship between researcher and subject. The researcher plans the discussion, asks most of the questions, and uses the responses to achieve a qualification necessary for career-building.

There is a word that expresses restraint in Myanmar culture: "ana." It means approaching things with caution, humility, or not at all, in order to avoid placing the burden of understanding on the person or people with whom one is interacting. I tried to be ana in the way I approached people and my research as an ethical stance. I also believe truly that in conducting research with Indigenous communities, it is important to have people around you from those communities who *will tell you off without a problem*. I can confidently say I have a number of such people in my life. To research ethically with communities as an outsider, one must have friends and colleagues who will frankly point out when words and/or actions are mistaken.

No matter how conscientious one tries to be about researching ethically, a white passing researcher from a rich Western nation-state will always have to contend with their own white gaze. I learn from Alcoff's (2009) essay *The Problem of Speaking for Others*, which weighs the ethical implications between scholars speaking on behalf of those who face oppression, or choosing not to speak at all. Alcoff emphasizes that we must always be mindful that we cannot transcend our location or social identity to fully understand the position of the communities we speak for; however, choosing to *not* speak out against oppression (which to a degree may always entail speaking for others) is also ethically problematic. Alcoff argues that the problem of speaking about or for others is one of representation. To mitigate the kinds of reification and co-optation that can occur when speaking about or for others, she argues for a constant calling-out of the political terrain, and "to strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and

the practice of speaking with and to rather than for others" (p. 128). I attempt to embody this view through a collaborative, curious, humble approach to the interview and research process, with refusals embedded everywhere along the way.

Whiteness is shaped by the right to see everything, be everywhere, talk to anyone and ask any question in the name of observation and discovery. This thesis attempts to think through how whiteness uses "helping" to access relationships with other peoples, to engage in travel, to bring their supposedly developed culture abroad. Using refusal makes obvious the way white researchers/people are trained to entitlement to knowledge, and to helping, and the way that entitlement also leads and has led to a host of harmful actions, including speaking for others. Refusal can shift the power dynamic between researcher and participant by reminding the latter, during the interview itself, that they do have options to shape not only their own answers, but the way the interview goes and future results. I made refusal part of my research practice by offering participants the ability to refuse outright to answer questions, or to shape the questions themselves. My final questions discussed whether or not my research was useful, how it could be useful, and what participants thought about academic research in general. This set of questions offered participants a way of sharing their opinion and understanding of my research as well as research at large: they were able to critique both the act of academic research and the way it is conducted. This was a good exercise, both for interviewer and interviewee, that I have since promoted as a necessary component of research practice. It grounded me in a sense of responsibility to my participants, and gave them a way to express what I could and should do in the future.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the interviews with the partial help of the transcription software temi.com, listening through each interview to correct where the software misinterpreted words or phrases. I plugged each transcription into NVivo, where I sorted my codes. NVivo software, which facilitates the clustering of data into nodes, and then categories, is particularly helpful in generating grounded theory (Hutchinson, Johnston & Breckon, 2010). Hutchinson et. al. (2010) characterize grounded theory as an iterative process of data collection, where theory generation happens through the sampling of data, analytical codes and categories emerge from the data, and

these codes can be systematically compared to enrich further theoretical development (Hutchinson et. al., 2010, p. 284). I sorted my data first question-by-question, understanding each question as a stand-alone theme or category, searching for overlapping codes within the answers to the question. Then I coded once more for where themes overlapped between questions. To analyze the data, I combined Kvale's (1996) method of "meaning structuring" and "ad hoc meaning generation" with Saldaña's (2009) coding method. I attended to the patterns, themes, comparisons of ideas, and the stories and scenes that participants chose to draw upon, weaving different stories and examples together into a condensed and meaningful pattern (Kvale, 1996, p. 199). After each interview, I thought through an overall impression of what was said, then attended to deeper interpretations of specific statements, identifying any metaphors or overall narrative themes (p. 204). I used Kvale's technique of pinpointing interview moments that offered straightforward information, such as when participants discussed the activities of their organizations and the organization's success, and the question about research. However, for discussions that generated longer answers with more complexity, I followed Saldaña's suggestion to code for aspects of meanings: cognitive aspects (ideologies, rules, self-concepts), emotional aspects (feelings) and hierarchical aspects (inequalities) (2009, p. 14). I then traced emergent categories, themes and concepts in order to identify possible networks and connections among these (p. 36). Using printouts of the first round of codes, I used post-its and handwritten notes to make "analytic memos" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 40) that especially helped me to reflect on existing theories related to the study, future directions for study, overlapping categories, any ethical problems, and my personal dilemmas and relationships connected to the study.

The goal of my interpretations is not to come to some monolithic truth, but to present the interpretation of meaning as pluralistic, and be as true as possible to what participants wish to express. My obligations to the communities on the Thailand-Myanmar border, and my friendships with my former coworkers are, ultimately, a priority over this work. To be sure I am expressing as clearly as possible what they desired for the public to know, participants were given a point-form summary of initial findings, and were invited to read through and change any of their direct quotes. They were also given the entire dissertation to read in draft mode and were able to offer comments.

The results of this data formed an entry point into the notion of humanitarian imaginary. After coding and analyzing the interviews, and writing the results together with literature within

the theoretical frameworks described earlier in this chapter, the four elements of the humanitarian imaginary–humanitarians are human; humanitarians travel; humanitarians create economies; and humanitarians settle–became clear. The chapters integrate the interview results with literature review, my own analysis, and descriptions of land and place.

Chapter 3

Humanitarians Report

This chapter establishes elements of the humanitarian imaginary that I explore in the rest of the dissertation. To trace how these elements manifest in INGO reporting, I conducted an analysis of specific terms in the annual reports of eight of the world's largest INGOs. Searching for these terms helps illustrate what activities INGOs take on and how they operationalize certain concepts in order to justify their work. I selected annual reports because as simultaneous fundraising and accountability tools for organizations, they are excellent examples of the ideologies embraced by organizations, and thus prime resources for analyzing how INGOs conceptualize themselves and wish to be understood by the public. Annual reports reveal how INGOs comprehend the problems they are trying to solve, how they make work and justify the work and activities they are doing, how they construct imaginaries of places and peoples: how they make worlds.

This chapter is different from the rest that follow, because it takes data directly from texts (annual reports) produced by INGOs. It helps to inform my overall analysis of the humanitarian imaginary by illustrating how INGOs understand their own work. I read these reports to learn how INGOs would answer my field research questions about concepts of the human in humanitarianism, perceptions of its success, and INGO responses to the land loss and displacement so many of their beneficiary communities have suffered. In addition to illuminating how INGOs would answer my questions, the term search revealed how humanitarianism produces itself as a material and ideological regime, how it understands and produces its audiences.

INGOs report about their work in a repetitive and consistent way: through annual reports, again on websites, in their grant proposals, and in their advertising. All these modes of reporting are forms of accountability to funders and to publics they imagine are either supporting them currently, or who may be potential new donors. However, these forms of accountability do not address the beneficiaries of the aid work. As I discuss in the following sections, it is very clear from these reports that INGOs consider their audiences to be everyone *but* the beneficiaries. Thus, these forms of accountability are repetitive, polished, super-edited and world-making, yet *thin*; despite claiming (over and over again) that their practices are inclusive of local

communities, their practices of reporting betray that they still don't consider those communities important enough to be the audiences, or the producers, of these materials. The beneficiaries of aid work are the supposed center of the work, yet somehow still elided, circled around. INGOs continually define and make-work for themselves as necessary components in the lives and contexts of people who are always already other.

Documents analyzed and method for this chapter

I analyze the annual reports from Oxfam International (2018-19), Save the Children International (2016), Plan International (2019), Médecins Sans Frontières (2018), CARE International (2017), CARITAS International (2019), ActionAid International (2018) and World Vision-Myanmar[6] (2019). I have chosen these organizations because they have among the largest INGO budgets in the world (Morton, 2013, p. 334)–ranging from hundreds of millions to billions of Euros/USD. All but one is headquartered in the Global North. A table on **Appendix D** provides details about each organization's scope, headquarters, and the year and type of report analyzed.

I searched the reports for the following terms: *Land; Place; Environment; Displacement; Communities; Local; Human.* I selected these terms because they relate to specific questions I asked participants on the Thailand-Myanmar border, about how humanitarianism is conceptualized, and what aid organizations are doing about land confiscation. To analyze this data, I considered the number of times these terms arise, their contexts, and then use Saldaña's (2009, p. 14) method of seeking out aspects of meaning, in this case especially cognitive aspects (ideologies, rules, self-concepts) of the ways INGOs present themselves. Analyzing how annual reports use these terms helps to demonstrate how the humanitarian regime animates notions of progress; economics; hierarchical understandings of peoples and places as civilized, as backward

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[6] World Vision did not have an annual report for the global organization for 2019, so I chose to conduct the term search in its Myanmar report.

or forward in time; concepts of land as often ignored or elided; and how land theft is seldom blamed as a cause of displacement.

As I read through interviews I conducted on the Thailand-Myanmar border, and the literatures that helped me to understand my findings, I referred back to the data found in this term search analysis. At first, I wrote these into the chapters as interstitial components of the humanitarian imaginary; later, it became clear that organizing this chapter in a parallel way to the rest of the work offers a mapping of how the humanitarian imaginary is directly produced by the organizations and people whose work is to professionally bring humanitarianism into the world. Gathering my findings from the reports together in one organized chapter provides an overview of the humanitarian imaginary that will then be reiterated chapter-by-chapter in the rest of the dissertation. The subheadings of this chapter follow the four major elements of the humanitarian imaginary, in the same order as the next four chapters: humanitarians are human, humanitarians travel, humanitarians create economies, humanitarians settle. In each section I present the results of my search term analysis, and explain how each concept relates to findings from the larger study.

Humanitarians are human

I searched the term "human" to investigate how INGOs conceptualize human. The results complement Chapter 4's (Humanitarians are human) analysis of the type of human idealized by the humanitarian regime. The search yielded uneven results among the annual reports of INGOs. The word "human" was mostly embedded within the term "humanitarian," and was sometimes used to refer to "human rights." Two of the eight reports–from Care International and World Vision–never use the term human, humanitarian or human rights. Overall, the results from my analysis of INGO's use of the term "human" reveal that organizations take for granted a common concept of the human and humanity.

The term humanitarianism, frequently referred to by six organizations, is described in a multitude of ways, both ideologically and through the organizations' activities. This use of the term iterates to readers that humanitarianism is necessary, and flexible: it can mutate to mean a

number of things, to respond to multiple contexts. The use of "humanitarianism" in these reports reveals that a part of the work INGOs do is to *produce humanitarianism*: INGOs conceptualize the idea of humanitarianism as they enact it. This was affirmed by the responses of participants, as described in Chapter 4 (Humanitarians are human), who note that there has been a turn toward a more self-conscious kind of humanitarian work, one that develops and calls upon the ideal humanitarian, even as it relies on a definition of the human that is narrowly defined.

Human: An assumed commonality

When INGOs use the term "human," it is to invoke the ideal of a common humanity. Oxfam uses the term as a way to describe a better economic system, noting "this is how we can beat poverty: by building a far more equal, dignified, more human economy" (2019, p. 2). Save the Children ends its annual report with the story of its founding, referring to human rights, the human condition, and human impacts to express why it's important to bring humanitarian aid to children. Caritas, which along with World Vision is the most explicitly Christian organization I examine, used the term "human" most frequently, describing its vision as driven by the concept that we are all "One Human Family." Caritas refers to the human when describing the Pope's private audience with the organization at the Vatican, "during which he reflected on charity, integral human development and communion" (2020, p. 5). Pope Francis' endorsement is essential to Caritas' reporting of its work: his activities with the organization are showcased throughout its annual report. The report quotes him evoking the need for "all of us" to ensure "the future of humankind," which

> isn't exclusively in the hands of politicians, of big leaders, of big companies. Yes, they do hold an enormous responsibility, but the future is, most of all, in the hands of those people who recognise the other as a YOU and themselves as part of an US. WE ALL NEED EACH OTHER. (2020, p. 27)

This quote places the impetus of global change on individualism. It invokes the human as a normative ideal that we all must work toward. This notion of common humanity, whether religious or secular, is a strong thread in humanitarian work and a way that organizations call upon their audiences to join in their work. In Chapter 4 (Humanitarians are human), I trace the

history of the concept human to European Enlightenment, Christian tradition, and notion of individualism and free will, which are all constituted in the creation and diminution of "others."

Human rights: Distinct from but implicit in humanitarianism

The term "human rights" is mentioned only once in the MSF, Save the Children and Plan reports, four times in the Oxfam report, and three times in Caritas' report. Human rights are discussed in the context of collaborating with other agencies, including governance and administrative bodies that could be a resource to the projects the INGOs were working on. Barnett (2011) distinguishes humanitarianism, which is about "moral codes and sentiments [and] the urgent goal of keeping people alive" from the work of human rights, which "focuses on legal discourse and frameworks [and] the long-term goal of eliminating the causes of suffering" (p. 16). This distinction is clear in the INGO reports: they rarely use the term human rights but implicitly assume that humanitarian work is about human rights. They differentiate their work from the legal frames of human rights while relying on those frames to justify their actions.

While I do not focus on debates over human rights in this writing, the co-constitution of human rights and humanitarianism is an important area of study that is complementary to my work. There is a large body of work tracing human rights as an invention of liberal democracies and as a universalizing concept that bolsters narrow conceptions of the human, which has come to occupy a ubiquitous space in the language of justice (Manfredi, 2013; Williams, 2010). Manfredi (2013) traces this theoretical history, then points out that hegemonic discourses and practices of human rights do not necessarily preclude justice, and there are various meanings to human rights which are not stable or fixed (p. 8); he identifies the many scholars who argue that the concept and practice of human rights "has never been exclusively coterminous with neoliberal expansionism" (p. 11). Williams (2010) argues that human rights frameworks are couched in a "dogged persistence of an international division of humanity grounded in the capitalist reproduction of "monstrous" economic disparities" (p. xvi). They represent a continuity with colonialism and work in favour of U.S. imperial aims, as a globalizing process that "has cleared the way for a conception of global civil society that is, at best, hopelessly idealized and, at worst, fully complicit with neoliberal structures of domination" (p. 121). Williams observes

that justice cannot be achieved by human rights discourses, which are limited by their implicit reliance on a hierarchization of humanity. This critique is closely related to my own analysis that humanitarian ideals are based in a narrow understanding of the human. In Chapter 4 (Humanitarians are Human), I explore how humanitarianism propagates a vision of humanity that Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter (2003) terms the "globally hegemonic ethnoclass world of 'Man'" (p. 262): the white, male, cisgendered, able-bodied, property-owning and salary-earning person is the model for the ultimate form of humanity. Wynter argues that the figure of the Western male disproportionately occupies our global cultural imagination, and perpetuates notions of "progress" that rely on the continued disavowal of historical and present violence. I read Wynter's theories of Man 1 and Man 2 in popular definitions of "humanitarianism" to understand how concepts of the human constitute the activities, and failings, of the humanitarian project.

Humanitarianism: In continual self-definition and self-justification

The term "humanitarianism" is frequently, and sometimes constantly, used throughout all of the reports. In the MSF report, "humanitarian" arises once every three pages, and in Save the Children's report, it is present on every second page.

There is no place where the INGOs summarize or explicitly define humanitarianism. Instead, it is inferred everywhere to label the work they do. Used as a noun, verb and an adjective, humanitarian is an anchor for a range of ideas. In the MSF report the word "humanitarian" is found before the following words: crisis, organization, situation, aid, response, status, emergency, set of services, relief supplies. It is also a "hub," a form of assistance, and a budget line item. It is described in terms of access: for example, when the Myanmar government refused it and armed groups in Nigeria restricted it. MSF's report distinguishes humanitarian and social action: the two are distinct, yet complementing forms of action taken to counter injustice.

For Save the Children, Oxfam, Plan and Caritas, the term "humanitarian" is defined as a program area of the organization's work, as an action that they do for relief and aid, as differentiated from their development work. Save the Children especially mentions the term in the context of emergencies and crisis. Plan, which calls itself a humanitarian organization,

describes its work as being increasingly dedicated to emergency response and humanitarian crisis. This emphasis implies that the humanitarian part of the work is separate from development work. Caritas describes their work as taking place "in the midst of a humanitarian tragedy" and discusses humanitarianism in terms of crisis, disaster, emergencies and challenges. They list their activities as humanitarian actions, and refer to taking part in humanitarian conferences, communities, and sectors.

The use of humanitarianism across these reports makes clear that INGOs understand humanitarianism as a concept encompassing a range of activities that are separate from development work. In my field research, I found that humanitarianism and development are both separate and done in tandem: there was a difference between immediate relief and longer-term development, but much of the time, both happened together. Although many of the world's large humanitarian organizations have been around since the turn of the 20th century, and humanitarianism as a concept emerged in the 17th century, international development as a concept and field is much younger. However, international development is understood, within the humanitarian community and Western culture, as a form of humanitarianism. Development is taken for granted as a good thing, a thing everyone needs, whether they know it yet or not.

The word "humanitarianism" does a lot of work, in these reports and in the wider Western society, across history, space and time. The reports of INGOs make clear that humanitarianism is both latent and absolutely necessary to repeat, define, reiterate as something "we"–INGOs, their supporters, their audiences–do. The act of humanitarianism berths a number of assumptions: that we know that humanitarians will be doing good work; that they know how to live well and can bring a better way of life to those they help; that their projects, the ways they bring help, are working. These reports exist to justify not only that the proliferations of humanitarian acts are working, but that they circle back to the *ideal* of humanitarianism as a form we participate in and hold in high regard. This ideal must be produced alongside the accounting for the work INGOs are doing: without the ideal, the projects and activities are not accountable, but without the projects (the busy-work; the make-work), the ideal might fall apart. An interrogation into the ideals that steer humanitarianism, however, leads to some difficult questions about why it falls short of its goal of making the world a better place.

In Chapter 4 (Humanitarians are human), I discuss how the concept of humanitarianism descends from missionary work and the civilizing missions of colonialism. Civilizing missions assume that everyone should be on a path to globalization and inclusion into the market and developed world. Western-founded international institutions position themselves as superior, and therefore responsible to usher other places into modernity, which I discuss in Chapter 6 (Humanitarians create economy). These constructs of progress, development and modernity are more than teleological, but also spatial and geographic, as discussed in Chapter 5 (Humanitarians travel).

To justify doing humanitarian work, its enactors must show that it is working for its beneficiaries; often, showing that humanitarian projects are working has entailed making more work. To posit humanitarianism as a common good, there is an assumed common human who will benefit from it. Thus the work should be more uniform, with more standards and more accounting, in more places, places that did not necessarily ask for any of it. Once on the ground, humanitarianism needs to prove itself legitimate by continuing its work and by explaining itself, to itself, its donors, its audiences abroad, but not necessarily to its beneficiaries, who are almost always presented in these reports as a "they," foreign and apart from the audiences and writers of the reports. I explore this process of othering in the following section.

Humanitarians travel

I searched reports for the terms "local," "community" and "place." While initially I expected the findings to contribute to my understanding of how the humanitarian regime conceptualizes lands and places, the results instead helped to show how INGOs operationalize logics around travel that I discuss in Chapter 5 (Humanitarians travel), which explores the white Western fixation with supposedly pathologized others, and how INGOs invoke this to entice Western publics to donate to their causes.

The term community harnessed the most finds of any other term I searched. Across all eight reports, "community" appeared on 50% or more of the pages. The term local was used in synonymous and accompanying ways, often found next to the word community to describe which communities INGOs were working with (local ones). Overall, the themes that arose from

my search of these terms reveal that humanitarianism imagines the communities it works with as foreign and dwelling in places supposedly underdeveloped, stuck in the past, exotic and dangerous. This positioning of communities as different and distant distracts from the ways that the Western world is intimately intertwined with "local communities": imperialist, military, capitalist and geopolitical forces are often at root of the problems those communities face. Places are represented as theatres of need, and there is a focus on the spectacle of the pain and other-ness experienced by people "over there," at once in need but also curious objects open to being helped and visited. This perspective elides the influence of the Western world in causing social problems, and legitimizes the work of humanitarian organizations, who represent themselves as vital contributions to solving the problems people face. Action Aid was an outlier from the rest of the INGOs, which I discuss at the end of this section.

Places are distant and needful

Geography is central to describing communities as far away, out beyond the comforts of Western infrastructures, in places embellished with exoticness. MSF in particular uses terms that specify geographically distanced and different places where they work: "nomadic pastoralist" "hard to reach" and "remote" communities "whose homes were ravaged" in isolated, rural and urban areas. The term "communities," when describing territorial conflicts or displaced populations, references the effects of loss of land without directly talking about land (a phenomenon I address in later sections). The term local is never used to refer to lands and places.

Across all the reports, the word "place" is almost never used to specifically refer to a given physical location or natural place. "Place" is generally used in three ways: to position people, such as "women's place"; to describe specific contexts, for example "workplace," and as a way to describe where the INGO is working, abstractly or specifically.

Places where INGOs work are often defined as lacking; reference to them justified the need for the organization's work: "Helping women gain greater control over material, intellectual or financial resources in places where lack of such assets hinders women's development and independence is critical" (Action Aid, 2018, p. 71); "Caritas shines rays of hope in places where people face harsh realities, injustices and suffering" (Caritas, 2019, p. 3); "a place where rates of

stunting are high" (Action Aid, 2018, p. 59); "we carry out an average of 100 hospital referrals a month in places that are considered no-go zones by other ambulance services" (MSF, 2018, p. 38). "Safe" places were described as being created by the INGO, such as a refugee camp in Bangladesh for the Rohingya: "she is grateful that Caritas gives her a place where she can feel safe and secure after the horrible nightmare she went through" (Caritas, 2019, p. 11). Save the Children talks about its work "in some of the most dangerous and unstable places in the world" where "safeguarding children is not always easy" (2016, p. 21). OXFAM lauds its work in hard-to-reach places that are far away: "365 days a year, round the clock, we are ready to deliver, build and maintain life-saving drinking water supplies and toilets for thousands of people in the places no one else can reach" (2019, p. 6).

MSF is an outlier in terms of bringing up politics as a backdrop of the context in which it works. While it does not mention land, it does discuss the issue of displacement as a major driver of violence and the need for medical aid. Places that are "safe" or unsafe" were posited against one another as MSF explains its work, for example, critiquing Australia's offshore detention centers as places of captivity while calling for "the immediate evacuation of all refugees and asylum seekers to a place of safety where they can have fast access to permanent resettlement" (p. 65). MSF is also the only INGO to indicate it is aware that when referring to locations on maps, places are contested; not everyone agrees that the geographical boundary, the country in which the place is embedded, is real. They note multiple times throughout their report: "the place names and boundaries used in this report do not reflect any position by MSF on their legal status" (2018, p. 65). In these cases, MSF acknowledges the existence of places such as Kurdistan and Palestine that are under attack by the nation-states around them, while simultaneously having to placate readers who might balk at the mere mention of the existence of these places and peoples.

Local communities are different from INGO workers and foreign supporters

The use of the terms "local" and "communities" reveal that the humanitarian regime creates and imagines communities and local populations as their most important stakeholders. The descriptions of the communities they work with posit those communities as different from the readers of the annual report as well as the staff teams and employees of the INGO. The text is

not aimed at communities, but treats them as the objects of the story. They are represented as distant, foreign, and often as victims of circumstance. Organizations describe communities as categories with differing layers of need, from the generally vulnerable to those facing crisis: women, girls, refugees, migrants, those who are "poor," "displaced" "marginalized" "vulnerable" "affected by violence" and "facing emergencies." Or, they describe them in terms of their usefulness in helping INGOs do their work: local and community partners, systems, health centers, authorities, influencers, governments, agencies, organizations, staff. The INGO reports constantly typify these populations, with broadness or specificity, to legitimize, theorize and define their work. In doing so, INGOs make clear that they themselves are not a part of the communities they work with, but come in from outside. This is also apparent in the two other uses of the term communities. "Communities of practice" is used not to describe people in emergency or as beneficiaries, but people brought together by the INGO to work on its mandates. A wider "humanitarian community" is referenced in some reports to mean that INGOs were working with other organizations to influence activities and policy positions.

The distancing and differentiating between humanitarian workers/organizations and their beneficiaries arises in my discussion in Chapter 5 (Humanitarians Travel), which argues that humanitarianism relies on a relation of hyper mobility and immobility: Westerners are encouraged and expected to travel to and "discover" the other, who is there to be visited upon and helped. As I discuss in the next sections, those others are not included in the planning of humanitarian work, yet are the source of its legitimacy.

Communities legitimize INGO work

Communities, in and of themselves, are written about as the end goal of INGO work: repeatedly throughout every report, INGOs laud their activities with communities, and mention the variety and volume of communities they work with. The term is used to explain the types of work INGOs are doing. For example, disaster preparedness and response, health promotion or "engagement" and "sensibilization" work, always punctuated by the phrase *with communities,* are presented as core parts of INGO work. The format followed by the annual reports is to present problems, describe projects that brought solutions to the problems, and then provide statistics, stories or both to show that results had been produced by the solutions. Most of the

time, the word "community" is invoked to show that the INGO is indeed successful in their solutions to the problem. To indicate they are doing work that is relevant, they start sentences and paragraphs with the fact they are working with "community" and "at the local level." "Partnering" with local communities, "reaching" them, and doing activities with them are described in diverse and detailed ways to illustrate the importance of the INGO's work.

The concept of community is also invoked through the photos selected to present the INGO's work. Typical representations include a person doing an activity with the caption, "(name) shows/teaches their community..." some aspect of the INGO's initiative. Or, "(staff member of organization) meets with community members." Depicting interaction between INGO workers and "communities," as embedded within communities, is a key source of legitimacy for INGOs.

Bridging conversations between different community groups is another way that organizations legitimized their work. Action Aid praises its work in bringing community leaders into conversation with women and young people and for making political leaders aware of community needs. Other organizations describe their work in translating for local communities, in getting messages out to diverse communities and "bringing communities together," for example by having migrants and refugees interact with local communities. Participants also described this as a key part of success on the Thailand-Myanmar border, which I discuss in Chapter 6 (Humanitarians create economies).

Community is invoked to refer to scalar levels of population, with organizations describing many of their projects as working at scale as "local to national" and "local to global." Scale is another tactic to show legitimacy: while organizations ensure readers they are "on the ground," they also explain they are working from the top, "from individual to family to community to national to international." Organizations note throughout their reports that they are tailoring their work to local needs and meeting local requirements, signaling their work is bringing in people who are not usually a part of this work. Both Action Aid and Oxfam noted inclusion of people at the local level as a sign their work is improving.

Communities don't do the aid work

INGOs posit communities as in need of aid, but not as self-directing their own forms of aid. Care once describes communities as being "first responders to crisis"; Caritas describes their work with communities as being based on "partnership," "care and respect" and Plan says their work is "addressing root causes through community leaders and parents" and coming up with community-based solutions. However, only ActionAid takes a critical approach to discussing how to do the ground-up work that the other INGOs gesture toward. As I describe in Chapter 6, (Humanitarians create economies), in the case of the Thailand-Myanmar border it is clear that local groups do and have always done their own forms of aid work. However, INGO donors largely did not consider local community-level groups and organizations to be doing aid that was "legitimate" enough to keep funding it after the supposed 2010 reforms, even as international organizations heavily depend on those groups to help carry out their work.

Action Aid's different approach

ActionAid is an outlier in the way it refers to community. It is very deliberate in explaining it works with, not for, communities and movements. Its report recognizes that communities have context-specific ways of approaching and dealing with problems. It refers repeatedly to community activism, activists, and its explicit support of community-based and civil society organizations and dialogue between governments and communities. ActionAid posits communities against the government in a way that other INGOs do not, such as through projects that conduct social audits with communities to bring governments to account. Rather than referencing communities as a foreign "other," when ActionAid refers to communities it is often talking about its own members. It presents communities not as in need of INGO expertise, but as enactors of change, aware of their rights and power. It pushes back against the idea that INGOs are superior knowledge holders in reference to climate change and communities, noting

> the work around natural resources and climate change is dominated by so-called experts. We need to shift that power, recognizing the communities as the real experts and that it is their voices and experiences (traditional knowledge) that should determine how to protect their eco-systems. (2018, p. 28)

In contrast, when Caritas invoked the idea of communities being involved in change in Oceania, it implied that those communities were not originally the arbiters of change; they needed the push from the INGO to bring change (2019, p. 25).

Action Aid also critiques the UN and governments for not listening to communities, stating:

> most of the processes related to the management of natural resources and climate are closed… dominated by government agencies and the UNDP, with no or little space for the voices of local communities. ActionAid and other NGOs are invited to many government consultative processes, while communities are not. To shift the power, we need to understand how and why these spaces get closed and how we can bring the communities that are affected into them. (2018, p. 28)

ActionAid addresses where it made mistakes in working with communities. It discusses best practices as a part of its reportback on its projects, for example, explaining ways that they experiment with talking to communities, and ways that they work to become more reliable and trusted by making campaigns coalition-led. It is the only organization to detail a precise way of asking communities to approve of its work, for example through the creation of community scorecards as a way of consulting with people to build facilities for pregnant women, and by conducting community-led "innovative social audits" to help influence new mining legislation in South Africa and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (ActionAid, 2018, p. 24). These tools were often used for political ends that aimed to change social structures.

ActionAid's attitude to its work makes it all more glaring that other INGOs don't take these approaches, or at least don't present their work in this way in their annual reports. It is highly possible that INGOs work in less distanced ways on the ground than is presented in these reports. It is probable that INGO staff members across all organizations are highly aware of the structural causes of the problems that communities face, including capitalism and Western imperialism. However, the way they present their work to the general public and to donors avoids such critiques, while satisfying an imaginary of foreign communities and places as apolitical, passive, glad receivers of help who are in various forms of crisis that posit them as disparate from Western communities and thus in need of aid. The idea that Western economic models (based in capitalist logics) will grant people better lives are core to the humanitarian imaginary. Thus, funding and donation models center on fitting communities into Western forms of economic "progress," rather than centering local and traditional ways of being.

Humanitarians create economy

Chapter 6 (Humanitarians create economy), observes how humanitarianism relies on and creates Western economic norms in which the frameworks of capitalism and nation-states are taken for granted as the best way to effect change. My findings show how international funders swiftly withdrew their support of organizations on the Thailand-Myanmar border in order to move into central Myanmar after the reforms. In doing so, they revealed that they do not respect or fully understand the context of nonstate actors, but instead prioritize the nation-state as the focal point of development work.

While I did not undertake a search term around economy, it was clear through reading these reports that INGOs are very concerned with explaining administrative expenses, their financial responsibilities and justifying their spending. Major sections are dedicated to reporting on numbers, and accounting is integrated throughout the report, including inside the text, on charts for budgets and spending, and sometimes in image captions under pictures explaining they depict where the money goes. Reporting emphasizes that the spending will eventually "pay for itself," that the people donors are investing in will give good returns. Across the INGO reports, descriptions of development projects are overwhelmingly focused on the idea that local peoples must become a part of the "global marketplace" through their formation into viable employees, or through the creation of businesses. Many of the projects and activities INGOs describe are aimed at poverty reduction: these projects help people enter markets, create or uphold small enterprises, and generate income. My search for the term "environment" illuminated how INGOs understand economic development to be the driving force of change.

Market environments

I originally searched for the term "environment" as part of my research on how INGOs conceptualized land. However, I found the word was rarely used at all, but was found in reference to finances and investments. For example, Save the Children mentions it has created "a robust control environment" under a section titled "demonstrating our return on investment to donors" (2016, p. 20). It refers to the environment in terms of becoming more efficient and

effective: "we operate in complex environments and rely on many different partners to deliver change for children. We must continuously monitor the health of our own organisation to ensure we can continue to operate in the best way possible" (2019, p. 18). Caritas mentions the term twice, once in reference to the environment as the place we live in, in its work with Oceania peoples specifically, to monitor and combat a range of environmental issues. The other references "impact investments... [that have] the aim of serving the poor and vulnerable and generating a measurable social and/or environmental justice impact alongside a financial return" (Caritas, 2019, p. 15). Here, environmental justice is positioned alongside finances, as if the organization needs to justify its work on the environment by showing it is economically sound. The connection between the good work the organization is doing, its sound financial record, and the creation of better environments implies that the environments in which the INGO work is located are in need of help. That help often comes through economic amelioration, which was a recurring theme throughout the reports.

Save the Children notes it strives to "create an environment in which young girls can choose who and when to marry,"–this on the same page with a huge heading: "NOT ALL CHILDREN EXPERIENCE THE WORLD'S PROGRESS" (p. 25). Across most of the reports, as across the humanitarian field in general, emphasis is placed on working with women and girls. Much of the aid offered to them is through population control and bringing them into markets. In recent years, INGOs have posited help for a girl as the single best way donors can change communities; the figure of the poor girl has become central to both advertising campaigns and to development projects. Métis scholar Michelle Murphy's theory of "the economization of life" (2017) demonstrates how these priorities are a way for the humanitarian regime to perpetuate Western economic practices in the places it operates. The (normally Black or brown, often Muslim) "Third World girl… has become the iconic vessel of human capital… the darling of philanthrocapitalist ventures" in which the donor sets off a chain reaction to turn the girls' life from unproductive to productive (Murphy, 2017, p. 117). I now summarize Murphy's theory, which is salient for understanding the way the humanitarian regime follows capitalist logics.

The economization of life

Murphy argues that nation-states have used the science of population, and its control, to "install economy as our collective environment" (2017, p. 1). Murphy traces how population becomes key to gauging the health of political economy; as biologists attempted to move away from a eugenist/Darwinian vision of civilization, which hierarchized bodies into ones that were progressive and ones that were primitive/pathologized, they tethered their theories of a civilized society to ones based on the productivity of a population. Population came to be "rife with possibilities for management," (p. 4), as birth and death rates and the reproduction of some (and not others) could alter the supposed progress of the nation-state. Managing population though mathematical (and thus, seemingly objective tools) for measuring changes to demographics was linked to the national economy, resulting in what Murphy called "the economization of life": "the practices that differentially value and govern life in terms of their ability to foster the macroeconomy of the nation-state, such as life's ability to contribute to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the nation" (p. 6). Observing how the purpose of the nation-state has itself become beholden to the creation of the economy, Murphy shows that "population and economy became massive material-semiotic-affective-infrastructural presences" (p. 7).

Measurements of population present as being biologically objective but are in fact deeply raced and gendered, and Murphy works to unfold how questions of reproduction are "at the center of how capitalism summons its world" (p. 7). Murphy tracks the economization of the life of the "poor non-Western girl" to the 1990s, when economist Lawrence Summers, at the time vice president with the World Bank, calculated how education would lead to fertility reductions in young girls in developing countries, which would in turn boost national economic productivity (Murphy, 2017, p. 114). From that moment, international development agendas have been preoccupied with (poor, non-white) girl's education as an investment strategy. Using the concept of "human capital," which "designates the embodied capacities of a person that can produce future economic benefits for that person, her employer, and even her national economy," (p. 115), Murphy traces how bodies "become a site for an anticipatory, future-oriented calculation of value" (p. 115). Girls' bodies, with their vulnerability, reproductive or educational potential, become key sites of investment for development work which has the end goal not of liberatory agendas, but economic benefit. Liberation, feminine equality, and even happiness are all implied as results of economic progress; they are subsumed into economy and dependent on it. Murphy notes that "the concept of human capital shifted the iconic economic subject from a worker or a

consumer to an entrepreneur" (p. 116); the new homoeconomicus is entrepreneurial by default, boundlessly capable of remaking themself in a perfect system where a little opportunity begets success. Murphy observes that under economic logics, human capital investments have particularly strong returns because poor children start out as having such a low value. Murphy's analysis shows that "invest in a girl" logics are part of a larger environment of thinking life itself in economic terms. This was evident in how the humanitarian regime approaches land as commodity.

Humanitarians settle

In this section I analyze the results of my search for the terms "land" and "environment." In Chapter 7 (Humanitarians settle), I examine the ways that INGOs approach land, and whether they are doing much about it, in a context of mass theft of land across the globe. My research on the Thailand-Myanmar border found that all organizations were responding, directly or indirectly, to land theft, because they are all working with people who were forced or compelled away from their homelands. However, while nearly all the CBO members described overt work their organizations were doing to address land loss and land rights as an issue, those who worked with INGOs said their organizations were mainly not addressing land issues. This reflects a settler colonial approach to land, which absents land, and elides its meaning beyond its use as a commodity form. This settler colonial approach emerged in my search in the annual reports, where there was a clear absence of the word, and concept, of land.

Six of eight INGOs almost never mention land. I also searched the terms territory/territorial to be sure I was not missing out on conceptions of land, but these searches turned up nothing. The one INGO–ActionAid–that supports peoples' on the ground movements in a tangibly political way, was also the one that most authentically works on projects concerning land rights.

Land

World Vision, Plan International and Save the Children did not mention the word land. Care International referenced land one time, in reference to a project in Nepal where it is helping to strengthen land rights for a particular community; land was described here in terms of its importance for food security. MSF's report mentions land twice to describe regions in which they work, and once quoting a Palestinian person who says, "this is our land" (2018, p. 13). Caritas mentions land twice, once in reference to Gaza, to explain it is a "strip of land" (2019, p. 12). The other was a reference to its "State of the Environment Report 2019" which describes its work with peoples of Oceania. I went on to read this specific report, and found much acknowledgement there of Indigenous people as stewards of the land, but nothing about land rights, or the ongoing sovereignty struggles happening there.

My findings from the Thailand-Myanmar border also reveal an avoidance over politics and discussion of Indigenous sovereignty among INGOs, as I discuss in Chapter 7 (Humanitarians settle). Combined with the findings (or rather, no findings) from these reports reveals INGOs as incapable of hearing or imagining relations to land outside colonial nation-state logics that view land as property and commodity. A romantic view of Indigenous peoples as "stewards" avoids serious discussion on how the presence and political philosophies of Indigenous peoples challenge modern nation-states and capitalist logics. Instead, INGOs entrench multicultural liberal values, in which some people's cultures and beliefs bolster white supremacist progress by being placed on a racial hierarchy: the romantic, stuck-in-the-past land-based peoples who have not yet come to understand property law just need their rights defended by Westerners for when the lands are parceled out; they just need to be included in conservation processes. These attitudes do not consider Indigenous ways of relating to land, and how around the world, Indigenous communities live in systems in which people thrive without having to turn lands into commodity, without accruing profits for the wealthy few while having disastrous effects on human and non-human life.

Of the eight INGOs, OXFAM and ActionAid stood apart as organizations that do explicitly address land rights, the importance of land, and the layered way that capitalism and political power is causing land grabs. OXFAM (2019) has a section devoted to "Land rights," under a larger section "Sustainable Food and Natural Resources" which claims to reach 2 million people and has two goals: "More people who live in rural poverty will enjoy greater food security, income, prosperity and resilience through significantly more equitable sustainable food

systems" and "The world's most marginalized people will be significantly more prosperous and resilient, despite rising competition for land, water, food and energy sources and stress on climate" (p. 30). OXFAM explains that Indigenous people experience inequities in ownership over their lands. It acknowledges climate change and the environment as connected to lands and the manipulation of corporations, stating:

> up to 2.5 billion women and men worldwide depend on indigenous and community lands to survive. These lands, which are held, used or managed collectively, cover more than 50% of the world's surface. Yet, indigenous peoples and local communities who have protected these lands for centuries, legally own just one-fifth. The twin global crises of extreme inequality and climate emergency, exist in phenomenal proportions and succeed in directly holding poor people back or driving them further into poverty. Powerful corporations continue to influence public policymaking and remain unaccountable for their human, social and environmental rights abuses across the food supply chain. (p. 30)

OXFAM goes on to explain how one of its campaigns, called "GROW," is tackling "systemic causes of hunger, including the marginalization of farmers… [by challenging] elites and vested interests who stand to gain by excluding small producers, by failing to empower women in agriculture and by violating peoples' land rights" (p. 30). They devote a full page to explain their land rights projects, in which they partner with CBOs working on land rights return campaigns in South America and Africa. They explicitly recognize the need for smallholders to keep their lands, and connect land rights to climate change (p. 31).

While this is a departure from the ways the other INGOs in this study address land rights (almost not at all), this section reveals that Oxfam understands Indigenous people to be living "illegally" or extralegally on their lands because they are not recognized as owners by the nation-state and private corporations. Their collective/customary ownership is not viewed as sustainable and legitimate. Alongside this section is a picture of a woman and daughter with the caption: "Yvette and her daughter Grace in the fruit and vegetable patches she and her husband maintain with support from Oxfam and partner Farm Support Association. We are helping the agricultural sector in Vanuatu transition from subsistence to small-scale market-oriented farming." OXFAM does not recognize traditional farming to work for the local communities they aim to help, but rather places its efforts in orienting them toward market models that will change their way of life to something more "legitimate" from the perspectives of banks and corporations. In this same

section Oxfam describes projects it has across West Africa which aim to help smallholders "access the market" (OXFAM, 2019, p. 28)

ActionAid International mentions land on 40 pages of its 108-page report. Unlike the other organizations, ActionAid tackles political issues as a part of its mandate: it discusses governments, corporations and the wealthy as the root of the problems its beneficiaries are facing. It openly supports social movements and groups organizing direct actions. It suggests that fundamental economic transformation, and shifts in power, are what is needed to bring change. Within its executive summary, it places the blame of land loss squarely on free trade agreements between multinational corporations, governments and international financial institutions. It also links the issue of land loss to the environment and climate change.

ActionAid partners with groups who are antagonistic toward corporations, such as Vía Campesina. ActionAid tangibly helps these groups but also co-theorizes with them, supporting the publication of their reports. They explicitly discuss land rights, smallholder farmer's rights to land and the stakes of large scale vs. small scale agriculture. They spell out the rights and conventions that smallholder farmers can use to help them secure lands and outwardly challenge "the current agricultural-industrial model" (p. 16). They bring up land rights in relation to other parts of their work, including work with young people and women, indicating they understand that rights to land leads to systemic change on other fronts, including reducing gender-based violence.

ActionAid also critiques other INGOs and funding agencies for work they fail to do, as in the case of USAID in Haiti promising land and housing to people but not fulfilling that promise, causing displacement through aid projects (p. 56). ActionAid's approaches to development work is a refreshing departure from the norm; but as one out of eight organizations analyzed, it is a major outlier.

Environment

The term environment was mostly used to indicate a particular type of location that the organization was working to create, while referring either to negative aspects of an environment

or to how an environment could be better: a "safe environment for women to give birth" (MSF); "gender-friendly school environments," "working environments," the "current donor environment" (ActionAid); "protective environments for children" (ActionAid; World Vision); "learning environment," "positive and caring environment," (World Vision); "educational environment" (Oxfam); "a safer and more positive environment for children" (Save); "family environment"; "emotional environment" (Plan). As with the term "community," these designations are full of the sort of typifying etymologies connected with development and superiority. They imply that Western organizations know better how to nurture liveable environments.

As with references to land, ActionAid was an outlier, mentioning environment in terms of living ecologies on 19 pages. It is the only INGO of the eight that includes environmental justice as part of its strategy, and is also the only one that connects women's issues to climate change, child protection, people's rights, environmental collapse and corporate greed (ActionAid, 2019). It connects environmental protection to land grabs in Haiti, citing its work with a collective that provides legal support for fighting land theft. It also works with countries in the "Global North" across Europe and in the US on awareness-raising projects that teach publics to be critical about green energy transitions. References to environment in terms of the natural world occurred only one or two times in the other INGO reports, in reference to partner foundations with the title "Environment" and/or where environmental degradation placed challenges to their other projects.

With the exception of ActionAid and OXFAM, my findings show a near-complete lack of attention to land and the natural environment as important factors in bringing change to people around the world. There is an omission of the issue of climate change and the global land rush as being drivers of the problems people are facing. This contrasts greatly with what both communities and scientists have to say about land. In Myanmar, legacies of private property laws introduced by colonialism and the global market collide to cause loss of land, displacement, poverty and conflict. These are all reasons INGOs find themselves present in communities. Yet as I discuss in Chapter 7 (Humanitarians settle), there was a resounding silence among INGOs when it came to land.

Reporting is a major activity for humanitarian organizations. The annual reports produced by INGOs do not only summarize their work from the past year; they also create, define and update major concepts in the field of humanitarianism. In these reports, INGOs justify their activities alongside their theories of change, in a feedback loop where the problems they counter are presented as being solvable through the actions they are taking. Actions not being taken, language that is avoided, and the social issues completely absented from these reports reveal that INGOs do not value, or perhaps cannot even consider them. While I began this research with an impression that land, place and the environment might be less prominent concerns for the world's largest INGOs, my finding that they are *overwhelmingly* not considering how these factors influence social problems tells us much about their positioning. That positioning is to stay with ideals of progress and economic development, to stay with the notion that there are superior ways to be human that can be taught from the developed world, while ignoring the effects of actual "development." Whiteness and Western systems, as established in the previous chapter, have a vested interest in presenting themselves as advanced, while sticking to surface-level representations of what that advancement means, and what it costs.

This chapter serves as a parallel mapping of what I now explore more deeply in the following four sections: humanitarians are human, they travel, they make economies and they settle. While my exploration into these themes stretches outwards from my interview results, across history, academic literature and theories, the self-reporting done by these INGOs has helped to frame and anchor how the field itself understands and defines these concepts.

Chapter 4

Humanitarians are Human

This chapter traces the concept of the human in humanitarianism. In the previous chapter, my analysis of the words human and humanitarian in annual reports revealed that humanitarian aid is conceptualized by INGOs as an act performed to enhance humanity. Within the concept of humanitarianism, humanity is taken for granted as a common ideal we all share and strive toward. In this chapter, I explore how humanitarianism relies on, and is incepted from, a notion of human conceived through both Christianity and the secular scientific-political revolution that began in the 17th century. Organized humanitarian activities began around the same time, and perceived some forms of human as those who do the charity/helping and humanitarian work, while others, as less-than-human, are those who receive that work. In this way, the humanitarian imaginary generates and fortifies the notion that those from Western liberal places are superior forms of human, while those who are recipients of aid must be less-than human.

I begin by discussing results from my research question to participants on the Thailand-Myanmar border: "What does humanitarianism mean to you?" Participants saw humanitarian acts as ever present features of daily life, but discussed the ways that humanitarianism has become increasingly influenced by Western governance regimes, while also existing in response to violence and harm perpetuated by Western-driven powers. Participants distinguished everyday societal acts of care from the explosion of institutionally driven aid work coming from abroad.

Locally born participants understood humanitarianism as part of how we relate to one another: they talked with cynicism of the structure and its problematics, but tended toward rich theorizations of humanitarian work and humanitarians as those who do what's needed, who respond directly to needs in the community. By contrast, foreign born interviewees largely theorized humanitarianism as part of looming institutional structures, policies, donors and governing bodies. They theorized humanitarians in hierarchical ways, distinguishing between rank and roles within organizations, and describing what they are not. I see this is an effect of the cultural and social influence of humanitarian institutions in the West, which shape ideals of the human in teleological terms: as developed and motivated toward progress. In a socioeconomic system based on genocide and land theft, Western identity creates the humanitarian as proof that there is good in the system. However, because a narrow understanding of what it is to be human

(the European secular concept of the human as economic machine under capitalism) serves as a template for "humanitarian" activities, these activities serve capitalism rather than upending it.

To illuminate this point, I read historians of humanitarianism, in particular Michael Barnett's (2011) comprehensive history of humanitarianism, alongside Black feminist theorists, especially Sylvia Wynter (1995, 2003, 2015). Barnett shows that humanitarianism has historically and presently relied on paternalism, and quotidian humanitarianism is distinct from today's structural, institutional collection of humanitarian organizations. Wynter's theorization of the concept "human" shows how the creation of Western identities as the ultimate form of human has required the dehumanizing of others. The humanitarian regime is shaped to help others become more like the Western European human, considered the height of progress and development, which is in turn produced by the domination and exploitation of the "others" humanitarianism tries to save.

Definitions of humanitarianism on the border

During interviews on the Thailand-Myanmar border, discussions on the questions, "what does humanitarianism mean to you?" yielded a clear distinction between those who were locally born and raised in Myanmar or Thailand, and those who were foreigners. Of my eight interview questions, this is the only time this happened: this is the only instance in which I discuss participants' results separately depending on place of origin.

Humanitarianism as an everyday act

Locally born interviewees were much more likely to describe humanitarianism and humanitarian activities in altruistic terms. They presented rich, expansive theorizations of the idea of being human, of being in community and what it means to show up for one another. They referred to a relationship between humanitarianism and "equality," arguing that humanitarianism is rooted in our "equal basic needs," such as food, shelter, a social life, health care and education. They described humanitarian work as ensuring dignity for people, fighting cruelty and exploitation, and accessing equal rights for all. They theorized about how humanitarian work is

related to "the poor;" "the disadvantaged;" and "refugees, migrants, local people, IDPs," saying that humanitarians can come from anywhere and be anyone, regardless of status or walk of life.

About a third of locally born participants directly related the term to "being a human." They described characteristics of this human-humanitarian with words like goodwill, empathy, honesty, purity, kindness, generosity and intelligence; people "who exist to alleviate poverty and pain" which arose in times of need and danger; and as those simply driven by a desire to help. A few noted that poor people especially are humanitarians, that humanitarianism exists when the government is absent, and is reliant on charitable donations. Khaing Oo Maung (Rakhine State), who is in his late 60's and is the founder and headmaster at BHSOH, a migrant school operating on the border for over 20 years, said that in the context of Mae Sot, many of those who fled after the 1988 uprising, such as himself, became humanitarians not by choice but by necessity.

For Saw Eh Htoo Wah (Karen State) from RISE, humanitarianism is deeply tied to the notion of a universal humanity: "As a human, you have concern for another human. Regardless of who they are, their ethnic or religious background, if they suffer or if they have some sort of problem, you understand them as a human." He emphasized that

> usually people understand that you only have to be humanitarian toward the weaker, not the stronger people, but as a human, you also need to be humanitarian, to be human, toward the stronger people as well. It's [about] understanding humanity, understanding each other as human. [Saw Eh Htoo Wah, Karen State, RISE, CBO worker, 10+ years' experience]

Saw Eh Htoo Wah's distinction that humanitarianism is about relations between people, regardless of power differentials, reflects that there is usually an assumption that humanitarians come from supposedly "stronger" backgrounds to help the weak. This assumption was clear in foreign participants' conceptions of humanitarianism. Foreigners also equated the term to humanist/universalist principles, the "welfare of all humanity" and ideals of impartiality and respect. One said it was a driving force of life; another called it a "basic human value." Ton Baars (Netherlands), who has been a teacher on the border for over 25 years and also helps run the community-based organization and shop Borderline, described humanitarianism as "the opposite of capitalism," saying it is "as simple as making bread for a community." Ton noted that basic humanitarian acts are "how we build societies" but that "in general we have lost track of [the fact that] it's the people who are doing the basic things in society that are the most

important people in society. They are the structure of it, but we emphasize the people who are controlling things." Ton's observation that we are "losing track" was common among foreign participants, who noted a distortion or change in humanitarian work. One felt the need to point out, "it's not something I consider myself" while another noted: "it's no longer apolitical"; another said, "it's different from activism."

Humanitarianism as a career

Though foreign-born participants acknowledged the altruism in humanitarianism, they mostly did so in comparison with "career humanitarians" and in the context of the global regime that humanitarianism has become: they largely were unable to separate humanitarianism from its institutional forces. They related the term humanitarianism to development work, associated institutions and organizations, and service provision, describing tensions between different types of humanitarian work such as human rights, development, and emergent "security and peace complexes." They named specific INGOs and funding bodies as part of their answers, pointing out that humanitarianism is "donor driven." They described humanitarians as being mainly from the international community, coming from "democratic, not dictatorial nations" who were affluent or had a "privileged upbringing with a safety net"; people who "came from the first world and hired locals"; "white liberals from… Western Europe, North America… people with, you know, the nice cars."

Some of the most experienced participants described a hierarchy between those who do humanitarian work because they have to, and those who pursue it as professionals. Mr. K (UK), who has worked for decades with CBOs and INGOs, distinguished types of humanitarians:

> Within communities that are, let's say more disadvantaged than others, there are many humanitarians who are not only acting collectively as in setting up civil society organizations, but even just the local press, the mother or the neighbour, I guess that's a small H humanitarian. But as for the Westerners and Anglo Saxons, they are typically someone who works for one of these large Western-based aid industries who fly around the world, improving their career, doing "good work." Don't forget to say I put air quotes around that… the typical sort of humanitarian you see in the NGO world, a person, probably middle class, probably well-educated or educated beyond high school. Altruistic. But beyond that, there's a lot more humanitarianism out there, unpaid, uncelebrated and unrecognized. [Mr. K, UK, INGO and CBO worker, 25+ years' experience]

Here, Mr. K describes the discrepancy between workers along the border and within Myanmar, where local peoples are humanitarians "by nature," because they are addressing the needs of other people around them. Foreign peoples, however, with the privilege of mobility, fly into regions far away from their own homes addressing people's problems as part of career-building, as part of a field built around aid that has less to do with everyday, collective community engagement, and more to do with individualism and being self-defined as "Humanitarian."

Chris Wright (UK), teacher and CBO worker currently based in Yangon who worked on the border for about 10 years, spoke at length about the changing definition of humanitarianism:

> It surprises me that it's become used as a noun. Once it was, you know you did something that might have had a humanitarian effect. It was a way of behavior. People wouldn't describe themselves as being a humanitarian and organizations wouldn't have either…. what [the term humanitarianism] means to me now in today's day and age is very much associated with the development sector and that business, rather than an individual ethos, ethic or way of behavior. It's organizational, institutional… for me it's a term that's been coined and used to sort of say, "look, we're helping the world," but to separate it from a religious or a missionary bent. From my experience of how it's used and how people use it, they're very rarely using it, if ever, in relation to their own communities or the societies that they directly are living in. It's used almost in a superior way, to say "I am acting in a humanitarian way… to these poor people that need my help." Whether that help was requested or not. I think if they do [work in their communities], it wouldn't be referred to as "humanitarian." It would be referred to as social work or care work. [Chris Wright, UK, CBO worker, 10+ years' experience]

Chris reiterates Mr. K's observation while also pointing out that people who are "capital H Humanitarians" are not engaging with their communities at home, or at least, are not calling it humanitarianism when they do. The Western definition of humanitarianism becomes about an act of help performed upon the "other," a finding that was reflected in the INGO annual reports analysis in Chapter 3.

KT Julian (Aotearoa/New Zealand), founder of Mote Oo Education, who has worked on the border for over 25 years, pointed out that the perception of "goodness" in humanitarian work is not warranted:

> Just because you're humanitarian doesn't mean you're good. In fact, one thing I absolutely loathe about the perception of humanitarians is they're somehow perceived to be noble and self-sacrificing. Whereas actually, you know, a lot of people are making personal profits out of it… there are people who don't gain materially from it, but I don't think anyone's doing it because they dislike it and are sort of forced into it for the good of

everyone else. It's not like taking your share at you know, doing the dishes. [KT Julian, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Mote Oo Education, CBO worker, 25+ years' experience]

Here KT observes the self-congratulating or Western societal-congratulating aspect of humanitarianism. There is an idea that it is a particularly virtuous career choice, rather than a form of work like any other. It is almost as if there is an element of surprise that Westerners would choose to do this work, over other forms of profit-making work, and so they must be considered extra good people; as if the work of helping others is difficult, rather than a deeply gratifying and enriching choice of career.

The notion of people profiting from humanitarianism as a career–not only financially, but through social image–was a recurring theme. Saw Eh Htoo (Karen State), a member of RISE (Rural Indigenous Sustainable Education) said

> people say they are humanitarian, but really they are not. In Thailand or in Burma, people are following the humanitarian groups, but actually they are failing, they don't really have the stomach, they are showing one face to the people and getting support, but when they get a support they don't give it away to the victim's needs. They keep some for themselves. [Saw Eh Htoo Wah, Karen State, RISE, CBO worker, 10+ years' experience]

Saw Eh Htoo explains corruption within aid groups, as well as a form of hypocrisy in a field of work that proclaims to be virtuous and self-sacrificing but on the other "face" could be self-serving. He went on to explain that some humanitarianism was "kind of biased… like if you're just concerned for a particular group of people, like your own people, your own ethnic group." Crystal White (Myanmar), the Program Manager of RISE, similarly noted the ethical breach that sometimes can happen when people claim to be humanitarians: "Sometimes people can manipulate by providing something that people will need, but also taking back [something]." These remarks emphasize that personally benefitting from humanitarian work is not necessarily the problem. Rather, it is when people operate under the guise that humanitarian work stands apart from other forms of work, and deserves special accolades, that was at issue.

Humanitarianism as an industry

Participants accredited the creation of the "career/professional humanitarian" to an increasing bureaucratization and structuring of humanitarian work over recent decades. They

described humanitarianism as mediated through institutions, newly related to an "industry of aid." Simon Dickinson (UK), former Deputy Director of the Mae Tao Clinic, observed that "in the last 15, 20 years, there's been the [growth of a] career humanitarian… it's now seen as a business, a way you could earn a good living." Mr. K (UK) who has worked for decades with CBOs and INGOs, explained

> there's a whole discourse around the "efficiency" of humanitarian aid work… please add my floating fingers!… you know, in my experience on the border here in the last, let's say certainly 15 years, it's typically [all about] the accountability of the program, the program "efficiency" is not towards the beneficiary, but it's towards the donor. And so programming has been increasingly driven by government aid wings, foreign affairs departments. The UN [saying], "this year is the year of disability" or "next year is the year of child soldier recruitment" or "this year we're going to hit on the boarding houses," whatever it be. [So] the intervention… isn't driven by the needs of the community, the beneficiary community, so much as the trendy themes at the time coming from Geneva or coming from donor governments. [Mr. K, UK, INGO and CBO worker, 25+ years' experience]

Here Mr. K observes aid as a top-down phenomenon: rather than beneficiary communities requesting help for specific goals and projects, Western institutions have become drivers of where help goes, and make categories of aid into themes and trends.

Jack Dunford (UK), who helped found the TBC (The Border Consortium)[7] in the 1980s, explained a phenomenon of encroaching UN and donor intervention since 2007. Dunford said that an increasing attitude of intervention by the UN and donors "swung the pendulum" from considering refugee camp populations on the border as autonomous communities, to seeing them as "commodities to be served" within the rules of overseas policies. These had become ever more defined and narrow, and were often imposed in a standardized way according to global mandates set down by the UN and other governing bodies. Dunford tells the story of how camp populations were affected by a UN mandate that imposed a "civilian nature of camps":

> it was basically "no soldier can live in the camp," and if they have been a soldier they have to actually de-mobilize. You [as a soldier] had to go through an official program… denouncing it, handing in your weapons and so on. Or don't you dare be in the camp... [Jack Dunford, UK, INGO worker, 25+ years' experience]

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[7] TBC is one of the most important NGOs in the region. I explain its history in greater detail in Chapter 6 (Humanitarians create economies).

Dunford points out the UN's policy meant that the refugee camps could not reflect the society in the context of the border, where armed civilians are members of communities and play key roles in governance and sovereignty struggles. After almost 20 years of camps led by a philosophy of self-governance, those structures came under increasing question by donors. Their representatives would briefly visit the camps from abroad and, in Dunford's words, "see what they wanted to see, go away and damn us… they would see everything they needed to prove their point through their own little narrow eyes."

A review of humanitarianism's history reflects much of what participants in my study observed: over the past 30 years from the 1990's onward, humanitarian aid work has become increasingly professionalized and standardized according to political and economic changes by donors and aid agencies. This has led to changes in perceptions of the populations "benefitting" from humanitarian projects: they became clients to be serviced. When the results of mandates set from overseas were perceived to not work, funding was cut or more policies created. Humanitarianism is not just a human response to human needs, in human moments, but one determined by structures seeking evermore standardization and norms.

These observations are reflected in Michael Barnett's (2011) history of humanitarianism, which traces the roots of humanitarian work from ad-hoc responses to crises to a full-blown global governance regime. Who sets humanitarian norms and who decides what is best for populations is determined by concepts of humanity, development and Westernity set down by a long colonial legacy. In the following section, I read Barnett's history alongside Black feminist philosopher Sylvia Wynter's reading of the formation of the category "human" to understand how humanitarian governance has evolved alongside concepts of the human. I begin with a brief overview of what the concept "human" meant in Europe before the first imperial conquests, and before the notion of "humanity" writ large became a part of European scientific and social philosophy.

The Western European human

From its inception, Christian tradition requires viewing humans as separate from animals and other "beasts." This binary precipitated discursive social formations that posited Indigenous, Black and other people, including women and the differently abled, as "savage," "vulgar," predisposed to natural appetites and in need of control (Anderson, 2000). Patel (2019) examines how before colonial occupation, Moors in Europe were the original "internal others," and anti-blackness preceded anti-muslimness as the Church represented dark-skinned peoples as nonhuman or hybrid (p. 421). Patel shows that Western (white) Europeans encountered others through "relations of conquest and the production of alterity." To know the other meant making them into commodity: owning dress, accessories, exoticizing and constructing lands and places according to European fantasy produced the other as "Other" while amalgamating diversity and difference into–for the Westerner–a monstrous yet ornamental sameness (Patel, 2019, p. 426). Jay (2014) argues that European identity was always fractured, its "discursive construct… far more fragile and provisional than it seemed from the vantage point of those being colonized by it" (p. 610). Jay argues that the process of colonization was itself an attempt to suture together a coherent understanding of what Europe was, which was an impossible project. Together these scholars describe the concept of human in Europe as fluid and ill-defined, a problem that sought to solve itself through control, commodification and conquest of the other. These projects of dehumanization, while part of the Christian belief system, also created friction with Christian morality and notions of a common humanity. Humanitarian scholars have documented a reflexive relationship between the moral conundrum of colonial violence and moves to humanitarianism: there were "counter-arguments about the moral significance of common human feeling" as early as the 16th century, when a popular Spanish priest decried atrocities committed against Indigenous peoples in the Americas, "emphasizing their humanity as potential Christians" (Bornstein & Redfield, 2011, p. 13). However, the potential humanity of the Other was always measured in terms of Christianity and the European experience of the human.

The history of Western humanitarianism

Michael Barnett (2011) offers a description of key events that make up the humanitarian field from its origins, as well as analysis of its tensions, productive forces and defining characteristics. Like the research participants in this study, Barnett separates humanitarianism as a field and set of activities from everyday acts of kindness. He defines humanitarianism in two forms: "emergency and alchemical." Emergency humanitarianism reacts to sudden events where people have immediate need of help. Alchemical responds to more protracted needs; currently this is referred to as development work. Barnett categorizes the history of humanitarian practices into three ages, each driven by forces of destruction, production and compassion: "imperial" from 1800-1945, driven by colonialism and the European urge to "bring civilization" to other places; "neo" from 1945-89, driven by the Cold War and moves to sovereignty and postcolonialism; and the present era of "Liberal peace" driven by globalization and the concept of universal human rights (p. 30). As it moved from one age to the next, humanitarianism's governance extended to more populations while becoming "increasingly public, hierarchical, and institutionalized"; the past 30 years have seen an explosion in humanitarian and international development agencies, humanitarian workers and public funding for humanitarianism (p. 29). In the following section I trace the imperial origins of humanitarianism against its relationship with the notion of the human as read by Sylvia Wynter. I argue that the field of humanitarianism and the concept of the modern human are co-produced.

Enlightenment Period: Man1, Western science, and free will

Barnett (2011) traces the earliest forms of organized humanitarianism to the 17th and 18th centuries, when a "turn to compassion" materializes in parallel to transformations in state and economic systems: "an expanding market, urbanization, and modernization… were breaking down existing political communities and encouraging individuals to envision new forms of solidarity and responsibility that were at a greater social distance" (p. 52). Compassion for the other became performatively important for European upper classes though simultaneously emerging paradigms: Anglican preachers began promoting benevolence as a virtue; a French philosophical movement popularized the notion of *humanité;* new transportation and

communication technologies opened notions of farther-away worlds to publics, and introduced the idea that what happened in one region had impact on another; and, perhaps most importantly, the Scientific Revolution separated human actions from those of the divine (p. 49-50). These paradigms percolated into action when an earthquake devastated Lisbon in 1755, killing 40 000 people. Wide news coverage of the event sparked the first cross-European humanitarian relief work, demonstrating to publics and governments that it was possible to cooperatively aid others. The event bolstered Enlightenment theories of human experience as an effect of material/natural forces rather than being influenced by the supernatural, and configured human action as social responsibility (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011, p. 15). Free will, a budding cornerstone of Enlightenment's definition of humanity, found its place in religion, in particular Evangelism, which posited that salvation lay in free will; Evangelical movements, located especially in the U.S. and England, initiated sweeping social reforms alongside organized forms of charity that were foundational to modern humanitarianism (Barnett, 2011, p. 53).

The scientific revolution and its attendant notions of free will produced a paradigmatic shift in concepts of the human and its sociopolitical world. I now turn to Sylvia Wynter's reading of the category human during the Enlightenment.

The Copernican shift to the natural sciences, along with the introduction of Protestantism and the secular state in the 16th and 17th centuries, led to what Wynter observes as "the lay world's invention of Man as the political subject of the state… the first secular or "degodded" (if, at the time, still only partly so) mode of being human in the history of the species" (2003, p. 263). This new mode of being human replaced the earlier identity of the human as made in the image of a Christian god ruled by the heavens. Wynter calls this Man1: the first understanding of Man as biologically natural. This shift in the European figuration of humanity happened alongside the creation of new sciences and philosophy, which were occurring in the context of colonial conquest and emerging nation-state formations. Colonialism and the nation-states it invented required a human schema in which Indigenous, Black and racialized others were conceived as "savages."

Reading Mignolo's concept of modernity/colonialism, which sets colonial knowledge, and the world system it imagines, against the difference and disregard of Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production, Wynter argues: "this epistemological 'disregard' was itself

part of an even more central imperative—that of the sustainability of the new mode of being human, of its epochal redescription as, primarily, that of the political subject of the state" (2003, p. 265). This new mode of being human opened the way to a definition of secular humanity that instituted the political state, commerce and economic production as central facets of human life, while still relying on Christian theologies that were obscured within the notion of the biological/natural.

To begin to read Wynter against a history of humanitarianism, it is important to note her pedagogical contribution to mapping the notion of the human. da Silva (2015b) argues that Wynter disrupts philosophers of the modern epistemic and ontological order, in particular Foucault, by "tracing the effects of colonial power beyond its juridical-economic architectures… [Wynter's] highlighting the material conditions of possibility for onto-epistemological transformation enables a feat, specifically the unsettling of freedom" (p. 97). Modern Western philosophy takes as given that the modern Human and humanity begin with a comprehension of the universe as heliocentric rather than geocentric (via Copernicus) and Man's rationality as objective truth and a priori moral imperative (via Descartes and Kant) with freedom as its ultimate project. Wynter, in contrast, locates "the conditions of possibility outside, exterior to, the self-determined mind and thus contingent upon the relationships of power that organize global-historical moments" (da Silva, 2015b, p. 97). The sense of freedom so integral to modern humanity is contingent upon the unfreedom of others, and thus the modern human is "always already an effect of coloniality" (p. 101).

Reading the exterior conditions that make possible the formation of the human (as Man1) in the 16th and 17th centuries, Wynter demonstrates how European knowledge systems produce the human as a rational, secular being, presented as scientifically objective. Wynter argues this definition of the human is overrepresented and obscures that man is a combination of *bios* and *mythos*: we are biologically natural beings animated by origin stories/cosmogenies–what Wynter refers to as *homo narrans*. Mignolo states Wynter's theoretical practice is decolonizing because she uncovers how knowledge systems that establish what it means to be human fail to notice the stories that make them: that they are "intelligible cosmogonies" that support imperial epistemologies parading as totality (Mignolo, 2015, p. 107-9). Alagraa (2019) notes Wynter's project is a "disciplinary breach" in the biological overdetermination of humanity: reading Fanon's (1952) sociogeny, in which we are socially produced rather than ontologically given,

Wynter insists that culture, rather than biology, makes us human (Alagraa, 2019, p. 168). In the colonial world, biocentric definitions of Man justify hierarchizations that pathologize Blackness (Alagraa, 2019, p. 168). These biocentric definitions satisfied the needs of slavery, and "explain the emergence of attitudes of racial superiority rather than the other way around" (da Silva, 2007, p. xxv). These definitions ground Western science, which requires concepts of race and difference as irreducible qualities (da Silva, 2007). They fuel attitudes that are foundational to nation-states and geographies based on categorizations of habitability/uninhabitability, which overlayed onto notions of the human/inhuman: once the discovery of America as "habitable" had been made, the imperial project centered on rendering supposedly chaotic, wild, natural environments into European tameness: it followed that any peoples who lived in what was deemed "uninhabitable" similarly needed to be brought into the fold of European humanity (Ansfield, 2015). In Chapter 5 (Humanitarians travel), I expand on the importance of this colonial perspective on geography for shaping humanitarian agendas. In the next paragraphs I draw on the relationship between Western science and the project of conquering nature.

The human as free–free to conquest, objectify, control

In a time of imperial/colonial conquest and new developments in Western science, Europe's nascent nation-state formations defined concepts of "freedom" and free will, which led to the emergence of judicial and economic systems that support those concepts (da Silva, 2015b). Parading as objective truth, the mythos of freedom is tied to a cosmogony of the human's relation to nation-state, producing legal architectures that create more freedom for some humans–those with a particular relation to the nation-state–while negating freedom for others (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015; da Silva, 2015b). Whole categories of people with antagonistic relationships to the settler nation-state were (are) purposefully erased from places through resettlement, displacement and murder.

Cosmogony marries settler colonial state-making in Dunbar-Ortiz's (2015) account of the history of settler colonialism in the U.S. in the 16th century, in which the earliest settlers created a mythology of a covenant with the land. This populace (indentured labourers from England) understood themselves as exceptionally endowed with a godly purpose of conquest on lands they saw as empty, sacred, occupied by heathens. As they killed, fought and died for lands, settlers'

notion of their "blood sacrifice" earned them entitlement to land that would ground the mythology of the U.S. as a settler state for centuries to come (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 50-54). Nature, a mythologically pristine and undeveloped wilderness in this worldview (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 45) was a thing to be conquered through settlement, but also scientific discovery that established humans as separate and differentiated from nature. These early relations toward nature and the other lay foundations for the making of the settler-nation state while also defining European statehood, as European monarchies/governments raced to colonize and conquer and created laws to allow them to steal land. These violent foundations would become key to European, American, and all "Western" identity, and were justified as rational and scientific. Goeman traces how Indigenous peoples were imagined as un-American, communist and anti-capital, and thus provided fodder for imperial narratives of individualism (2013, p. 91). In an attempt to forcibly assimilate Indigenous peoples into the American imaginary, they were violently displaced from their land under policies such as "termination legislation" (p. 90), which absorbed nearly one and a half million hectares of land into the US nation-state and terminated Native nations, all under a narrative of "progress" (p. 90). The settling and conquest of Indigenous lands centered on "unjust spatial policies [that] culminated in the violent interruption of cultural epistemologies" (Goeman, 2013, p. 125). However, as Goeman's work also shows, Indigenous peoples persisted in their resistance.

Western scientific epistemologies grew from man's encounter with a seemingly uncontrollable natural world. This included othered peoples, whose bodies and ways of life were open to scientific discovery. Indigenous peoples were viewed as part of the flora and fauna, and open to settlement, in a "spatial imaginary of vast landscapes" (Goeman, 2013, p. 18). From the perspective of Western science, nature was reducible to "inert, manipulable matter" (Shiva, 1997, p. 163). The land could thus be altered and conquered by anyone possessing scientific knowledge, which held its power through claims to universality and neutrality (p. 165). Narratives of a human-animal divide, inherited from Christian notions of the "bestial," endured as Western tropes that posited the human as an animal in control of its urges and/or in control of other animals (Anderson, 2000). In this view animals were little more than biological beings without social relations, and humans were beings whose social relations took place through control: this control would surface in every system from the scientific to the governmental to the humanitarian.

Post-Enlightenment: Man2, abolition, governance and civility

The 19th century saw a scaling up of conquests and annexations of territory, with nation-states across the world taking up imperial projects in rivalries for power. Technological innovations (and the attendant idea that those who possessed them deserved power), the industrial revolution, and an increasingly integrated global economy entrenched a division of labour between working poor, indentured, and enslaved populations, all categorized along racial lines, as almost all of Africa and a large part of Asia were colonized. This forged excessive wealth for the new "bourgeois" class in Europe, who found themselves with lots of time to philosophize and seek explanations for human nature and existence. Into this moment of rapid economic and social change came Darwin's theory of evolution. Wynter posits that Darwin's theory was exceptionally salient at that time: just when the public was primed for a scientific explanation that was yet still rooted in cosmogeny (a rooting that was obscured by a staunch belief in objective rationalism), Darwin merged mythology and natural science as humanity's origin story.

In his study of the evolution of human rights, Richard Rorty (2010) similarly observes the importance of this shift. Moving from an essentialist view of humans as attached to the divine, Rorty observes that "New Science" recruited humanity into a corpuscalarian understanding of nature. Shifting away from the human-animal divide which had been a cornerstone of the Western comprehension of humanity from the ancient Greeks to the Christians, a corpuscalarian worldview both reduced humans to the "natural" and imbued them with the potential of difference (p. 120). This set the stage for Darwin's "easy" triumph over the public, who were hungry for an explanation of human difference, not in some philosophical or theoretical form, but as "clever" animals with the potential of progress (Rorty, 2010, p. 121). Darwin's notion of man as biological-economic subject replaced all other narratives in the minds of the Western bourgeois (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 35). The concept of people as economic machines under capitalism–what Wynter calls "homoeconomicus," was already in full force, and evolution fit nicely as an excuse for the violence and objectification that served capitalist markets. Wynter explains this as a hierarchization of humanity in which the Westerner is at the top:

> in the wake of the West's second wave of imperial expansion, pari passu with its reinvention of Man in now purely biologized terms, it was to be the peoples of Black African descent who would be constructed as the ultimate referent of the "racially

inferior" Human Other, with the range of other colonized dark-skinned peoples, all classified as "natives," now being assimilated to its category—all of these as the ostensible embodiment of the non-evolved backward Others—if to varying degrees and, as such, the negation of the generic "normal humanness," ostensibly expressed by and embodied in the peoples of the West. (2003, p. 266)

The notion of the generic "normal" human entitles all who are ostensibly in (or aspire toward) the descriptive category Man2 to push others toward their ethnoclass[8], which is taken as inarguably superior (Wynter, 2003). Thus, the aim of humanity becomes the "incorporation of all forms of being into liberal monohumanist man" (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 23). From this moment, Man2, the white, male, cisgendered, able-bodied, property-owning and salary-earning person becomes the model for the ultimate form of humanity.

If Man2, as the human of the highest order, is reflexively defined against the (lower) other's shortcomings, his humanness compels him to help the other become more fully human: helping, in turn, re-affirms his exceptional humanity. This was perhaps most evident in the moves toward abolition, beginning in the late 1700s but reaching an apex point in the 19th century. Most historians trace modern established forms of humanitarian governance to abolition movements, the original acts of reaching across racial borderlines to help the other, the original Western-organized and institutionalized humanitarian work.

Citing the robust literature that links modern humanitarianism's origins with the antislavery movement, Barnett calls it "an historic breaching of established categories of humanity" (2011, p. 57). The movement to abolish slavery signaled "shifting sensibilities about pain and suffering" that would lead to human rights discourses, political advocacy movements and humanitarianism; this movement took place alongside civilizing projects initiated by administrators and missionaries, who strove to "remake and reform their colonial subjects and landscapes" (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011, p. 16). The abolition movement flourished both from views of the human as having natural "reasoning" and thus rights, and as the Christian responsibility, especially of Evangelicals, to reform the conditions of slavery to help facilitate slaves' ability to find their place among other Christians. These moves were highly paternalistic, constituted by the notion that "civilized" people were responsible to backward populations.

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[8] Wynter uses the term ethnoclass to combine social (economic) class with ethnic origin.

In Chapter 5 (Humanitarians travel), I read Saidiya Hartman's account of the abolition movement to understand the particular legacy it established in centering white subjectivity through ostensible charity work and through objectifying the Black body as suffering. Abolitionism performs as a form of protection for the humanity of the enslaved other while protecting the civil character of the society and peoples who continue to engage in and benefit from slavery. Abolitionism has always been as much about the identity of the abolitionists as it has been about freeing slaves: Brown (2006) documents British abolitionism as a move to organize moral legitimacy for the British empire after its defeat in the American Revolution. While abolitionists' eventual work was toward a society free of slavery, their original work was about reforming slavery to treat slaves better and to focus on individual rights and freedoms (Barnett, 2011, p. 58).

Abolition movements functioned as disavowals of the societal benefits of inequality through purported humanitarianism. They served to reinstate the humanity of those who made empire through slavery. I believe these movements set the blueprint for what comes later, a humanitarian regime established by the West to work alongside its global economic structures that produce violence. Through humanitarianism, the West evades accountability for the harms it commits through the performance of help. In doing so, it bolsters, rather than collapses, categories and hierarchies of the human. Claiming there is a "common humanity" while defining the human as Man2, humanitarianism as a field generates complex governing and social forms that reify, reproduce and solidify categories of the human as they were understood and shaped through colonialism. Elbourne (2016) traces direct connections between early movements for "Aborigines protection," including the creation of a parliamentary committee on the treatment of Indigenous peoples in the British settler empire, showing that humanitarianism "played a key role in creating and promoting the very idea of "Aborigines" as a transnational category." Activities aiming to "help" victims of colonial violence used discourses of "equality" that aimed to bring supposedly inferior populations into the orderly and superior realms of the supposedly superior classes.

Charity and help on behalf of the State

Humanitarianism's role was complementary to government, if not integral to it, from its beginnings; it served as a softer form of governance that worked to quell social unrest through "helping." As Barnett (2011) notes, within Europe and in the colonies, intervention and aid were defined by those in power: "in this way humanitarianism's emancipatory spirit also contained mechanisms of control. It targeted specific populations that might be particularly restive and used a variety of nonviolent techniques to contain the possibility of violence and rebellion" (p. 55). Humanitarian governance was constitutive of the British colonial project, and developed in direct parallel to the perpetuation of violence and displacement of Indigenous peoples (Lester and Dussart, 2014). It also presented an alternate form of governance as a response to anxiety about the morality and feasibility of British imperial rule (Dirks, 2006; Wyman-McCarthy, 2015). British subjects fighting against colonial violence on humanitarian grounds could claim a higher morality, while at the same time remaining tethered to the notion that imperialism was a moral good (Elbourne, 2016).

As colonial powers grew more entrenched and sophisticated, the narrative between charity, governance and the economy took an important new form: the state began to describe its "public works" as charity. This move is encapsulated in the story of India's Bengal famine of 1837, one of the many British-caused food shortages in India that killed millions. Influenced by Britain's antislavery movement at home, which pushed the government to recognize its responsibility toward colonial subjects, British India had passed a New Poor Law, establishing a governmental obligation to help those facing famine–but only if they could be put to work. In this way, the British colonial regime could ensure a source of labor power while claiming itself as charitable and humanitarian, despite "paying starvation wages and working the labor force to the point of collapse" (Barnett, 2011, p. 63). In the meantime, despite their inability to adequately save people from dying, officials refused to allow local relief systems to operate. Despite communities' having been responsive to hunger in the region for millennia, the British assumed their methods were inferior to those of Christian charities. This new ideology of humanitarianism meant new forms of obligation on the part of the British state that also "created a new apparatus of control" (Barnett, 2011, p. 64). This control was at once bound to the economic potential of colonial rule and the paradigm of civility. In the next section I examine civility as a structuring logic birthed in colonial rule and 19th century imperialism that stretches into the 20th century and becomes a key part of Western globalization. Civility, and its attendant

ideologies of civilization, civic humanism and civilian protective rights, are core components of humanitarianism in the present. In its opposition to the imagined "savagery" of the uncivilized, civility constitutes the hierarchizing of humanity that enables charity, aid and development work. 19th century conceptions of civility and civilized nations have a direct lineage with today's international development and human rights work (Wilson and Brown, 2009, p. 6).

Civilizing as helping; civility as state subjecthood

Europeans assumed that the racialized peoples on whom they imposed their imperial rule were "primitive," without civilization, and thus not fully human. Wynter tracks how Western Europe excused the atrocities it was inflicting in the colonies through the perceptive move away from "civitas dei," in which mankind's origins and goals orient around the will of the divine, and toward "civitas saecularis"–man's goals and behaviours orient around the will of the state. For Wynter, this is an epochal transformation: human redemption now comes "through the state as intermediary… achieved primarily through the individual's actions, as a rational citizen, in ensuring the stability, growth, and competitive expansion of the state" (1995, p. 14).

Tracing the history of the concept of civility, Nehrig (2011) argues that the behavioural norms of civility, imposed culturally on the intimate lives of civilians or citizens and entwined with norms of democracy, emerged as a way to establish "a specific polity, namely the state monopoly on the use of violence" (p. 315); he thus advocates against splitting "civil society as a site and civility as an action" (p. 316). Rather, civility can be understood as the acquiescence of personal/private life to the norms of statehood and its constitutive violence. Nehrig determines that colonial expansion is directly linked to the idea of civility in the colonizing country or within certain echelons of the society, and the notion of savage others in colonized countries or among poorer classes (p. 314).

Tuhiwai Smith explains civilizing processes as "processes of dehumanization… often hidden behind justifications for imperialism and colonialism, which were clothed within an ideology of humanism and liberalism… structured into the language, economy, social relations and cultural life of colonial societies" (1999, p. 68). Imagining Westerners as civilized, and all others not, was a founding mythology of colonialism: the idea that the lands colonizers occupied

were empty, or if Indigenous peoples were present, that they lacked civilization, was a delusion (Dunbar Ortiz, 2015). This was especially true in settler contexts where entire cultures were founded upon the notion of white settlers being more civilized than their Indigenous counterparts, even as those settlers behaved in inhuman ways toward the peoples whose lands they occupied. White settlers invested in a "fictive ethnicity" that established them as a homogenous group who were morally superior and the self-appointed keepers of order: justice, equality, and social behaviour were all contained within the notion of "the civil," and civility became a bordering, othering project (Coleman, 2006). As I investigate in Chapter 7 (Humanitarians settle), settler laws and relations to land were bound to the ordering and conquest of nature that productively ignores Indigenous governance systems; as Goeman argues, Indigenous peoples were "never… 'naturalized' citizen[s] but always a part of nature that must be civilized" (2013, p. 60).

Civility was a powerful tool to provoke and compel ordinary citizens to do the extraordinarily violent work of Indigenous dispossession and Black enslavement: it was the tool of dehumanization par excellence. But more than that, it is and was a tool of disavowal: it masks violent structures and actions with notions of the "good" that are foundational to nation-states. The illusion of the inherent civility of white people extends to perceptions of white nation-states as more "civil" or "developed," despite their perpetuation of incalculable harms. Today, civility continues to disguise a range of violent, racist acts through routinized bureaucracy (Razack, 2010). While Britain especially operationalized white civility to excuse its actions, the concept is found across the Austro-Hungarian and German Empires prior to the First World War, and within international institutions, especially the United Nations, established after the Second World War through racist, classist and gendered logics (Nehrig, 2011, p. 314). Studying how human-caused and environmental conditions converge and oscillate together to generate varying forms of violence, Balibar (2015) theorizes civility as a range of responses, from liberal to revolutionary to institutional, to address violence, calling civility a "whole set of political strategies (and conditions of possibility of politics) that respond to the fact that violence, in various forms, always exceeds normality" (p. 65). Embellishing a whole culture with notions of good manners, appropriate behaviours, well-intentioned institutions and higher technologies, civility does the work of normalizing violence that should be wholly abnormal.

Reading Balibar, Pinder (2018) notes that "institutions of civil society… which exist at the junction between the State and society, the public and the private realm, are at the very heart of the socio-political orders that produce and reproduce violence" (p. 484). Analyzing the permanent exhibition of the museum of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC) in Geneva, which uses theatricality to teach about history, Pinder argues that "humanitarian civility" produces culture and politics that romanticize and de-historicize victimhood while normalizing the ultraviolent global history and structure in which we are embedded (p. 496).

Unlike the violent projects that were excused based on the notion of the inferior other, humanitarianism's specialty was nonviolent improvement of the other's condition. From the turn of the century to the Second World War, as warfare grew increasingly technological and affected regular civilians, and news technologies made the effects of war more well-known to publics, emergency humanitarianism was born. This is often credited to the creation of the Red Cross in 1863 by Henri Dunant, who was not a pacifist but wished to humanize war (Barnet, 2011, p. 80). Dunant "appealed openly to Christian sentiment and inspired a pragmatic attempt to "civilize" warfare" (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011, p. 14). Barnett traces the colonial and racist roots of the ICRC while noting its important role in constituting the field of transnational organizations working together to address the violent impacts of conflict, leading to a global movement of Red Cross organizations. This influenced a range of other humanitarian organizations and political moves, that went on to institutionalize the philanthropic and aid sector while introducing the idea of "impartial" aid, ushering in the modern era of humanitarianism.

20th Century to the Present: Era of institutions and international community

In the wake of the Second World War, "in the gray zone between the recent memories of devastation and the eternal hope for a better world, rose the discourse of the 'international community'" (Barnett, 2011, p. 102). The Geneva Conventions and the creation of the United Nations established humanitarianism as an official form of governance, at once heavily influenced by nation-states yet outside them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, would become a guiding document for humanitarianism across the world; however, its dependence on membership to a nation-state and its iteration of

the ideological "Rights of Man" has been rooted in American imperialism (Williams, 2010). The Second World War made way for a new type of global governance, one more entrenched than ever by concepts of nationalism. As the USSR and USA competed for power while promoting the idea of human destiny as universally bound up in national identity, decolonization and the Cold War ignited tremendous suffering along with new forms of "Great Power intervention" (Barnett, 2011, p. 98-99). As Europe reconstructed itself and created policies that both liberalized the economy while providing protection for citizens, "there emerged a new field of development economics and a cadre of development economists preaching that the science of economics, with its universal and timeless insights, could benefit the Third World"; these benefits were bound with the security interests of Western states (Barnett, 2011, p. 100).

The end of the Cold War marked a new era of economic liberalism that also saw the proliferation of civil wars and new iterations of human suffering. A sense of "globalization" invigorated public discussions of human rights and concern for others abroad (Barnett, 2011, p. 164-166). The 1990's saw a marked shift in humanitarianism to addressing root causes and moves toward centralization, with large agencies such as the World Bank, previously focused on development, creating humanitarian wings (Barnett, 2011, p. 169). 1992 saw the creation of ECHO, the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office, and the UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs; the UN began to shift its focus from international stability to stability within states; definitions of "failed states" entered the scene of INGOs as they joined governments and international agencies in exporting Western-style statehood abroad. Talks of human rights "seeped into every nook and cranny of world affairs… [and] expanded to include women's rights, civil rights, religious rights, and even economic rights" (Barnett, 2011, p. 167).

Humanitarianism and development as a strategy of engulfment

Through an "analytics of raciality," da Silva argues that signifiers of race and culture, cohered by Western science, birthed two major logics: the category Other, whose "affectable (unbecoming/pathological) moral configurations… [require] their subjection," and the "signifying strategies that engulf the globe–namely, 'civilization,' 'modernization,' and 'globalization'–which retain as a presupposition the science of man's writing of Africa, Asia, and Latin America as subaltern global regions" (2007, p. 181). In this moment the West, both in

distinguishing these regions as subaltern and itself as the universal, becomes a discursive practice (Hall, 1992). The West defines itself and concepts of globalization as a whole, which in turn constitute ideals of the human, a humanitarian community, and human rights; this modern globality "fuses particular bodily traits, social configurations, and global regions, in which human difference is reproduced as irreducible and unsublatable (da Silva, 2007, p. xix)." In encompassing the world, the West hides that it is a particular way of being while posing as universal. Western onto-epistemologies are underwritten by race and racializing processes that produce what da Silva calls "strategies of engulfment" in which race and the color-line are found within every part of the political–juridic, economic and symbolic–and make the nation-state itself a racial figure, circumscribed as the type of "human" all other humans aspire to be (2015b, p. 33-34). This human possesses the ideals of self-determination and Freedom, which da Silva calls Europe's "self-claimed moral descriptor," appearing post-Enlightenment within the nation-state polity as self-determination, democracy and capitalism (p. 34). It is in the post-Enlightenment 19th century, when slavery and commerce within the colonial system are at their peak, that the human takes the form it currently occupies: Man2, "a purely biological mechanism that is subordinated to a teleological economic script that governs our global well-being/ill-being… who practices, indeed normalizes, accumulation in the name of (economic) freedom" (McKittrick, 2015, p. 10). Colonial conquest of othered humans was excusable as a means for them to join with the ranks of this idealized human.

da Silva analyses how self-determination, as the next iteration of "freedom," becomes taken up by social science as "development" in the mid 20th century (2015b, p. 35). Development is presented both as an end, or something that expresses the higher, superior values of a particular collective, and as a necessity, which is a natural outcome of the operations of the laws of nature. Development becomes a powerful weapon in the arsenal of raciality because it encapsulates the notion of perfection; development writes the "others of Europe's" failure to achieve human beings' highest vocation because of how the laws of nature prevent them from even contemplating the highest principles and values according to universal reason" (da Silva, 2015b, p. 35). Development was always a racial project premised on the notion that targets for development (the poor, the illiterate and the hungry) could not naturally help themselves, and that white/Europeans had an obligation to help them do so; this notion of a natural incapacity to help themselves obfuscated that colonialism, capitalism and the expropriation off their lands was

what caused supposed "underdevelopment" in the first place (p. 36). As the ultimate universal goal for nation-states in a globalized world, development is and always has been about race (p. 37). The concepts whiteness and development are taken in tandem as unquestioned superior ways of being. Both are structures hiding in plain sight: whiteness hides that it is a race while racializing all other groups; development hides that it is just one way of life while positing itself as the end goal for humanity.

Self-determination and freedom take many forms in modern Western society. In the following chapter, I explore how travel has been one of those forms. As an individualistic pursuit of class, status and knowledge, travel works to define forms of the human, as well as lands and places, as developed and underdeveloped, as progressive or backward in time.

Chapter 5

Humanitarians Travel

This chapter traces the connection between travel, colonial domination and humanitarianism. I examine how the phenomenon of Western travelers stumbling upon humanitarian work opportunities is part of a legacy of conquest, discovery, and travel as a privilege afforded to whiteness. While the ability to travel emerged as a recurring theme in a number of interviews on the Thailand-Myanmar border, this chapter contains fewer excerpts from my interview data, but stems from a decade of observation of how travel and mobility are integral to humanitarianism. Beginning with some of the discussions I had with participants around the question of who the humanitarian is, I explore the conditions by which Westerners are constructed as travelling subjects, de facto permitted to travel and move around and be invited into places, and why they consider themselves qualified to do humanitarian work.

I learn from Anne McClintock's (1995) "three governing themes" of Western imperialism: "the transmission of white, male power through control of colonized women; the emergence of a new global order of cultural knowledge; and the imperial command of commodity capital" (p. 2-3). I track how these themes appear in humanitarian activities and logics, to explore how humanitarianism is constituted by Western travel practices. Building on the previous chapter, which explored how the humanitarian is defined by a narrow vision of the human as Man2 (homoeconomicus), this chapter traces how Man2 is defined by hyper mobility–an unfettered access to the whole world–inherited from colonial conquest. Categorizations of who gets to be mobile–the traveler–and whose mobility is restricted or controlled–the traveled-to–continue to subtend travel and tourism culture. These categories are integral to the humanitarian imaginary, which relies on and produces white fixation with supposedly pathologized others. My findings from analysis of annual reports produced by INGOs, summarized in Chapter 3 (Humanitarians report), showed that the humanitarian regime represents beneficiaries as needy, foreign, different and distant from the audiences of the reports. I consider how INGOs use these tropes of pathology to entice Western publics to donate to their causes, generating an idea of a divide between those who are in need of aid and those sending it, and creating a feeling of travel for people consuming images of the "others" they help through humanitarian support.

Travelers become humanitarian by happenchance

In discussing the characteristics of humanitarians working on the Thailand-Myanmar border, it was common for participants to note that privileged Western humanitarians started out in volunteer work and decided to stay on in paid positions; they arrived in the region "accidentally," without a previous plan, then wound up spending years (and sometimes lifetimes) dedicated to work in Myanmar.

Participants marked a difference between local people who do humanitarian work out of necessity and responsibility, and those who have a safety net "back home," but "fell" into the work and then decided to commit to it because they "saw themselves as a part of something." Mr. H (UK), a representative of a nonprofit organization that has worked for several decades in Myanmar, described how this experience led to "a view of yourself within the wider society and wider group of human beings and a collective desire for good outcomes for everybody." Greg (Canada), Director of TeacherFOCUS, distinguished between humanitarians with a social safety net and those without, and the feeling of responsibility and inspiration incited in Westerners who see what local peoples are doing: "it's seeing those people that have everything to lose and are willing to do that. I think those are the best humanitarians actually. But yeah, they risk a lot more than others." Simon Dickinson (UK), former Director of the Mae Tao Clinic, told the story of how he'd been doing long-term volunteer work in Nepal and heard about Myanmar, leading him to come work in the region for years. He described meeting many others with similar stories: humanitarians often came "from all over" and decided to stay on and work by

> happenchance. I think it's just, you meet somebody and they introduce you and so you end up going there. So there was a woman who's left now... She worked for AAPP and [before that] she was working I think for an insurance company or something. And she rang another guy who taught here from the UK and he comes out a few times a year and you know, they just got chatting and he mentioned that he did that and she was like, 'Oh wow, that sounds interesting.' And in the end she ended up coming out here to work. So it's just accidental I think. [Simon Dickinson, UK, CBO worker, 10+ years experience]

Simon's description of the way Westerners travelled, "fell" into the work of helping, then recruited other Westerners into the work because it was something interesting to do, was familiar. I too am a person who began working on the border by accident. As I was finishing my undergraduate studies, I applied to work in Mae Sot after seeing a poster on a wall advertising the opportunity to teach in migrant schools. This was a voluntourism opportunity in the mid-

aught's, when such opportunities were becoming massive trends across the Western world. The program I joined was slightly different from the two-week trips popping up on offer through many schools and organizations; my stint was six months long and paid for through fundraising by the university community, which meant that the students doing the volunteer work were accountable to that community. I had immediate reservations about some of the cringe-worthy attitudes I noticed about the work, on the part of people in Canada: how they thought teaching English was a priority for students on the Thai-Myanmar border; how they lauded our supposed good intentions; and how they seemed to assume that it was normal, even noble, for young inexperienced people from the West to show up in a completely new environment and do the work of "teaching." As I spent time in the border region, I observed how the ability to travel and move in the world is so integral to whiteness, to Western privilege and the work of humanitarianism. Westerners move through the world for their own pleasure and recreation, and define recreation in the supposed discovery of the other. Discovery, learning and eventually helping become industrious activities that move from pastime to work.

Chu May Paing and Than Toe Aung's (2021) study of white academic researchers in Myanmar finds they also follow a trend of "stumbling upon" the country as a byproduct of something else they were doing: travelling or studying something that introduced the topic of Myanmar. They note "for white researchers, Burma is a subject of study, but for us native researchers, Burma is our home that we study to make sense of our ongoing oppression." Local scholars and humanitarians have no choice but to do the work. Foreign scholars and humanitarians enjoy immense privileges in Myanmar, while in our home countries we enjoy the positive perception associated with doing work in a place far away and imagined as in deficit, in need of aid from benevolent Westerners.

Mae Sot: The nexus of (im)mobility

The borderland region between Thailand and Myanmar is a dynamic site of movement, multiple intersecting classes and cultures. It is home to refugees and migrant workers without status from across Myanmar, to citizens of Thailand and Myanmar, and it is a long or short-term visiting place for people who are citizens of other countries, there for business, tourism, or

humanitarian work. Tens of thousands of undocumented migrant labourers work in manufacturing, in construction, and in domestic labour (Campbell, 2016). While many live in Mae Sot, hundreds cross the border from Myanmar each day for work. Some cross legally; others surreptitiously wade through rice paddies and forest, or cross the shallow portion of the Myawaddy river that marks the boundary between Myanmar and Thailand, scrambling up the riverbanks unnoticed (or just ignored) by authorities. In this world, I observed "high-society" Thais riding shiny SUVs to country homes while trucks with massive cages on their flatbeds carried hundreds of migrants to be deported across the border; many would simply return on foot the next day. I listened to stories of my students hiding from Thai authorities under floorboards in their schools, of getting arrested and deported for the crime of their presence. Riding on sangthaew (flatbed trucks used for public transportation) to the refugee camp, I witnessed the systemic extortion of people without papers; those who had so little already were separated from the rest and made to pay extra just to move around. I was hyper-free in that setting: reveling in cheap spicy meals, joyously speeding a bicycle through mountain and field landscapes, basking in the sunlight and monsoon rains, drenched in sweat and privilege.

The stark contrast between differences in people's mobility in the borderlands led me to think about how we all live in a *nexus of (im)mobility:* our differing access to travel, to being able to live in places, is interdependent and co-produced. In this region, I observed three types of mobile subject: hyper, compelled and forced. The *hyper mobile* are those who are allowed and encouraged to travel and move for work, leisure, or any reason they want. The *compelled mobile* move for employment: they get jobs that are presented as better than what they might get in their home countries, and their labour sustains economic systems built on exploitation. The *forced mobile* are those who move to survive, and yet are routinely punished for movement, often through containment, detainment and incarceration. People move among the three categories depending on their circumstances. A hyper mobile subject may be forced to move, for example, due to a climate event. Forced or compelled mobile subjects, after much work (and waiting) to gain access to class and status, can become hyper mobile. Thinking through how these three forms of mobility are in relation–are connected in ways that are intimate and enmeshed, yet obscured and segregated–contributes to a deeper understanding of how mobility is produced through structures including citizenship, borders, private property, notions of civility and charity, and pleasure. Theorizing "in the nexus" illuminates how (im)mobilities are produced by settler

colonialism, white supremacy and antiblackness (Toomey, 2021). This chapter explores how Western humanitarianism is built upon relations between hyper mobile (humanitarian) and compelled and forced (humanitarian beneficiary) subjects.

Western humanitarians, in Mae Sot and elsewhere, are hyper mobile. Their travel is part of a culture that encourages movement for status and for pleasure. Within the humanitarian imaginary, travelling to do humanitarian work is a responsibility, an expression of empathy. However, scholars have critically shown that acts of empathy and responsibility absent a global critique of capitalism and imperialism has led to forms of humanitarianism that hinge on consumption and objectification. In the following sections, I consider how travel operates as a defining characteristic of Western culture, something that people do as a mark of status, but also as a way to escape the grinding realities of wage labour under capitalism. Travel is a form of escapism, but it also happens while staying home: through the consumption of othered peoples and places. Travel understood broadly has always been a way for Westerners to define themselves, up and against the different "other." Travel underpins humanitarian work as a project of Western self-definition: feeling for others, "helping" others, secures the humanity of those performing empathy.

Whiteness, humanitarianism and the nexus of (im)mobilities

White males enjoy the greatest privileges of mobility on Earth: they statistically have more wealth and resources for travel, and the countries they come from have passport acceptance rates that are far higher than for countries in the Global South. White mobility is constructed against the purposeful systemic immobilizing of racialized people, who face myriad unequal infrastructural and political constraints on their movement, so that race cannot be understood apart from the consequences and opportunities of (im)mobility (Nicholson & Sheller, 2016). Settler colonial countries grant citizenship, and "possession" of the nation-state, to whiteness, especially through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Goeman, 2013; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Mobility as a way of differentiating between who is citizen and who is not is foundational to settler colonialism, which is about "both the potential and actual capacities of settlers to roam as autonomous sovereign subjects around the world and across the territories they claim as their own—and conversely to circumscribe and control the mobilities of Indigenous peoples"

(Clarsen, 2015, p. 42). "Citizens" have rights to move and travel, while noncitizens do not. The notion of "citizen" is composite with the notion of the human: white males, as the *de facto* human, are assumed to have citizenship and are thus allowed to travel with few difficulties, while racialized asylum seekers, taken outside the purview of the human, can have their rights categorically violated by the nation-state with the cold permission of the populace (Choules, 2006).

Western white mobility and nonwhite immobility underpins the humanitarian regime, through the ways that projects are managed, advertised, and funded, and by pivoting around the nation-state as a logical point of organizing and aid distribution, a point I explore in the following chapter (Humanitarians create economies). On the Thailand-Myanmar border, Karen civilians engage and resist both the Myanmar government and the Karen National Union, and in doing so place nation-state legitimacy itself in contestation (Oh, 2013, p. 1). However, data from my interviews and the literature reveal that when push came to shove, the humanitarian regime could not imagine itself outside the constructs of nation-state logics; it could not respect non-state actors enough to listen to what they had to say about the supposed reforms that had occurred in Myanmar. The humanitarian regime quickly shifted its work when there were (illusions of!) changes happening within an official nation-state governance. It ignored what many Karen and other ethnic civil society groups and grassroots organizations were advising, which was that the reality on the ground was much different from the central government's claims, and more time was needed before shifting funding to within Myanmar.

Kothari (2006) has traced how race and racism have been invisibilized in development work and studies. Racism and condescension toward local civil society groups and organizations are endemic to the humanitarian regime, both in the makeup of management–the vast majority of decision-makers are white–and the allocation of funds: the lion's share of funding goes to international, and not local organizations (Petersen & Lentfer, 2017). In recent years the largest INGOs have faced a crisis of mistrust stemming from the mistreatment and exploitation of beneficiaries and local staff (Clarke, 2021). This top-down management of humanitarianism as directed from North to South, West to outwards, is part of an expression of power and control over peoples in other places that manifests as mobility. Prioritizing funding for international organizations over local ones reveals how Western funders understand their role: to keep the

money flowing to the traveling organization, its ideas, its worldviews and its employees, while the local ones, their ideas, customs, worlds, and people, remain in place as static receivers of aid.

White Westerners' ability and propulsion to move around, visit and work with people, is predicated on a long history of travel as "discovery" of the other. Flowing between past and present, in the next sections I read theories and popular culture examples to illustrate how travel is constituted by forms of colonial conquest.

Imagining uninhabitable places and pathologized peoples

During European colonialism, white male identity was co-produced with the twin projects of discovery and conquest, a highly gendered and sexualized process that entailed ascribing foreign places as in need of civilizing and bringing into order. White women similarly enjoyed freedom of mobility, but their travel practices were motivated by an attempt to mimic their male counterparts within the bounds of what was acceptable for their gender (McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 1996). White women used the domestic realm and acts of helping to access class status and assert what little power they could. In doing so they often undermined the agency of local women. For white women, humanitarianism has been a ticket and motivator to travel: white women "discovered" the other by helping them. As colonial exploration mapped and divided places between the savage, chaotic, dangerous, jungle-covered uninhabitable, and the technologically and teleologically advanced urban metropolises of empire, categories of the developed and underdeveloped arose. Spectacle and consumerism were key to nurturing fantasies about the "other," which in turn informed the middle-class self. These colonial tropes together normalized mobility for some and immobility for others.

Travel as a domination fantasy

McClintock (1995) analyses hundreds of years of European art, texts, maps and later advertising and photography to trace what she terms "porno-tropics":

> a long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment… [in which] Africa and the Americas had become… a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears… [where] women figured as the

epitome of sexual aberration and excess… given to a lascivious venery so promiscuous as to border on the bestial. (McClintock, 1995, p. 22).

McClintock's work is essential to understand European legacies of travel as the project of discovering other places and peoples, imagined as objects of desire. Porno-tropics were intrinsic to the European male's understanding of his role in the world. Early colonizers had both a fear and fetishization of the marginal and of being swallowed by it; conquest was thus a project of engulfing the marginal into empire's norms (p. 26). The job of the European male explorer/settler was to discover and conquer (through mapping, labelling and stealing) lands, which were fantasized as feminized spaces open for invasion, the goal being "male penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior; and the aggressive conversion of its 'secrets' into a visible, male science of the surface" (p. 23). McClintock argues that Enlightenment metaphysics and science combined into a kind of gender violence, in which the "unknown" world "is feminized and spatially spread for male exploration, then reassembled and deployed in the interests of massive imperial power" supported by "new Enlightenment logics of private property and possessive individualism" (p. 23). In these logics, "women served as threshold figures through which men oriented themselves, as agents of power and agents of knowledge" (p. 24). Geographic spaces not yet conquered or discovered were imagined as uninhabitable and filled with peoples marked as pathologically inferior, but also romanticized as full of special secrets to be uncovered.

When I told friends I was headed to Burma back in 2004, their reference point to the country was from the show *Seinfeld*, which spent part of its eighth (1996) season satirizing J. Peterman, who at the time was famous for his popular 1990's clothing catalogue which invoked representations of imperialism, white masculinity and conquest to sell clothing (Hersey, 2000). People recounted a well-known joke from that season, where Elaine says, "I think it's called Myanmar now" and Peterman replies, "it'll always be Burma to me." That audiences thought that joke was funny because it implied Peterman's ownership over/familiarity with a country no one knew much about displays a form of white ignorance in practice. The joke elides the intertwined legacies of imperialism, arms deals and economics, and violent outcomes for people in "other" places.

Eleanor Hersey argues that Seinfeld's writers effectively critique the Peterman catalogue by obviating "the relationship between colonial nostalgia and consumerism" (2000, p. 14) while using racist colonial tropes as their own form of entertainment. The storyline evokes a colonial

perspective on Myanmar that reveals both the Seinfeld writers and American audiences as apathetic to the plight of actual people in Myanmar (Hersey, 2000, p. 19). Even when trying to be critical, it was too difficult to get away from stereotypes of white people as "world travelers" while those traveled-to are used as backdrops for entertainment, fascination and discovery.

Burma studies scholar and fiction writer Rose Metro remarks on the common experience of being asked whether she "fell in love" with Myanmar while writing a book about it. She writes,

> the idea of me as a white American falling in love with a formerly colonized nation is an imperialist fantasy. How would it even work? Falling in love is usually a person-to-person experience. Sometimes it's unrequited, but if it's with a country, a language, or a culture, it's definitely unrequited… (2018)

Metro observes that the white writer falling in love with a country, or even a whole continent, is an oft-repeated trope across the travel writing genre.[9] In travel writing, "love" is often symbolized by a feminine character and contains "the assumption that there's something poignant about being beholden to a place you should be able to enter and leave as you please" (Metro, 2018). Invoking white innocence, white travelers can elide their relationship to consent. By contrast, when nonwhite peoples express wanting to come to a Western country unbidden, they do not get to claim being in love: they are invaders, terrorists, or potential workers.

Writing two decades apart, Hersey and Metro connect travel, the colonial gaze, and the ways foreign peoples and places are imagined as exotic and subjected to Western "love," ignorance and apathy through different genres of consumption. Hersey illustrates how people living in places imagined as far-flung and exotic exist in the ethos of white travelers: they are reduced to backdrops for a Western plot line, served up as comedic relief, their political actualities ignored. Metro generatively observes that non-consensual exchanges between Westerners and "other" (peoples and places) are imbued with fantasies of domination masking as love.

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[9] Examples of travelers saying they are "in love" with places are found across cultural productions in the West. On the day I write this, the New York Times (2021) has a column listing "52 places to love" (instead of "52 places to go") as a lament of the coronavirus halting people's ability to tour the world. On India, one white woman contributor says, "No one told me 'the love of my life' could be a place!"

Women travelers as humanitarians

McClintock details white women's complicated relationship to colonialism: white women had few choices about colonial rule but at the same time wielded power (1995, p. 6). McClintock argues that "gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of imperial enterprise" (p. 7). As expounded through the extensive research of both McClintock (1995) and Stoler (1995), instituting the domestic life of Europe in the colonies was a way for white women to access masculine power and an imperative of imperialism: the "mass-marketing of empire as a global system was intimately wedded to the Western reinvention of domesticity, so that imperialism cannot be understood without domesticity and relation to the market" (McClintock, 1995, p. 17).

Both at home and in the colonies, helping the less fortunate became a way for 19th century middle-class housewives to create work for themselves in the public sphere. This helped them to assert their independence and climb the social ladder, as it became more in vogue for the bourgeoisie to think about and work toward the "greater good." Taking on local humanitarian and social work, women emulated men's independence by venturing into the realm of the "Other," "less fortunate," performing "good" work within the feminine realm of caring, securing their societal status as above the less privileged underclasses (McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 1995). White women's travel is a form of status and also an assertion of power and modernity: Western women showed their independence and upward mobility by travelling, which was supported by a proliferation of print and literary works (Galletly, 2017). Women mimicked the traveling and conquest of their male counterparts by going into the world and "doing good," as well as by settling, by enforcing domestic European practices onto other local women. Penny Edward's analysis of colonialism in Myanmar and Cambodia argues that women

> were crucial agents in 'settling' Europe into Asia, not only in their much touted roles as homemakers, but also as agents of philanthropic projects dedicated to 'uplifting' the colonized and securing 'uprooted' indigenous women into social niches as good wives and mothers. (2003)

Edward here confirms in a local study of Myanmar what McClintock and Stoler understood as a global effect of colonialism: that the role of white European women was to engage in soft forms of conquest and domination, through settling and civilizing, that often was couched in an ethos of humanitarianism.

Pathologizing othered places

In my reading of the annual reports of eight of the world's biggest INGOs, presented in Chapter 3 (Humanitarians report), I find organizations understand and present peoples and places as separate–as other–from those performing the humanitarian activities. Much of the text in the annual reports were dedicated to using language and examples that expressed the need for humanitarianism because of the danger, the difference, the distance between sites of humanitarian aid and the people who needed to either be the humanitarians or support that aid. INGOs relied on an implicit assumption that other places and people are underdeveloped, pathologized, in need of catching up and bringing into modernity. This has been a Western project from the beginning of colonial contact.

In her essay *1492: A New World View* (1995)*,* Sylvia Wynter explains that prior to Columbus' voyages, Europe's comprehension of geography rested on a duality of temperate and torrid climates: some places were habitable and visitable, and others not. Reading Wynter, Ansfield (2015) argues that after Columbus, geography was no longer contained in this duality, but became a project of discovery and conquest, altered from notions of habitable/uninhabitable to the idea that everywhere could be made habitable according to European standards (Ansfield, 2015, p. 129). Noting Wynter's contribution to illuminating the "interplay between geography, habitability, and humanness" (p. 138), Ansfield argues that projects aiming to reconstruct urban spaces in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina relied on tropes that posited Black bodies in poor spaces as contaminated. Modern development projects masquerading as anti-poverty and progressive continue to anchor on concepts of places as toxic and peoples as pathologized (Ansfield, 2015).

Saidiya Hartman's (1997) analysis of literature, historical accounts, pedagogical primers and legal cases in the American antebellum illustrates how white identity hinges on the idea of Black pathology. Whiteness is constituted by the objectification of Black peoples, who are imagined as in service to white culture and pleasure. Blackness is ideologically generated through both harm and (supposed) help of the Black other, especially through relations on the plantation which were brutally oppressive, yet fantasized in popular American culture as domestically harmonious. In these white imaginaries Black peoples are infantilized, idealized

and fetishized as in a "perpetual condition of ravishment," naturally given to subjugation (p. 51-52), their "personhood... conterminous with injury" (p. 93).

Katherine McKittrick's (2013) concept of "plantation economics" substantiates the historical grounding for the pathologizing of the places Black and racialized peoples come from. Delineating habitable and uninhabitable landscapes, colonialism creates the plantation as a space of order that generates wealth while marking out "othered" peoples as in need of ordering, of being brought into the fold of the economy. Coming from the "uninhabitable" to places under imperial rule, Black labour is recruited into the project of ordering the lands of the white nation-state and turning them into places of profitability. In this project, both Black labourers and their lands are treated as fungible, replaceable and subhuman, while also being fundamentally important to global capitalist imperialist economics.

While I do not suggest that racialized labourers are the same as Black labourers, plantation economics is helpful to understand the logics of uninhabitable lands, in which peoples from places deemed as disordered or condemned are positioned as disposable for the economy. This framing illustrates how hierarchical categorizations of the human posit the white male as traveler, positioned in the world to build economies abroad through the ordering of geographic areas deemed in need of European/Western control, while Black and racialized peoples who come from those geographies are imagined as needing to be brought into the economic order set down from the European metropole. The violence required for this control was excused by the supposed pathology/inferiority of racialized peoples, with whiteness presenting itself as the antidote to the disordered worlds of those others, through help and domestication. The white male's travel is thus imagined as necessary to advance the global world order, through stealing and inhabiting new lands, managing the labour on those lands and developing new societies in the image of European ones. The racialized other's travel is also necessary, but is to be tightly controlled by the needs of economic development and colonial projects of conquest and settlement: as labouring subjects, racialized people's travel is forced or compelled through slavery and indenturement. Or, they must be kept static and in place, either to labour in settled landscapes or to be visited upon by curious travelers.

Consuming exotic others through spectacle

The production of arts that fueled imaginaries of othered peoples and places were common from the outset of the colonial race: they were fundamental drivers in what McClintock calls the "global science of the surface… a conversion project, dedicated to transforming the earth into a single economic currency, a single pedigree of history and a universal standard of cultural value–set and managed by Europe" (p. 34). However, this project saw major acceleration in the second half of the 19th century. As Europeans began traveling more than ever, there was a mass emergence of what McClintock terms "commodity racism": the Victorian middle-class home became a display space for imperial spectacle, showcasing the racialized other's body, culture and homeland through myriad forms including travel writing, novels, postcards, pornography and especially photographs (McClintock, 1995, p. 34). With the emergence of mass media and more sophisticated forms of travel, Western middle-class publics came to understand themselves by comparison with what they deemed to be "lesser" classes, whose difference from the "normal human type" construed European self-identity through its contact with "Otherness," expressed in written accounts, the collection of objects and art (Hill, 2016). Bringing the other home, through stories, souvenirs, and photography after travel was a mark of status. Travel became a form of consumption requisite to helping European middle classes define who they were.

As travel popularized, so did photography. Pinney (2014) traces how the European desire to see "with one's own eye" (p. 453), to bring to the surface the secrets of Otherness, accorded perfectly with photography, which offered up the world as "a zone of representation" in which "picturing becomes inseparable from modernity" (p. 456). Ramaswamy (2014) observes that "visual technologies and practices frequently underwrote colonial governance and power" (p. 5), compartmentalizing the Third World into a "hitherto uninscribed and uncolonized space... forcefully brought into a world... essentially constituted around and by the idea of Europe" (p. 9). Images produced by Europeans depicted places outside Europe as faraway and exotic; they established the people in those places as disparate from Europeans. Visual culture was also bolstered by capitalism and the new moment of mass advertising. Ciarlo (2014) documents how advertising in Europe at the turn of the century enticed audiences with colonial ideologies that depicted Europeans as higher status figures, better-clothed and healthier in stature, helping to civilize the people they visited, paternalistically protecting through peaceful commerce and trade (p. 197). Pejorative depictions of Africans became indispensable to the public's understanding of

what an "African" looked like, creating stereotypes that became ubiquitous in European culture (p. 198). The acceptance of racist imagery took place in the context of a wider societal acceptance of colonialism as a necessary progressive project (Ciarlo, 2014). Re-producing images of the poor, suffering other continue to be integral to the West's understanding of itself as superior. In the following section, I consider how the racist depictions of others as in need of aid from Europeans underwrote the earliest forms of humanitarian advertising.

Spectacular pain and the urge to get closer

Halttunenen (1995) documents humanitarianism and the spectacle of pain as co-producing forces. Reading the history of the Anglo-American public's approach to pain, she observes that a "culture of sensibility" beginning in the 18th century encouraged publics to be sympathetic to the suffering of others through spectatorship: one first saw the sufferings of others, then used the imagination to "enter into" those sufferings (p. 307). A body of "sentimental literature," characterized by thick descriptions and drawings of scenes of violence, grew in popularity toward the end of the 18th century. While people purportedly engaged in the witnessing of others' pain as a matter of ethics, the ways in which they did so "from the outset lent itself to an aggressive kind of voyeurism [in which] pleasure mixed with pain" (p. 308). Tracing the increasingly popular use of pain depictions across a variety of mediums through the 18th and into the 19th century, Haltunnen shows that sympathy and spectatorship were an effect of a growing humanitarian ethos, which pushed for the recognition of pain through reproductions of sensationalist imagery and accounts, yet at the same time, humanitarianism's use of pain representations led to audiences' de-sensibilization. The earliest reformers working to abolish slavery and other forms of suffering were well aware of this paradox, "caught in a contradiction largely of their own making" (p. 330). In a culture of spectatorship that was commodifying the belongings and images of others on a mass scale, and in doing so dehumanizing and reifying those others, humanitarianism's pleas for reform through the production of visual representations contributed to the European view of the other as without agency or voice. The other was put on display as a reminder of the Westerner's potential to exalt their own humanity. Helping and hurting thus become intertwined in a relation of disavowal parading as affirmation, sympathy and action through consumption of titillating imagery.

Studying abolitionists' techniques of using legal arguments and depictions of the harms inflicted by slavery, Hartman (1997) traces how abolition movements also used pain as a tactic to create change, but centered white people's experiences. Abolitionist media productions on the ills of slavery thus focus on "the spectacle of the black body in pain … effaces and restricts black sentience… literally by removing the slave from view as the pain is brought close" to the white audience (p. 20). White audiences needed to "feel" the experience of the pain for themselves in order to enact empathy and change. Depictions of pain as "a normative condition" in which slaves lived erase the subjectivity of those in pain and renders depictions and experiences of Black pain into white fantasy. Thus, Hartman argues that the "acclaimed transformative capacities of pain" (p. 20) are doomed to fail as an enduring way to bring structural change. Arguments about the ills of slavery are focused on those experiencing its conditions, rather than turning the gaze onto the perpetrators and benefactors of slavery: white society writ large. Even when white people claimed to do the work of alleviating suffering or helping, they treated the Black experience as an object to be commodified, to be made into media. Abolitionists, widely considered the earliest humanitarians, paradoxically set the standard for normalcy in representation that would persist as part of the culture of humanitarian organizations–and the wider visual culture, which to this day reproduces "art" and media that exploits images of the pained Black body for consumption, excused as "awareness raising."

Twomey (2012) documents the role of humanitarian campaigns in bringing "atrocity photography" to the general public, arguing that the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century set an important new standard for norms of representation in new forms of humanitarianism, ones that stoked growing waves of concern for the well-being of others as a cultural norm and which were predecessors to human rights (p. 255-6). New trends in photographic sharing exposed publics to images of people with mutilated and suffering bodies, with an expectation that spectators would be drawn into feelings of empathy and contribute to charities and campaigns opposing the injustices. Photographs were seen as corroborating evidence to harms that were stronger testimonies than text could ever be; they "collapsed distance between the subject of suffering and the viewer, and also created greater space between them–a sense of difference–that was essential to the empathetic or sympathetic response" (p. 264).

The culture of modern spectatorship in the West created a "politics of pity" in which distant sufferers are classified together in universal relationship with audiences, who from afar experience an emotional response toward them (Boltanski, 1999). Seeing and feeling, rather than political engagement, becomes the way of taking action. Chouliaraki's (2013) study of modern humanitarian media shows how feelings of empathy overtake moves to solidarity. Chouliaraki sharply critiques of the role of consumption in popular culture, arguing that global campaigns for aid function as a communicative structure which systematically represent the global South to the West, compelling and inviting Westerners to act through their purchases. Chouliaraki argues that media representations of the "other" function as a way for the fields of humanitarianism and international development to justify their own perpetuation, and produces a culture that accepts structural inequity and violence, while performatively grieving it, while also gratuitously visioning itself as saviour. Spectacles of suffering that depict the human body's vulnerability collapse "the political question of global justice with the moral question of responding to the urgency of bodily needs" (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 41). Campaigns around securing food, water and toilets, which focus on deficits of local communities rather than campaigns to stop land and water theft, which are globally embedded political and structural issues, have reduced humanitarian aid to the bodily deprivations of the other. The "other's" deficits (pathologies) can be fixed through donations, by purchasing things for them, and also by buying into the humanitarian industry through representational gear like bracelets and t-shirts.

Traveling as (over)looking

Consuming visual representations of the other's pain is a form of travel for those publics who could not afford to board a boat, train or airplane. Blurring the line between optic and haptic, the goal of pain representation is to make people see and feel all at once. When the goal of this seeing and feeling is to invoke sympathy for humanitarian ends, representations have no limits; humanitarian groups have exposed publics to myriad forms of human suffering with the hopes of making them act. In doing so, they have nurtured a culture in which people feel both a voyeuristic titillation masking as closeness to the other's body, along with a form of distance that protects them from actual pain. Campaigns promising that publics can help makes them into potential alleviators of pain–superior to and distinct from the other. Enraptured by images of the

body of the other and their own affective reaction, the consumer of pain stories and depictions do not hear what those others actually have to say. Distracted by the immediate needs of relieving pain, audiences avoid deeper analysis into structural causes of the suffering.

Studying fundraising trends in Canada, Nathanson argues that charitable agencies use "distorted representation" of others which helps raise money but does immense damage, by discouraging a full understanding of root causes of poverty and political support and encouraging feelings of guilt, paternalism and racism (2013, p. 104). Recently, INGOs have increased representations in which stakeholders are presented as self-reliant, and narrate their own stories. However, they continue to promote stereotypes of racialized others as different and needful, and encourage consumption by Western donors as the best way to effect change (Nathanson, 2013). Vestergaard's study of humanitarian appeals in newspaper ads from 1970 to 2005 finds that by 2005 a new form of humanitarian appeal began, marked by more involved forms of donor engagement. Vestergaard categorizes these in three ways: "venture philanthropy," or forms of social entrepreneurship in which the donor picks their investment; "participatory philanthropy" in which donors have options to select how their funds are allocated; and "commodity philanthropy" in which donors can select "concrete" gifts to choose from (2013, p. 462). All were characterized by increased donor control and the new "experience economy": "tailored, interactive environments that donors themselves help create... [as] their own 'stories' of social change… [that] evoke a sense of immediacy between donors and recipients... from the point of view of the donor" (p. 463). The urge to have a sense of immediacy, of relationality, is a legacy of travel and imperial domination.

Relationality in the nexus of (im)mobility: Voluntourism; Women as helpers/objects

In *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality* (2000), Sarah Ahmed theorizes the figure of "the stranger," arguing that in an increasingly globalized world, desires for and against interactions with strangers influence a range of social and cultural constructs and processes, including migrations and multiculturalism. Building on Orientalist notions of the self as reflexively formed up against an Other, Ahmed argues that encounters between self and other, whether real or imagined, produce the category of "stranger": "a mechanism for allowing us to

face that which we have already designated as the beyond" (p. 3), which simplifies or conceals whole categories of difference and displacement (2000, p. 5). Encouraging us to think of relationships "as determined by that which must already have taken place to allow the particular encounter to take place, that is, the social processes that are at stake" (p. 9), Ahmed contends that

> colonial encounters do not just involve a transition from distance to proximity: they involve, at one and the same time, social and spatial relations of distance and proximity. Others become strangers… and 'other cultures' become 'strange cultures'… only through coming too close to home, that is, through the proximity of the encounter or 'facing' itself. (2000, p. 12)

Our experiences of closeness with others, insofar as they inform (or obscure) our predisposed understandings of ourselves, end up creating distance; bonds may be forged, but are never authentic when they elide the truths of why the relationship exists. The "stranger comes into being through the marking out of inhabitable spaces, bodies and terrains of knowledge" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 79). This marking out follows a long history of representation of the Other as fantastical, foreign, exotic, and as discoverable, for the Western subject, through travel, through the meeting of others, and ultimately through the commodification of others, buying up interactions with them like souvenirs. The phenomenon of voluntourism provides a stark example of how humanitarianism encourages travel as a form of commodity racism.

Voluntourism

In the 21st century, the advent of social media and cheap flights led to accelerated access to travel: tourism is one of the world's biggest industries, comprising about 10% of the world's jobs (UNWTO, 2017). Today, growing middle classes have made international travel more accessible to people from all places, but tourism continues to perpetuate colonial fantasies and economic structures (Linehand, Clark and Xie, 2020). "Other" peoples and places are a playground for Western pursuits of pleasure. In 2018, the Oxford dictionary named "overtourism" a word of the year: by that time, tourism had reached an apex point of predatory labour practices and environmental destruction, leading researchers to conclude that it causes more harm than good (Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolikowski, Wijesinghe & Boluk, 2019). Already the cause of local displacement for decades, in recent years the tourism industry has perpetuated land grabs and forced relocation after environmental disasters (Wright, Kelman & Dodds, 2020). The

tourism industry thrives from a nexus of (im)mobilities in which the hyper mobile benefit from vacations and experiences that rely on the labor of migrant workers and force local peoples from their lands, or deny them access to lands and waters to make way for resorts, hotels and other tourism-based businesses.

Because hyper mobile subjects benefit from violence inflicted on the forced and compelled mobile in order to travel, the kinds of travel they do must be excused as for pleasure, for necessity or for the "greater good." Tourism and leisure travel, clearly exploitative, are thus mutating new forms of travel called "ethical," such as the eco-tourism and voluntourism industries. By the 2010s, voluntourism was one of the travel industry's fastest growing sectors, with over half of voluntourists worldwide coming from the US, the vast majority of them white and middle class (Lough, 2013). Instead of a departure from other forms of travel, voluntourism is travel with a twist of humanitarianism.

Scholars and activists decry the effects of the unchecked proliferation of voluntourism projects, especially those working with vulnerable populations such as children. Gius (2017) argues that voluntourism revolves around practices of spectatorship that romanticize the other, naturalize suffering and celebrate the tourist's self-realization over the experiences of communities they purport to help. Voluntourism is driven by a desire to produce photography and social media (He and Sin, 2018). Mahrouse's (2010, 2011) research finds that voluntourism trips actually promote, rather than undo stereotypes about the Other, and secure travelers' sense of good fortune rather than educate about the systems that cause their privilege. Because the encounters are set up as reciprocal "exchanges" without critical thought to why some can travel and others cannot, they obscure Western complicity with the problems they are purporting to help solve, rendering ideas about social justice hollow. Angod's (2015) research on voluntourism projects finds they produced "micro practices of humanitarianism" (p. 59), in which positive but fleeting relations between the helpers and the "cared for" created the impression of successful work, while circumventing critical thought about why their positions as tourist-volunteers existed. Community members were treated as passive subjects, their voices rarely heard or asked for.

The act of travelling-to the other is often sandwiched between a vacation; temporary humanitarian work provides a quick, easy, "life changing" experience for the Western traveler,

while effecting no structural changes and in fact upholding the infrastructures that support inequities. However, the Western traveler has had a glimpse into the humanitarian experience, has made a donation and had a feeling of being active in "making a difference," and has had an experience of relationship with someone from far away, romanticized or pathologized in their imaginary as someone who needed their help. They can thus claim to have contributed to the good of the other, while what they really did was consume the other, collecting images, souvenirs and self-congratulatory memories.

Women as aid workers and as objects of aid

Heron's (2007) research with modern Canadian female aid workers in Africa concludes that their imperative to "help Others" is deeply rooted in legacies of colonialism (p. 37). Heron's interview data reveal a pervasive assumption on the part of middle-class, white women that they are "good," and an avoidance of analysis around the structural inequities that caused them to be in their privileged positions. This resonates with 19th century liberal feminists and anti-slavery activists in the West, who did not oppose British imperialism, but rather turned their attentions onto those they were trying to help (Heron, 2007).

Paradoxically, Heron's research subjects had some critical understanding that their work was not making significant changes in the lives of those they aimed to help (2007, p. 36). However, relationships with the Other were of such high importance, they usurped questions of whether or not the work was needed. Up-close interaction with those perceived to be in need was prioritized over analysis and critique of the political and economic structures that create those who can "help" and those who "need help." Heron concludes that taking on the role of development worker is not solely about a civilizing mission, but is mutually constitutive of the making of the bourgeois subject: social and cultural capital are gained, and guilt abated, through the act of self-consciously seeking out interactions with those less fortunate (2007, p. 42).

Interviewees in Heron's study viewed themselves as specifically emplaced in a Northern planetary consciousness that spatially segregates those in the north as coming from "greater civilization… order, cleanliness, and a truly good quality of life… while those in the South–the former colonies–languish in anachronistic space [of] chaos… disorder and disease" (Heron,

2007, p. 34). Reading Heron's interviews against Ahmed's work, the compulsion for aid workers to travel far away to "help" is driven by a desire to know more and be in closer relationship to that which is strange, reified as different, exotic, and based out of Northener's perceptions of Others as "in need." For Ahmed, that relationship becomes fetishized and objectified as one of consumer-consumed, and detached from the larger field of social relationships that produced the exchange (2000, p. 114), preventing an honest and profound relationality, and preventing work that might lead to structural change.

In recent years, INGOs have posited help for a girl as the single best way donors can change communities; the figure of the poor girl has become central to both advertising campaigns and to development projects. Many of these advertisements deliberately target Western women as the potential purveyors of aid, framing help for girls in poor countries as the responsibility of women from wealthier ones. Care Canada's 2010 "Reach out" ad, for example, features women and girls across the world reaching out to each other's hands. The ad begins and ends with white women, clearly living in "developed" conditions, reaching out to Black and brown women standing in fields and shanties. Against a soft song that repeats the lyric, "reach out," a narrator says, "no one can understand the life of a woman in the developing world better than a woman in any part of the world" (Care Canada, 2010).

Targeting Western women's empathy and donation power is a fundraising tactic that builds on the notion that white women feminists must save other women, to bring them up to their level of progressive humanity. It builds on tropes of Western middle-class women as more civilized, able and responsible to help other women who are caught in geographies of chaos and danger, as documented by McClintock (1995), Stoler (1996) and Edward (2003), described earlier in this chapter. INGOs have in recent years targeted women and girls as a major focus of their work. Rather than being brought into conversations with women-and nonbinary-led movements for change in the global south, INGOs appeal to publics to donate help and save them, and in doing so, to buy into a hierarchical vision of people in the global south as incapable of helping themselves. Humanitarian organizations advertise the possibility of directly affecting the poor brown girl's trajectory through purchases, as if the help itself is a commodity. Examples are everywhere: Plan International's I am a Girl Campaign created a number of short videos, in which girls (mostly from places in Africa) narrate their story and say things like, "girls like me are the poorest on the planet. We have no control over our lives" (Plan International, 2012). Save

the Children's "Shop Gift Catalogue" section on its website, which allows donors to "buy" things like a goat, a sheep, a soccer ball, includes "educate a girl" for $75. On the "popular gifts" page, 10 out of the 14 thumbnails feature pictures of girls and women. And at the top of OXFAM Canada's website, a header reads simply: "Ending global poverty begins with women's rights."

As this chapter argued earlier, travel and colonial discovery has historically been a gendered project, with lands, places and peoples imagined as wild feminine spaces needing to be brought under control of the European masculine. INGOs perpetuate this legacy by treating women, and in particular reproduction, as focal points of aid and fundraising. This has been theorized by Michelle Murphy (2017) as "the economization of life," which I summarized in Chapter 3 (Humanitarians report). Murphy shows how "population and economy have been built into the architectures of nation-states where practices of quantification have helped to install economy as our collective environment" (2017, p. 1), and this has manifested in the logics of Western humanitarianism. The humanitarian regime's focus on reproduction and family control is a legacy of population science and management, which began in the 1920's as a distinct movement away from eugenics, moving away from "racial evolutionary futures… [to] *economic futures*—how to balance quantitative population with national production, bringing biology and state planning together through economy" (p. 3). In the 21st century, the symbol of the poor brown girl drives humanitarian ethos as publics are encouraged to literally "reach" or "click" across the imagined divide between Westerners and non-Westerners. Helping the poor woman become an income-earning career person with controlled fertility has become a major marker of progress in international development. This is a modern form of reordering and engulfing that was always the pursuit of colonial travel. In the next chapter I attend to the significance of this dynamic for how humanitarians create economies.

Chapter 6

Humanitarians Create Economies

This chapter presents results from my discussions with participants about the successes and challenges their organizations face. In analyzing this data, I trace how foreign aid established itself as an integral part of the economy and social world in the Thailand-Myanmar border region. As discussed in the introduction's overview of humanitarianism as a defining feature of Westernity, and in my analysis of annual reports in Chapter 3, international institutions and INGOs perpetuate the narrative that people in economically poorer countries like Myanmar could not succeed in taking care of one another without the economic support of foreign donors.[10] However, along the Thailand-Myanmar border, local organizations managed the bulk of humanitarian work prior to the arrival of the INGO-industrial complex in the 1990s. My data in this chapter reveals that local groups continued to provide relief, and manage sectors such as health and education, again when foreign donors largely abandoned the region after the 2010 "reforms" in the country.

I begin with my visit to BHSOH, the first school I worked at in the border region, and track a brief history of the evolution of what Oh (2016) and Horstmann (2016) have termed a humanitarian economy in the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands. I then present participants' discussion of challenges and successes of the various organizations they've worked with. These discussions paint a rich picture of a complicated and often changing context along the Thailand-Myanmar border and within Karen State and Myanmar, the timeline of changes that have happened there, and the ways organizations delivering aid and social services grapple with complicated and arduous conditions caused by war, poverty and displacement.

Interviewee participants in this study revealed that INGO and CBO workers had to become experts at managing the issues they were encountering as part of their day to day operations. They needed to be politically savvy, learn multiple languages and cultural nuances,

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[10] A recent book (2020) by Michael P. Griffith, *Community Welfare Organisations in Rural Myanmar* (New York: Routledge), documents the rich history and present of self-organized welfare and community support systems in Myanmar.

and face physical and environmental hurdles, from illness to blocked roadways. The major challenges they identified included working in a complex and multilayered political situation, between dictatorship, insurgency, extractive capitalism, and a highly diverse and changing population with multiple cultures, languages and interests.

Outside the issue of conflict, human rights abuses and oppression, participants overwhelmingly named their biggest challenge as working with funders and donors, who do not always understand the border zone context, its non-state actors and diverse beneficiary communities. Large foreign donors such as ECHO and national governments enacted a sudden withdrawal of funding, and ignited the mass retreat of INGOs from the border region, after political reforms happened in Myanmar. As part of the INGO retreat, organizations worked with the UNHCR to pressure refugees in the region to repatriate, which they were hesitant to do given the continued violence in Myanmar. The cuts to funding caused a lot of hardship and revealed that funding bodies were largely out of touch with the border context and the larger political context in Myanmar. The choice of international donors to work with the Myanmar regime posed a major challenge for border organizations. They were forced to respond to this choice by acting as mediators between local groups and the supposedly reformed government. At the same time, they had to pivot their work toward repatriation of their beneficiaries, while struggling against mounting pressures toward assimilation of ethnic cultures into Bamar culture.

The bulk of this chapter purposefully centers the story of humanitarianism on the Thailand-Myanmar border through my participants' accounts as they emerged in our interviews. At the end of the chapter, I analyze how what happened on the border is a function of the humanitarian regime's focus on the nation-state. International institutions based around statehood as inherited from the colonial order infuse humanitarianism's policies, in which Global Northern countries paternalistically seek to "develop" countries in the Global South. This paternalism manifests as arithmetics/rationality logics, in which organizations need to account for their work in evermore formulaic and bureaucratic ways.

Migrant schools, medical care, refugee camps: History of humanitarianism on the Thailand-Myanmar border

On motorbike under a glaring sun, I follow a former student through Mae Pa, a suburb of Mae Sot that has expanded massively since the last time I was here. Disoriented from how familiar-yet-unrecognizable the place is, I balance awkwardly on the bike, struggling to catch her as she speeds along, making sharp right angle turns through the newly-paved streets. We are heading to BHSOH, the Burmese High School for Orphans and Helpless Youth, one of the longest-established schools for migrant students from Myanmar. We pass the sprawling campus of a Thai primary school, its fields of groomed green grass enclosed by shining blue and gold gates; we pass long blocks of cement rowhouses; shiny shopfronts of brand-new buildings. Finally we are out of the town and on winding dirt roads that bend and curve amidst hazel and green flecked fields. Riding between lines of tall trees on either side of a gritty roadway, bits of gravel and sand now spitting from under my wheels, the mountains that had embosomed my views give way to expansive blue sky. Then suddenly we are under a big sign that reads "BHSOH." Turning up a path that snakes through tall grass, I slow significantly to avoid big potential-tire-puncturing rocks. My heart thrums with excitement to be almost at the school, the first place I encountered when I arrived in this region 15 years earlier.

BHSOH today boards hundreds of students on a campus comprising several buildings. At the front of the site are large open natural spaces with playing and learning areas for young children; a soccer field; long rows of classrooms. Behind these are two large concrete dormitories, several bathroom and washing areas, and a small wooden hut used by the headmaster, Saya U Khaing Oo Maung, and his family. I hear the school before I see it: sounds of singing, playing, roosters crowing, the crackling of a cooking fire, students speaking in unison as they recite lessons out loud, excited voices cheering as part of a game. Tiny kindergarten aged children follow their teacher onto a field, each rolling an entire car tire on their own, to sit upon for a circle activity.

And then I am slipping under a thatch roof and into Saya's class, bashful to interrupt it but too thrilled to stop myself from immediately greeting this person who is a grandfather to me, and who after so many decades is still dedicated to teaching migrant young people. I am shining with tears held back and pressing my hands into his as he introduces me to his class. After a brief

reunion he gets back to teaching and I'm outside, being handed a small glass of hot water and a 3-in-1 coffee mix packet for my wait. Later, Saya sits across from me and tells the story of how he came to be headmaster of one of the longest running migrant schools in the region.

> I am a humanitarian from a young age. I have been teaching in poor villages since I graduated from Rangoon University. I had to do this because of State Power; because we had to protest and demonstrate for democracy. I was detained in Insein [prison in Yangon] from 1967-1972. After that the Material Gains offered for me to participate in their organizations… [with] a high salary as a school principal at their military school. I refused. After that they beat and tortured me. Since then until now I've been working as a migrant teacher. After 1988, I was in the village [on the border between Karen State and Thailand] 10 years, and [since then I've been] here in Mae Pa 20 years. I have to run a school here and teach because in this area, the students are crying. They say 'Headmaster, if you leave us we will face starvation and no chances…' So I should not consider for my self-interest. I should consider for the new generation. [U Khaing Oo Maung, Arakan State, migrant school teacher, 25+ years experience]

In referring to the Myanmar government not as a government but as State Power and Material Gains, U Khaing Oo Maung offers analysis of what people in Myanmar are fighting: not simply a violent dictatorship, but a calculated system of profit-reaping; not simply the people who wound up in power after colonialism, but the force given to nation-states by colonial logics, the effect of granting authority to the nation-state to influence people's lives. By interposing these titles–*State Power and Material Gains*–for the Myanmar regime, U Khaing Oo Maung indicates that the power a state has and its thirst for profits are mutual drives, and ones, as in his story, that can lead to intense violence against civilians. The effect of state power and material gains surfaced throughout the interviews with participants. As I explain at the end of this chapter, the Thailand-Myanmar border context shows that state power and material gains also drive the humanitarian industrial complex.

Political dictatorship in Myanmar as the biggest challenge faced by organizations

The context of a dictatorial government was raised by every participant as a major impediment to doing the work they wished to do. Participants expressed their desire for an inclusive and peaceful society, saying that without this they could never feel their organization had truly seen success. A third of participants described the challenge of nonstate actors (local ethnic governments, Ethnic Armed Organizations, and civil society groups) not being supported

and facing assimilation (through ceasefires) or eradication (through violence) by the Myanmar government. Participants noted that security presented a major challenge to doing work in the region, for staff as well as for local people with whom their organizations worked. They said that some organizations working on publishing and writing about human rights abuses had to operate in fear of punishment. This also affected access: not being allowed into parts of the region was a major problem for service provision and for advocacy work.

Legal and environmental activist U Thein Oo (Myanmar) said the biggest challenge faced by humanitarian and development work was the army's refusal to relinquish power, along with its resistance to decentralized federalism. Mr. K (UK), who has worked for decades with CBOs and INGOs, noted the biggest challenge for organizations was a lack of sincerity from the government in working seriously towards reform. Elise Tillet (France), formerly with Amnesty International, identified the biggest problem faced by INGOs and CBOs as human rights atrocities in Myanmar, perpetuated by the military regime. James Harrison (UK) described the biggest problem facing his political organization's work as "the marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities." Saw K (Karen State) and Dave (USA) with KHRG in Mae Sot said the biggest problem their organization faces is "a culture of impunity" by the Myanmar government, and its perpetuation of human rights abuses against the Karen population, which were currently taking the form of land confiscation (discussed at length in the following chapter). Ms. L (Singapore), who worked with KESAN, identified a major challenge as "seeking justice or reparations for the historic subjugation of the Karen people."

Dictatorship, ethnic tension and the KNU: A brief history

British colonial invasion between 1824-1947 highlighted differences between ethnic groups in Myanmar, and sequestered those living at the frontiers (Myint U, 2001). Majoritarian nationalism in central Burma, among Bamars, developed both in opposition to British colonial rule and to the country's ethnic nationalities (Walton, 2013, p. 8). Tensions between ethnic groups has been a lasting legacy of colonialism, one that many organizations throughout Myanmar and along the border have continually worked to combat. One of the points of success listed by participants was the ability of organizations to bring people from diverse ethnicities together; U Khaing Oo Maung said the top accomplishment of his decades-long work as a

secondary school headmaster is nurturing a schooling system that truly runs with an integrated and egalitarian ethos. Resistance to ongoing cultural assimilation was a preoccupation of many of the organizations, as will be elaborated later in this chapter.

In 1947, General Aung San, father of Aung San Suu Kyi, formed a parliament comprising leaders of the region's major ethnic groups in the hopes of forming a peaceful national union. A few months later, Aung San was assassinated along with six of his cabinet ministers. This left Myanmar "awash with weapons and deeply fractured along ethnic and ideological lines [that]… rapidly transitioned into a string of armed struggles" (Wells, 2018, p. 6; Taylor, 2009). That year, the Karen National Union (KNU) was founded with four guiding principles for the state it calls Kawthoolei: 1) to never surrender; 2) to attain recognition for Karen State; 3) to retain arms; and 4) self-determination (Naing Oo, 2007). Saw Eh Htoo Wah (Karen State), a member of RISE described Karen nationalism:

> We Karen are a resistant group fighting for justice and self-determination for many years. We have our own governance system. We have tract level, township level, district level and then central level, in Karen controlled area… We want to be within this country, but as a federal system. So we have our own systems. [Saw Eh Htoo Wah, Karen State, RISE, CBO worker, 10+ years experience]

The KNU has a fully developed political administration, including departments of Health, Education, Finance, Defence, Transport, Communications, Mining, Agriculture, Forestry, Information and Justice; schools, clinics, courts and prisons, as well as a large network of community organizations catering to social sectors. Its 5000-person army, the KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army), has been a powerful insurgent force, despite being significantly smaller than the massive army in Myanmar (McConnachie, 2014, p. 29). McConnachie (2014) calls the system of government in Karen State a "palimpsest" in which "multiple state and non-state actors seek political power and control over land, resources and populations" (p. 59).

Myanmar's governance was seized by General Ne Win in 1962. In pursuit of autarky, Ne Win brought almost everything in Myanmar under government control. He grew the military to one of the largest in the world and nationalized internal trade, placing major industries under the umbrella of "State Economic Enterprises" which the government had a weak ability to run and which provoked a massive black market among ethnic groups at the border (Jones, 2013, p. 5). Ne Win impoverished the population, which led to mass protests in 1988. During this uprising,

the regime murdered 10 000 people, imprisoned 6000, and forced 10 000 into hiding, many in the border zones (Smith, 1999). U Khaing Oo Maung was one of these, and as he recounts, many educators fled the capital and resumed teaching in the jungles, including near the Thailand border.

After the 1988 massacre, Ne Win resigned, and his successor General Saw Maung established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which imposed martial law in the country. The SLORC also began a controlled transition to state-mediated capitalism, appointing around 15 individuals to control the majority of Myanmar's major business interests (Jones, 2013, p. 7). At the same time, the Myanmar regime began attempts to make ceasefire agreements with ethnic governments along the borders. Ceasefires brought some relief from fighting, but also opened areas to economic exploitation and natural resource extraction (Buchanan, Kramer & Woods, 2013, p. 5). Woods terms the Myanmar military's strategy "ceasefire capitalism," in which the regime uses ceasefire zones "to govern land and populations to produce regulated, legible, militarized territory" (2011, p. 747). Myanmar military offensives would continue for the next two decades, forcing two generations of Karen peoples to flee their lands, while they simultaneously lost those lands to resource extraction.

Conflict at the border

For decades, the KNU controlled almost all cross-border trade between Thailand and Myanmar (Bryant, 1997). Up to two-thirds of Myanmar's foreign investment is concentrated in the borderlands (TNI, 2011, p. 12). Because of this, a major priority for the regime has been to quell the power of ethnic nationality governments, through violence or by bringing them into cooperation via ceasefire agreements.

In Karen State through the 1970's, Myanmar armed forces encroached upon villages in the dry season (November to May) and left in the wet (June to October). In response, Karen communities practiced a pattern of retreat and return, moving over the border to ad hoc villages set up in Thailand during the dry season and returning home with the rains. In 1984, the Myanmar military did not retreat, and trapped people in Thailand; this led to the creation of the first temporary shelters that would become refugee camps (McConnachie, 2014, p. 33). These

camps functioned much like villages in the borderlands of Myanmar, and eventually became more permanent fixtures in the area. They caught the attention of Christian agency directors who'd been working with Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese refugees along Thailand's eastern border. Jack Dunford was one of these: he formed a Consortium with a few colleagues, eventually creating the The Border Consortium (TBC; formerly TBBC- Thailand Burma Border Consortium) to support refugees from Myanmar in Thailand.

The TBC's approach from the outset promoted and supported local forms of humanitarian work that had long been established within the KNU. Dunford explains how his approach in the Thailand refugee camps grew from a rejection of the attitudes toward aid he'd previously experienced.

> Part of my first experience in humanitarian work, part of what became the traditional models for taking care of refugees, was the UN-structured, top down approach on encampment for refugees, very rigid structures, where assistance was provided and the solutions were all about temporary solutions, taking care, eventually going home or being resettled to the third country. Always a concern to me was that no one was really talking about root causes. No one was really talking about [refugees'] individual needs. They were a commodity that had to be dealt with… [it was about] coordinating various policies and [refugees] had very little say in their own administration or in their own future. So by accident, because the Thai government didn't want international attention, because the problem was small [and] the Thai government didn't want a lot of aid workers around or complicated aid programs, we were allowed to establish principles. And from day one, we said "well, we're here simply to support refugees and their communities to survive, and to determine their own futures as much as possible." So we at no point had an agenda saying, "we've got to get involved in this issue, that issue." [Instead the approach was:] "How do we provide the basics so that they carry on in their own way"… we allowed them to choose how they wished to struggle for their own futures–which became defined as struggling for some kind of federalism–and to organize in the way they choose. We didn't tell them they had to form this committee or that committee or that they had to do to things in a different way. [Jack Dunford, UK, NGO worker, 25+ years experience]

The approach taken by TBC is unique and had positive consequences on the governance within and beyond the refugee camps. Local communities were able to manage aid on their own terms, and against what Dunford identifies as the common approach taken by the UN and INGOs. The result would be a long-term engagement in the region between INGOs and CBOs, in which the balance of power often was in favour of local groups.

TBC at first operated alone and on a relatively small scale. After the 1988 uprising, Western countries placed economic sanctions on Myanmar, which included the steep withdrawal of international aid provided by the World Bank, UNDP and Japan (Steinberg, 1992). This pushed even more people to the border areas, seeking relief from poverty (Banki, 2009). Through the 1990s and 2000s, the Myanmar government placed mounting restrictions on remaining aid agencies within the country, particularly in disputed border areas. As a result, much of the aid to these areas had to be delivered through border countries, in concession with non-state actors (Duffield, 2008; Stover, Suwanvanichkij, Moss, Tuller, Lee, Whichard, Shigekane, Beyrer & Mathieson, 2007; Rae, 2007). Foreign aid joined in to help the schools and healthcare providers who'd already set up in Mae Sot and the surrounding area.

In 1989, Dr. Cynthia Maung, who fled Karen State after the brutal military crackdown, opened the Mae Tao Clinic for migrants from Myanmar in need of health care they could not access within the country. The Clinic has been a major reason why migrants moved to Mae Sot over the years, and is a vital part of the migrant community. It currently treats about 100 000 patients a year, while collaborating with eight ethnic health organizations to provide medical training and care for people inside Myanmar and all along the border (Mae Tao Clinic website, 2019). Through the early and mid 1990s, parents and community members moved over the border and created a network that would become the migrant school system, complete with school boards, parent-teacher committees, and teachers' unions (Kook Lee, 2014). Initially housed in small buildings in and around Mae Sot, rented from Thai landlords who ranged in levels of amicability, they were commonly called "illegal migrant schools," and ran mainly on the funding of parents and guardians who worked and lived in nearby factories, or had remained in Myanmar and sent their children alone to access better schooling than was locally available. Most migrant schools doubled as boarding houses for children who could not stay with their parents in the factories, whose parents were far away, or for those who had been orphaned. These schools, and the community networks that supported them, existed for years before INGOs arrived on the scene. They were anchoring elements in the migrant community.

By the late 1990s, nine refugee camps had been established along the Thailand border; by 1998, they were officially recognized by the UNHCR and granted a protection mandate by the Thai government (McConnachie, 2014, p. 34). At their height through the 2000s the camps housed around 150,000 people from all ethnic backgrounds; today there are about 96,000

refugees still living there (TBC, 2019). As the camps grew, INGOs established themselves in the region. TBC became the largest agency in the refugee camps, and INGOs arriving there were compelled to work with them as part of an aid consortium: this meant INGOs worked alongside and often in service to local civil society organizations, coordinated largely through the Karen Refugee Committee.[11] INGOs established in northwest Thailand were thus inclined to work with the KNU. Combined with TBC's approach in the camps, this created a landscape of large and small, rich and poor, official and nonofficial organizations working together. Mae Sot was already a well-established trade town catering to people running businesses between Karen State, other parts of Myanmar, China and Thailand. With escalating violence in Myanmar, it soon became a place of residence to over a dozen INGO offices, and eventually a few hundred foreign aid workers employed with both local and international organizations.

Humanitarian economy: Communication, reforms, funding cuts, pressures to repatriate and resilience/resistance

Oh (2016) & Horstmann (2016) argue that humanitarianism functions as an economy in this region, operating in parallel to the neoliberal economy in Thailand: the humanitarian economy provides limited jobs in non-profit organizations, while the Thai economy offers thousands of low-wage factory jobs. The humanitarian sector, comprised of both local and international actors, comprises "trade unions, committees, medical clinics, human rights advocacy organizations, cross-border aid and learning institutions," all producing and distributing goods and social services in combination, delivering resources according to need (Oh, 2016, p. 193-194). Humanitarianism in the Mae Sot border region replaced the function of the state in social services, contributing "in a crucial way to the consolidation of social support networks of Karen villagers and a parallel state or self-governance of the Karen in the context of open state terror and hostility [from Myanmar's government]" (Horstmann, 2016, p. 171- 2). Horstmann's (2016) research finds that INGOs are highly dependent on CBOs and CSOs to negotiate with each level of power in order to do their work; they grappled between secularity,

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[11] The Karen Refugee Committee was formed in 1984 "to represent the whole refugee camp population and coordinate with various international as well as community based organizations in providing basic needs for refugees." See https://krceeobd.weebly.com/about.html

religion and Karen nationalism (p. 176-177). These findings were reflected by participants in this study.

As a relatively inaccessible and unknown region with, for a long time, few of the "creature comforts" of a larger city (for example, access to air conditioned spaces, foreign foods or restaurants with English menus), Mae Sot was a place where foreigners who came to work committed to staying for a long time; many stationed in the region for years, if not decades, marrying locals and the causes of an independent Karen State, a democratic/federalist Myanmar. At first centered on the refugee camps, INGOs eventually began to service the growing number of migrants who arrived in the town to work in factories, and were living within and around Mae Sot. People living in refugee camps face confinement, and are banned from access to salaried work. These limitations have meant that the majority of displaced people from Myanmar live outside the refugee camps as undocumented migrants. While Mae Sot's population is somewhere around 63 000, an estimated 500 000 migrant workers come and go from the region (Wai, 2015). The main types of employment for migrant workers in Mae Sot are domestic work, construction, seasonal farming, sex work, service jobs in restaurants and hotels, and work in one of the 400 factories producing textiles, foods and other goods (Oh, 2016, p. 199). Their opportunities for advancement are restrained (Oh, 2016, p. 196). Migrants in Thailand face deep instability; they are paid less than a third of the salary a Thai worker would expect, and are vulnerable to arrest at any point (Human Rights Watch, 2012). While not confined in the same way refugees are, they face systemic restrictions on their mobility because they rely on temporary work permits. They are perpetually vulnerable to arrests and searches, and cannot easily leave the surrounding Mae Sot region, which is bracketed by Thai military checkpoints. Migrants face varying levels of extortion from authorities when required to move around, paying small or large "taxes" to individual police officers or military personnel on their journeys. Migrants and refugees often overlap in their access to services: refugees travel (sneak) out of the camps to visit family, work as undocumented labourers, to access health services or educational programs; migrants go into the camps for similar reasons. Aid and the migrant community grew reflexively with one another: the more services on offer, the more migrants could come; the more migrants in the region, the more services organizations would provide.

Communication in a complex environment

A third of participants talked about the unpredictability and instability of the context in which they worked. Mr. H (UK), a representative of a nonprofit organization that has worked for several decades in Myanmar, said that decades of conflict, displacement and unstable conditions have led to the fundamental problem his organization faces: communities not having access to basic "services and resources that they really need to thrive." This was due to both the political landscape as well as practical geographic challenges. Organizations and communities did not always have agreement on which regions were where, which made it difficult to describe work to donors abroad, who demand an exact location for projects. Between weather events, dirt roads, and spontaneously established military checkpoints, the delivery of essential services could be difficult. Working from outside Myanmar to provide services to the inside meant literal roadblocks–from authorities, weather events such as mudslides, and the absence of roadways into remote regions. Communication in places where multiple languages were spoken was also a challenge. Registration issues were named as a common problem: organizations and their members who were based out of Thailand while working in Myanmar, and vice versa, had to procure registration materials to travel between places; whether these would be accepted or not could be subject to change. The ability to get resources to different areas meant it was challenging to build capacity for beneficiaries inside Myanmar, who require regular, long-term access to funding, goods and services.

Much of the participant's comprehension of success in their work was wound up in their ability to act as bridge between the diverse players in the region. Communication was highly skilled work that required long-term experience in the region. Greg (Canada), Director of TeacherFOCUS, described it as a "Game of Thrones":

> There are all these kingdoms that just don't want to work with each other… there's a lot of bad blood and politics… it's fragmented in a lot of ways. That makes progress really hard because… [some] individual organizations, maybe they will experience success… but it's not applied to the whole group. And… there's not a lot of financial resources, which makes everything more tense. I think one of TeacherFOCUS' greatest successes has been really spending a lot of time and energy coordinating and bringing the major players to the same table and working together…. that's our biggest achievement; we've worked hard to earn the trust of a lot of the major stakeholders. [Greg, Canada, Director TeacherFOCUS, CBO, 10+ years experience]

Greg's description is similar to a number of other participants who work with CBOs, who expressed that their ability to work across relationship dynamics, cultures and languages was a sign of their success. For participants working with INGOs, communication across the complexity of the environment could be a hindrance to getting things done. Mr. T (Thailand), from a large agency working mainly in health and resettlement, noted there had been no success because of the amount of bureaucracy the agency deals with, especially in terms of working with Thai authorities to help integrate or return people. He said true success was prevented by the constraints of all the "levels" and "channels" the organization had to get through to do anything: "from the field to the government to the centralized government levels." Patrick Kearns (USA), who worked with both World Education and CBOs, described the great efforts organizations took to educate people at the grassroots level about intended INGO programming. Patrick described how representatives would be sent by local organizations to learn about a program and communicate it back inside Myanmar, but these representatives changed often, making it difficult to know if the information would be understood, then communicated back in the way intended by INGOs.

These communication challenges were exacerbated after the 2010 reforms, which marked a new moment in which organizations had to work more intentionally with the Myanmar government. Participants discussed how the Myanmar government often did not communicate policies to CSOs or local NGOs, and did not include groups in consultations. Buy-in from beneficiaries and local leadership was a major challenge, culminating from understandable mistrust in organizations working with a violent and corrupt government. Mr. H (UK), a representative of an international nonprofit organization that has worked for several decades in Myanmar, described facilitating communication between CBOs and government as an extensive new area of work. Half of participants noted that the reforms had a huge significance on their activities, in particular because it had meant a mass INGO departure from the border region.

"Reforms" in Myanmar, the INGO retreat from the border region, and the consequences

In 2010, Myanmar held elections that brought President Thein Sein's Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) into power in 2011. The USDP began sweeping reforms that included liberalizing the economy, lifting some press restrictions and freeing Aung San Suu Kyi and hundreds of other political prisoners. Always in support of a federal democratic union, the KNU signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, as a way to push for constitutional reform "through multilateral political dialogue" (Joliffe, 2017, p. 1). The government's reforms leveraged tensions between the US and China, and were meant to make Myanmar's economy more attractive to the United States (Myoe, 2015; Han, 2017, p. 5). Indeed, the US and other Western powers including the EU dropped (most) sanctions in Myanmar following the reforms. Almost immediately afterward, INGOs began to move operations inside Myanmar. Participants described a massive and rapid INGO departure from the Mae Sot and border region as the single biggest challenge their organization had faced over recent years. The departure had compounded other challenges, including funding cuts, the pressure to work on repatriation, and "Burmanization" or the assimilation of ethnic cultures and languages.

Funding cuts

Nearly every participant named funding as a major challenge for the organizations they'd worked with. Issues they discussed included procedures that organizations have to follow to receive funding, a culture that encourages competition between organizations for funding, and vulnerability to donor whims. Participants explained that donors often did not understand the context in which they were providing funding. This was most blatantly clear when they largely pulled funding after Myanmar's "reforms." Between 2011-2015, donating agencies began to withdraw their funds from border organizations, some gradually, and some abruptly. Andrea Costa (Australia), who worked with NGOs in Thailand and Myanmar, told the story about how donors viewed the elections and the "opening up" of Myanmar:

> all the donors came rushing in thinking, awesome, everything's kind of better now. We'll just work directly with government. And so the support that used to be directed to the groups on the border, they just thought, well, 'you don't even need it anymore. The state is back! The state is capable… So, you know, we'll just funnel all our money to government.' So, for awhile there, the [local] groups were just bleeding money. Like there just wasn't any support. USAID, which traditionally… did a lot for health… [after the reforms] they went inside [Myanmar] and completely changed their strategy. So the

groups that had been supported through USAID, you know, for decades, were suddenly out of USAID funding. And, you know… it was just a disaster. I remember talking to the Karen groups, the adjacent groups, and them just sort of looking [at us] and going, "what are we going to do?" Like, "we survived decades of conflict. And now that we've signed a ceasefire, we're in a worse position in terms of supporting our services than we were when we were in conflict." Oh, they were just heartbroken for a little while. [Andrea Costa, Australia, INGO worker, 15+ years' experience]

Andrea Costa's description highlights the absurdity of the donor's choices: after over 70 years of a clear pattern of violence, donor agencies nonetheless rushed to work with the Myanmar regime. This signals a desire to believe in the nation-state, even when its governance poses a threat to the population. Andrea's summary of the fallout is heartwrenching, and was described similarly by a number of participants.

Cuts to funding were widespread and had major impacts across the refugee camps and migrant communities. In many cases, they were swift and severe and affected the most longstanding organizations on the border (Burma Link, 2015). The Australian government, for example, served a devastating blow to the Mae Tao clinic when it suddenly cut all of its funding, resulting in a near shut-down of operations (Santos, 2013). Ethnic health organizations suffered greatly from the withdrawal, as did the education systems in the camps (Karen News, 2018; Loong, 2019; Weng, 2019). Funding cuts were a blatant effort by international donors to send people back over the border to Myanmar. The UNHCR set up "voluntary repatriation centers" while donors reduced financial aid to the camps: TBC lost 50% of its funding between 2012-2016 (Naing, 2013; Lynch, 2017). This forced them to cut food rations significantly, so that adults in the camp were restricted to an average of 1600 kcals per day; in 2015, rates of malnutrition in the camp were at 35%; by 2019 children's malnutrition was markedly increased (Lynch, 2017; Wilkie-Black, 2019). In addition to nine official camps in Thailand, there are five large, and thousands of small, IDP camps along the border in southeastern Myanmar which were supported by TBC rations: their inhabitants faced destitution when rations were cut (Wilkie-Black, 2019).

Even though the reduction in supplies and services was severe, people still did not want to go back to Myanmar, because they were well aware of the continuing violence there. Yet, organizations were compelled to pressure people to repatriate.

Pressure to repatriate refugee populations

Mr. T (Thailand), an employee of a large refugee camp agency, identified one of the biggest problems the organization is trying to solve as getting people, especially new arrivals, formally registered with the UNHCR, so that they could officially access INGO-funded programs and services. He expressed that rumours about having to go back to Myanmar had caused major fear and paranoia in the camps, and people felt insecure about registering with the UNHCR because it could lead to repatriation. People were hesitant to voluntarily repatriate. They knew what the funders abroad wished to ignore: that material conditions to which they would return posed a number of challenges, including lack of access to water sources, health and education services, land confiscation and increased presence of business and commercial projects run by the military (Grundy-Warr & Wei Jun, 2016; Lynch, 2017). Anxiety within the camps increased; suicide rates soared (Asia News, 2017; Carroll, 2019).

Beginning about 2012, the UNHCR had begun taking a leading role in registration, repatriation and resettlement, creating "highly intrusive programmes which have had a far-reaching impact on camp life" (McConnachie, 2014, p. 94). This included the marginalization of CBO and CSO's roles in their own governance, which formed the cornerstone of sovereign Karen society (Horstmann, 2016). As donors left the Mae Sot border, CBOs and CSOs became more vulnerable to "donor fatigue and fancies" (Oh, 2016, p. 23), leading to jobs cuts. Less INGO jobs in the region caused more migrants to be thrust into the Thai economy and into dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs (Oh, 2016, p. 206). And repatriation programs did not work: in 2016, the UNHCR's target for voluntary repatriation was 45,000; only about 2300 returned (Lynch, 2017).

Participants discussed how INGO departures from the region, and the pressure to repatriate refugees to dire living conditions at home, revealed the detachment of the donors from those communities, and their general undermining of the value of local camp governance. Paradoxically, donors from abroad seem to have decided that to accomplish their role in supporting migrants and refugees to return home to Myanmar, they could use abandonment as a tactic. This manifested not only as abandonment of funding, but of considering the complexity of the context of migrant and refugee communities. Participants working with the TBC and Karen

CSOs were particularly challenged by the dual work of dealing with funding cuts and repatriation. Saw Elvis (Karen State), head of the Karen Education Department and TBC employee, identified the biggest current problem facing the TBC as the plan for the closure of the camps, and facilitating either refugees' return to Myanmar or reintegration into Thai society. He described security issues facing refugees and the tension of CBO staff being compelled to tell them to go back to Myanmar, against their own best knowledge.

Doing the work despite the funding cuts and becoming independent

Participants described the resilience of local organizations and how they pulled through the mass funding cuts. Mr. K (UK) who has worked for decades with CBOs and INGOs, explained the attitude of local leadership: "they say, 'even though we didn't get funding, we'll fucking do it anyway. It may not be as smooth and it may not be as comfortable, but we'll work it out.'" Eventually some donations came back, as Andrea Costa (Australia) explained:

> I think the conversation matured. The Rohingya crisis happened. The donors realized that perhaps the Myanmar government wasn't the golden child they thought it was going to be, and they realized that perhaps they needed a more balanced approach. And they shifted again… the lion's share of the money still goes to the government, but they've realized that they need to keep Indigenous systems alive and support those too. They [also realized they] need to help bring that conversation around convergence, around integration of systems. They need to help foster that conversation rather than just siding with the government. [Andrea Costa, Australia, INGO worker, 15+ years' experience]

Andrea observes here that despite the obvious need for a change in approach, foreign donors have kept their plan to move work into Myanmar and channel funding through the dictatorship. They revealed themselves to ultimately be an undependable source of help for local groups.

While some of the funding had slowly returned to the region, many of the participants discussed how the end goal of their work had always been to become independent from foreign donors. Participants who work with CBOs explained success as being able to run their organizations solely with the local support of communities. KESAN's Executive Director Saw

Paul Sein Twa (Karen State) explained the Salween Peace Park's[12] work as an example of self-governed work, while Naw (Karen State), an organizer with KNU Generation Youth, said they had been able to get stipends and food to teachers through local support from leaders and community groups. Participants who'd worked with the CBOs Mae Tao Clinic and Migrant Education said they'd been largely successful in their goals, which was to help transition migrants at the border who'd depended on INGO and CBO-funded medical and health services toward using services provided by the Thai government. Chris Wright (UK) defined Migrant Education's success as "a managed close down and transfer of responsibility to [Thai state-run] organizations that were in a much better place to do the work."

INGO workers conceived of success as either making their organization redundant and exiting the situation, or morphing into service to local organizations. They described their organization's goals as training up local organizations to do their work, or making strong ties with local organizations, then providing social services under the guidance of local groups. However, most INGO workers noted that their organizations had not been successful because they hadn't accomplished helping local groups to be independent. Naing Win (Myanmar) noted that World Education had not succeeded in their quest to have community-based partner organizations work independently from them, which was a goal for years. However, he said that World Education had seen partial success in terms of the rollout of the mother-tongue based, multilanguage education framework, which was a key response to pressures toward cultural assimilation. A number of organizations had to manage new pressures toward cultural assimilation as a part of their work.

Resistance to Bamar cultural assimilation

Participants noted that the historical push to assimilate Indigenous communities toward Bamar culture had accelerated after the KNU signed onto the ceasefire agreement; this view coincides with scholarship and media reports (Aung, 2019; Gray, 2018; Walton, 2013). While

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[12] I describe more about the Salween Peace Park on page 159 and in Appendix 1.

cultural assimilation is a longstanding issue (Yawnghwe, 2001), participants said they felt it as a new area of challenge with donors having moved funding toward repatriation and peace processes that pushed organizations to work with the government. Mr. K (UK), who'd worked with CBOs and NGOs, expressed: "they just started flooding ethnic areas with Burmese teachers and Burmese medics, without consultation." One of the worries after the reforms was whether ethnic populations would be able to continue to access services and find work in their language and within their cultural context. Getting programs recognized by the Myanmar government, especially the qualifications of people in camps and on the border that would allow them to be able to work and go to school once they returned, was a new major concern for many of my participant's organizations. Catherine Daly (Ireland), former Country Director of World Education, described a key barrier for migrant students as not speaking Burmese and having their migrant school education credentials not recognized in Myanmar. She identified the biggest problem World Education was trying to solve as facilitating the return for migrants into Myanmar, especially in the context of children being able to go back to school.

CBOs similarly were spending a huge amount of time and energy working on integrating local organizations and peoples into the new context in Myanmar. Greg (Canada) and Naing Win (Myanmar) described their work with TeacherFOCUS as "filling the gap of transition." They said the biggest problem their organization was trying to solve was getting recognition for those who were formerly teaching in migrant schools inside Myanmar. The RISE team described the biggest problem they are trying to solve as getting recognition for the education systems of ethnic nationalities/Indigenous peoples. Crystal (Myanmar), Program Manager of RISE, noted that her organization's "intangible success" was the participation RISE got from communities, especially to keep teaching in their Indigenous languages and to keep cultural practices as a part of the schooling system, up against a push toward homogeneity by the government.

Participants explained that donors did not understand or empathize with the ethnic struggle against assimilation. They elaborated this was because donors were not able to conceptualize a place like the Thailand-Myanmar border, where populations are fluid and groups work outside the nation-state model. Jack Dunford (UK), former Director of TBC, explained

> it's too confusing… [the donors would say] 'oh Burma, it's so complicated'… the UN does not ever really, in my opinion, support non-state actors. So, there was no buy-in. So 30 years in we get into the election and we're getting into a peace process and the

whole peace industry descends on Burma; all their resources go into trying to help the Burmese government… [Jack Dunford, UK, INGO worker, 25+ years experience]

Dunford makes the point that because it is defined and employed by States, the UN is ill equipped to work with non-state actors who are in conflict with those states. His description of the aftermath of the reforms beginning in 2010 has been decried by analysts as a refusal for the international community to understand the way the Myanmar government works. Myanmar analyst David Mathieson observes: "the Western scramble for Myanmar had as one of its primary premises the downplay of reports of military atrocities… Diplomats… would scoff at reports of serious human rights violations and mock the ethnic rights groups who relayed information" (2021). Mathieson laments Western attempts to engage the military as misguided, a "blind faith in the Tatmadaw's sincerity" (2021); I read this phenomenon as part of a wider ethos in which international development is biased toward Western framings of the nation-state and the push to the homogenization of populations that has long underpinned Westphalian concepts of statehood. Bringing cultures and traditions into ways of being that are more reflective of nation-state governance and is an effect of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism requires the homogenizing of a dominant group, categorized as the same even though they may be diverse. Settler colonial processes include the eventual and gradual assimilation of all ethnic "others" into the mainstream, which requires the erasure of language, cultural traditions, and geographies, through displacement and dispossession; it requires the erasure of people's relationships with land, including their ability to make livelihoods, and the accumulation of capital through racial hierarchy. Describing what he'd found written in his old journals, Dunford noted this has been a problem with donor attitudes from the beginning:

I had somebody from the UK government that came to my office at least 15 years ago, could be 20 years ago, and I was trying to make the case of the ethnic struggle. He basically said, 'so what's wrong with assimilation? Scotland, Wales, you know… 300 years down the line, who cares?" So [he was saying] in the long run, 300 hundred years down the road, 'who gives a damn about Karen state?' [Jack Dunford, UK, NGO worker, 25+ years experience]

Dunford's account of this government official's stance reveals the way colonial logics, learned through the earliest British conquests, continue to influence donor's choices. When they withdrew from the Thailand-Myanmar border in order to work with the Myanmar regime, Western donors showed they could not respect Karen sovereignty, and the many longstanding civil society organizations operating with the KNU, because they imagined them as eventually

assimilating into Myanmar culture and control–despite the clear agenda of the KNU and a long-term system of Karen governance.

Because a major function of the nation-state has been to engage in war and conquest in order to secure and expand its borders and pursue dominance and imperialism, humanitarianism has fomented as an act of care alongside the violence of war. As humanitarianism became an official area of work for citizens, its bureaucracy evolved, compelling its workers to show proof of their actions in order to be deserving of funding. As nation-states have gradually collapsed into servants of global capitalism, the concerns of development work have engaged a parallel move toward making those they serve assimilate to the demands of the global marketplace. Refugees, migrants and Indigenous peoples who pose a challenge to both definitions of the nation-state and the markets that support them become targets of humanitarian control.

State Power and Material Gains: The focus of humanitarianism and development

As outlined in the introduction of this dissertation, humanitarian funding is heavily routed from Global North OECD countries, and mainly the United States, through tied aid that expects the Global South to glean to Western expectations, standards and norms. Chimni (2004) offers a comprehensive view of how International Institutions (IIs) are today present across "all areas of international relations–economic, social and political–considerably limiting the autonomy of sovereign states" (p. 2) and empowering international economic institutions–the WTO, IMF and the World Bank. These are in turn bolstered by the UN which "has embraced the neo-liberal agenda and is being geared towards promoting the interests of transnational capital" (p. 2). The UN's relationship with sovereign states was marked by a turn, in the 1990's, to interventionism via armed humanitarianism or threat of force, while any of its more critical agencies have been "repositioned and normalized" through pressure, in particular from the US (p. 2). A vast range of NGOs influence and participate in normalizing decision-making processes within II's, undergirded by "a web of sub-national authorities and cities" as "decentralized instruments of global governance" that are resistant to transparent democratic processes (p. 3). Chimni concludes that IIs "limit the possibilities of global redistributive justice and the genuine democratization of both inter-state and intra-state relations" (p. 3). The liberal democratic nation-

state becomes the theoretical and practical pivot point around which to shape humanitarian work. The top priority of II's is creating the social conditions for globalized capitalism, masked by conceptions of order and good governance. Those conceptions–order, governance and rationality–are all couched in the logics of humanitarianism and its younger sibling, international development.

Hammett (2019) identifies the first instance of international development as a concept in 1949, when then US-president Truman made a speech that defined the USA as responsible for spreading its superior liberal humanitarian democracy through development. Hammett (2019) surveys how Western-based perspectives on development have continued to dominate the field, including the notion that the need for development only exists in the global south. Despite different definitions of "development" emerging from the global south, including ones in which collectivity amongst peoples and the environment is prioritized over consumption and extraction (Campodónico, Carbonnier & Tezanos Vázquez, 2017), institutions driving development have prioritized Western "spatialities, temporalities, and politics… rooted in dominant power relations" that mark out a new form of colonialism and imperialism (Hammett, 2019, p. 1). The Millenium Development (and later Sustainable Development) Goals purported to change their focus to a more global scale, but remain entrenched in Western values and institutions (Willis, 2014). Barnett describes the current global humanitarian landscape as one "premised on a society of stable states" in which the UN has become preoccupied with managing and reacting to violence within states, and attempting to save what it terms failed states, using Western states as the blueprint for what supposedly failed states should look like; a perspective that mirrors earlier imperial forms of humanitarianism (2011, p. 163-164).

Gill's (2009) study of British humanitarian relief workers traces how the aid economy developed in tandem with the nation-state's military pursuits. Gill argues that after the Franco-Prussian war of the 1870s, "aid worker" became an official career, alongside the recognition that better care was needed in conflict. Humanitarian aid moved from an act stemming from a crisis of conscience, to the condoning of war: humanitarian workers through "practices and protocols were increasingly regulated and conceived in official circles as auxiliaries to the regular army medical services" (p. 25). Aid work was counterpart to war efforts, and erased political discussion over whether wars should be fought in the first place. Gill tracks a turn of the century "new humanitarianism" preoccupied with concepts of secularity, in which humanitarians had to

maintain a healthy detachment from their work, and justify their actions to those at home who were funding it. This entailed keeping records that included statistics, graphs and charts that would show those in Britain that volunteers abroad were doing work that was financially justifiable. Gill terms this "rational compassion." Amidst intense violence that irrationally harmed people in the name of the nation-state, humanitarians found themselves justifying their relief work, which paradoxically bolstered the war effort, through increasingly bureaucratic forms posited as rational.

Detailed accounting and standardization was evident as a problem for participants in my study, who lamented the administrative burden of securing funding, and especially how CBOs needed to follow complex procedures in order to keep even small amounts of funding. Participants discussed funder's requesting to fund only particular parts of the work, and not the whole organization, which could make management for the organization very difficult; related to this, donors wanting detailed accounting on where funds go could be hard to provide in the complex context of the border. Patrick (USA), former Executive Director of World Education and Youth Connect Thailand, described how organizations had to conduct huge time-sensitive research projects ahead of securing funding from donors:

> one of the biggest issues is, you see an RFP [request for proposal] and [then] you have, like, a month and a half to respond… and you have to build partnerships and then turn around a 400-page proposal for millions of dollars. I mean it's just a ridiculous way to organize development work. [Patrick Kearns, USA, INGO and CBO worker, 15+ years experience]

For Patrick, who is one of the hardest workers I know, the make-work of creating a huge proposal, often because of bureaucratic demands from funders, was a highly frustrating aspect of engaging with donors. The details of an RFP displaced energy away from real-time needs of local communities, and onto meeting the needs of people abroad sitting in their offices.

On the Thailand-Myanmar border, where local organizations have their own systems in place, development work driven from the West became more concerned with accounting than with truly finding out what was best for populations. This culminated in their clear misunderstanding of the context, after donors abandoned their work with CBOs, acted condescendingly toward them, and pushed them to apply repatriation tactics that did not work. From abroad, their perspective was that migrant populations should move back into Myanmar

and become part of the nation-state order. They implemented this plan using the harsh tactic of removing aid from the camps, in language that sounds coldly rational: the European Union's funding body for the refugee camps, ECHO, states in its 2012 report that it would gradually remove funding from camps despite documenting on the same pages that within and around Myanmar, people displaced by war and conflict faced dire conditions that had no sign of improving (ECHO, 2012, p. 2; Human Rights Watch, 2012).

Turns to an ideal of rationality is a legacy of colonialism, and the idea that Westerners are more rational than others is fundamental to international development. Jennifer Morgan's (2021) analysis of numeracy as a key element of colonialism makes a vital connection between accounting and colonial administration. Morgan's historical survey of the treatment of Black women in the early modern period (17th century) shows how Europeans used their self-perceived superiority with arithmetics to categorize themselves as a more rational race. Tracing "the processes that divide people and economies along distinct axes of value and commodity" (p. 5), Morgan argues that "ideologies of race came into being alongside newly consolidating ideas about wealth, nationhood, and population" (p. 111). Morgan shows that "neutral categories of thought such as 'population' and 'currency' came into circulation in England at the same time that commitments to the slave trade were becoming more robust" (p. 24-25): being "rational" and "neutral" erased violence perpetrated by those who benefitted from trading peoples as commodities. Morgan points out "while the manifestations of racial hierarchy are inescapably violent, they gestate in the claims of neutrality, calculability, and rationality" (p. 9). Moves toward more and more administration that divides Europeans from the beneficiaries of aid is a form of racial hierarchy that defines those "able" and "deserving" of aid as those who can comply with evermore complex funding proposals.

Funders from abroad make choices about the lives of people in challenging contexts according to formulaic calculations about whether or not they can meet funding standards. In this highly complex, war-torn region of the world, funders expected INGO and CBO workers to repeatedly prove their worthiness for funding, creating massive amounts of busywork for both the funders and those on the ground. Funders thus supported humanitarianism as an industry that generated projects and the justification of projects, when they might have been supporting political change that lessens the global arms trade and economic investments that support military juntas such as the one in Myanmar.

As a rational endeavour, humanitarianism and development has moved toward markets as a way to solve social problems. Alami, Dixon & Mawdsley (2021) document how the World Bank, IMF and other banks have been working to portray financial access as a development priority, signaling a major ideological shift toward capital as the central mode of development. They trace how "multilateral and supranational development actors such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the G20" are reordering the role of the state to one concerned primarily with expanding state capitalism (p. 1295). Through a review of literature they mark five transformations from this phenomenon. These include an acceleration of a new labour market in which new concentrations of "low-skilled" factory workers from South East Asia are more easily accessed by new patterns of global production and consumption; the facilitation of the flow of capital to and from distant territories; and an "historically unprecedented concentration and centralisation of capital" (p. 1297). Todorova's (2018) survey of investment patterns in the Balkans illuminates the ways that the flow of finances in global capitalism in places deemed as "peripheries" concentrate capital investment and influence the making of specializations. Todorova argues these global capitalist trends reflect Eurocentrism: the "'zoning' of places and peoples [are] defined by forms of labour and marked for postcolonial Eurocentric domination and control by fostering economic dependencies" (Todorova, 2018, p. 8-9). Todorova observes that India and China's versions of state capitalism learn from Western European imperialist practices, through state securitization and subjugation of minorities, and "national narratives revolving around foreign oppression, colonialism, and subjugation… [that enable] India and China [to] defer their own violence and exploitation of others on the path to capitalism and global power" (p. 10). In Myanmar, China's governance in Special Economic Zones emulates nationalism, a goal supported by multilateral institutions, which are still mainly influenced by Europe and the U.S., and promote capitalism as the best system by which to mediate governance between nation-states. State intervention in the management of capital includes the extension of control "over non-state economic actors and entities, via instruments such as taxation, transfers of resources, regulation, economic planning, and industrial policy," as well as ownership or control over capitalist production and accumulation (Alami et. al., 2021, p. 1298). Rather than challenge the role of the state in deepening market-based finance, multilateral institutions support the expansion of state capitalism as the new normal: "these institutions are not only cornerstones of the international

liberal order, they are also (and, perhaps, foremost) regulative agencies committed to the global imposition of disciplines central to capitalist reproduction" (p. 1314). In this light, it is clear why multinational donors, in the end, treated refugees and migrants, as Jack Dunford states, "as a commodity that had to be dealt with." Viewed as at the peripheries and outside capitalism, from a standpoint that believes all people must be subsumed within nation-states, funders support projects that place refugees in low-paying labour conditions before considering that they might instead desire to be given back their lands to make their own livelihoods, a point I discuss in the following chapter.

Shaw (2015) traces how the refugee emerged as a category of humanitarian concern in the UK through the 19th century. Shaw observes that the figure of the refugee cantilevered key aspects of Britain's identity: its help for refugees represented that it was a liberal society premised on ease of movement of the individual; a humanitarian society that could provide relief to victims of injustice; and a society premised on freedom up and against other places imagined as foreign and despotic. The figure of the refugee was used to undergird an entire humanitarian industrial complex in Britain, in which publics were motivated to support humanitarian work abroad while at the same time, through the 20th and 21st century, Britain's actual acceptance of refugees into the country plummeted, until it became one of the most unwelcoming countries in Europe (Shaw, 2015, p. 8). Eventually, the refugee became the concern of international aid, and responses to refugees abroad were key features of Britain's role as a humanitarian contributor, rather than a core part of Britain's national identity and state politics at home.

Refugees and migrants are simultaneously subject to the control, protection, and restriction of mobility by institutions interested in upholding the rule of the nation-state. Migrants unsettle nation-state hegemony "as the stable socio-spatial referent for an ongoing sociopolitical project" (De Genova, 2020, p. 163). They defy the power of the nation-state by crossing borders and setting up communities outside the purview of nation-state laws. As Natasha King argues in her study of undocumented peoples living in Calais, France, migrants force recognition of the state as "a way of being… [that we] institute whenever we create dominating relationships… [which in turn] opens us up to imagining alternative, non-dominating ways of organizing our social reality" (2016, p. 22). While refugees and migrants are often cast as separate from Indigenous peoples, many of them are Indigenous. Indigenous peoples, by their very existence, are anathema to the nation-state. In Myanmar, the civilizational project, whether

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imposed by the British, Chinese, Myanmar government or other occupying power, has always understood border-dwelling peoples as peripheral to nation-state and progress: border peoples have always engaged in a conscious refusal of state formation (Scott, 2008). Perhaps precisely because of their challenge to the nation-state order, refugees and migrants have become a critical populace to "manage," through the systemic restriction on their movements, viewed as protection.

Protection has been a focal concern of organized humanitarianism, and belies its colonial inheritance. Lester and Dussart (2014) observe that "a British governmental responsibility to protect seems to have emerged at the same time and in the same spaces as the government assumed the right to colonize" (p. 1). They show that humanitarianism was intrinsic to governmentality, to the expansion of a global assemblage of spaces marked by Eurocentric concerns and worldviews. These worldviews were decidedly centered on the nation-state as a unit of organization, which by definition excluded Indigeneity as a political category, while at the same time being dependent on it. The protection of "Aborigines" in settler colonial Australia and New Zealand helped to resolve metropolitan Britain's paradoxical problem of its colonial harms against Indigenous peoples (Lester & Dussart, 2014). Humanitarianism at once focused on Indigenous peoples while erasing them through civilizing projects. This duplicity is a mainstay of empire. Chickasaw theorist Jodi Byrd's concept of imperial transits can be applied to the humanitarian project. Byrd argues that the act of erasing Indigenous peoples marked the way for the propagation of empire "transhemispherically and transoceanically, not just through whiteness, but through the continued settling and colonizing of indigenous people's lands, histories, identities, and very lives" (2011, p. 21). Humanitarianism, and its evolution into international development work, propagates American and state-capitalist interests masked as concern for the less fortunate.

Persaud & Sajed's (2018) volume brings together a number of works that critique the myopia of international relations, showing that the field has traditionally positioned the West as superior to all other places and cultures (p. 9). Anishinaabe scholar Hayden King writes that the field of international relations is characterized by "a void of Indigenous presence, thought or action." King traces this "misrepresentation and exclusion" to early accounts of transatlantic contact, in which Europeans conceived of themselves up and against Indigenous peoples, who they categorized as "savage" (2018, p. 136). This laid the groundwork for centuries of practiced

ignorance about Indigenous political theories, economies, and philosophies, and an absence of training in the process and concept of settler colonialism for current international relations scholars (p. 137). King notes that orthodox international relations uses the state as "the dominant unit of political analysis" (p. 139). Pivoting itself against notions of anarchy, international relations can only understand an ordered society as "geographic containers with rigid borders, exclusive government powers, and exclusive sovereignty" (p. 140). Since the state is "antithetical to Indigenous peoples in its very constitution… the existence of states then truncates Indigenous political relationships": political philosophies and Indigenous concepts of nation-state are ignored and suppressed (p. 141). King goes on to describe Anishinaabe relations to nation-state, which in some aspects are similar to those of the Karen and other Indigenous groups in Myanmar, especially in terms of relations to land: the "conception of the land not only as economic but also educational and political" (p. 149) understands "a sustainable *sharing* of the land is a permanent condition. It is not a one-time transaction but a durable, never-ending pact… [political consensus] acknowledges that our survival depends on the survival of the land" (p. 148). Karen relations to land, and the ways INGOs categorically dismiss those relations, are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 7

Humanitarians Settle

Land is heritage transmitted to us by our forefathers, it is capital that carries many meanings, it is currency and the economic system, and it is a precious and priceless commons system for future generations.

Land is the place not just where human beings are born and human societies are nurtured, but also where biodiversity itself–including all biological and botanical species–are born and conserved. It is the place where food is produced, it is the place from which we learn our role in the social and natural environment, it is the sanctuary for safety, it is the survival of human cultures and the commons system to build peace.

Land is the history of human beings and their environment.

Land is the dignity of each individual, each family, each community and each society…

Land is not a commodity.

(Dr. Kyaw Thu (Paung Ku), LIOH Report, 2015, p. 4)

The above epigraph, which opens a report from Land In Our Hands, a cross-Myanmar collection of small-scale farmers and civil society groups, echoes the words of many of the participants in this study during our discussions about land. Its final sentence, that *land is not a commodity*, signals the disparate understanding between Indigenous or place-based communities and the colonial/modern notion of land as property. Land as property or commodity means it is considered inert, a raw material with no meaning, agency or rights outside its potential for use. In Myanmar, the treatment of land as commodity has meant that extractive capitalist projects, propelled by the government and multinational corporations, are irrevocably destroying and transforming the land in Myanmar, and displacing those who live on them in the process. In this chapter, I present results from my interview questions about the significance of land to the communities that organizations were working with, and how organizations were responding to land issues in Myanmar. Land, for communities, is much more than commodity: it is significant for culture, knowledge, and the future, and it is considered agentic and alive (LIOH, 2015). Despite the known importance of land to millions of people across Myanmar, and despite the obvious vulnerability of those communities to exploitative capitalist systems, my research finds that INGOs along the Thailand-Myanmar border are doing almost nothing to prevent further land

confiscation. I argue that INGO silence around the issue of land is the result of settler colonial logics that collapse land into commodity.

The first section describes my own experience returning to Mae Sot in 2019, six years after the last time I was there. In that timeframe, Mae Sot had become a special economic zone (SEZ) and had drastically changed through capitalist development. The creation of SEZs are occurring in tandem with ceasefires, which emerged as a major point of discussion; a third of participants talked about the role of development projects in causing widespread land loss. I consider how SEZs and ceasefires are a result of accelerated moves toward land-grabbing globally, introducing topics I return to at greater length at the end of the chapter.

I next summarize the results of discussions with interview participants on the importance of land to the local populations along the Thailand-Myanmar border and in Karen State. Interviewees unanimously agreed that land is of high importance for their communities. They explained how lands contain a multitude of meanings for community identity, in addition to being key to livelihoods and to people's ability to return from Thailand to Myanmar. I conducted these interviews in January and February 2019, about eight weeks from the Myanmar regime's implementation of the Vacant Fallow and Virgin (VFV) land law, which were designed to push thousands of communities across Myanmar off their lands. Lands classified as "Vacant, Virgin or Fallow" could be seized by the government, unless the people living on them apply for a concession; most of these lands are in ethnic areas, and about 10 million people rely on them for livelihoods (Nwe Ni Soe & Sung Chin Par, 2022). Participants named the VFV law as a source of ongoing oppression, and as a way that the government was further blocking people's return to their lands. I read Brenna Bhandar (2018) and Jane Ferguson's (2014) work to analyze the VFV law as part of a historical push by British colonial systems to turn Indigenous lands into private property, which in turn minoritizes and racializes Indigenous peoples as part of a multicultural nation-state, in which everyone's rights to lands are constituted through property law.

I then present results from discussions around whether or not INGOs and CBOs in the region are working on land rights issues. My findings are that CBOs on the Thailand-Myanmar border are actively confronting land loss as a problem, while INGOs are barely considering it. INGO's elision of land on the Thailand-Myanmar border is mirrored in the larger global humanitarian regime, as presented in my Chapter 3 analysis of the annual reports of eight of the

world's largest INGOs. I argue that INGOs ignore ongoing threats to land and the resistance efforts of Indigenous peoples because their work actively takes part in settler colonial formations in which land is understood as property, as capital resource.

Returning to a devastated/developed new Mae Sot

When I flew into Mae Sot in 2019 to conduct interviews for this dissertation, the flight was out of Bangkok, Thailand's capital, which was in the midst of a historic "toxic smog" crisis that filled the city with "murky haze" and forced authorities to close schools and factories (AFP, 2019). Looking down from the plane, I was relieved to take in sights of familiar green forests, like plush bunches of broccoli, atop rolling mountains that make up the landscape of northern Thailand. After the pollution in Bangkok, the view of uninterrupted greenspace felt like a balm on the soul. Still, I expected there to be changes: I had watched the place change in real time while living there from year to year. Six years earlier when I had made the journey by air, flights had begun tentatively, with 12-seat airplanes taking off twice a week. Now, flights triple the size run daily, and the one I was on was full.

As the plane got closer to the town, the verdant canopy gave way to sickly brown. The forested mountains all around Mae Sot had been razed; mountaintop removal was happening in some places. The landscape was rubble, punctuated by piled up tree trunks, draglines; speckled with tractors, cranes, and trucks with tires so large I could see their treads from the plane. It was sheer devastation.

At ground level I was struck by changes all around me. Car taxis, instead of tuk tuks or motorbikes, now lined up outside the airport. Driving down the highway toward town, views of the small mountains that nestled Mae Sot were now blocked by billboards, huge buildings and construction sites: *Mega Home; Tesco; Isuzu cars; The Hop Inn; Bizco Rich Buck; Ocean Life; Beijing fire station*; and a new massive, glittering *Welcome to Tak, Thailand* sign. There were cranes everywhere, building more.

The two main roads running through the town's center looked the same, but were busier now. The motley mix that once crowded the streets here–bicycles, tuk-tuks, scooters with ramshackle sidecar attachments, people leading the odd cow or buffalo down the road–were

replaced by cars and trucks. Riding my borrowed guesthouse bicycle was now much more precarious in this hulking, fast-moving traffic.

The loss of greenery meant Mae Sot had lost some of its insulation. The usually crisp January nights were no longer as cool, the air no longer as clear. Bicycling the surrounding areas, I was shocked to discover places that had been comprised of wide, rolling fields full of grazing cows, and forest in between, now solidly covered in concrete: new roads jutted off in every direction. I became disoriented as I bicycled around, finding roads formerly flanked by fields and ponds lined with hundreds of small cement row houses. Just a few years prior, Mae Sot had been edged by the natural world: fields of paddy on the south side; a hilly treelined horizon to the north. Now on the north end, that view was obstructed by a huge Robinson Department Store. Six new highways had been added to the two that joined Mae Sot to the outside world. A new bridge over the border to Myanmar was nearly complete.

These new buildings, roads and highways had exploded after the creation of Special Economic Zones on either side of the border–in Mae Sot and its adjacent town in Myanmar, Myawaddy. With governance structures "skewed toward the interests of investors and against those of locals and the environment," foreign investors use SEZs as tools to exploit lands and labour forces without political redress (Thame, 2017, p. 4). 20 kilometers north of Myawaddy, China's Yatai International Holding Group has invested $1 billion USD to build an SEZ it touts as a "new city project" called Shwe Kokko: a 2000-acre "high-tech hub, with an airport, luxury housing, a 1200-room hotel, casinos, an entertainment complex, supermarkets, department stores, police station, industrial zone, and freight depots" (Han, 2019). Communities in Karen state have stated explicitly that they will not benefit from Shwe Kokko, and that the jobs on offer will be undesirable (Han, 2018). Despite protests by the Thai Human rights commission and local groups, officials were pressured to speed up the development of Mae Sot's SEZ in response to potential business opportunities presented by Shwe Kokko; thus 3.2 square kilometers of land designated for the SEZ in Mae Sot displaced locals, many of whom were low income migrant workers from Myanmar (Wai, 2015; Lintner, 2019; Pinitwong, 2019).

SEZs and Ceasefires

SEZs are currently being created everywhere across Southeast Asia, but border regions are target areas for developers. Nation-state governments vying for power at the borders use SEZs as "a spatio-economic strategy to territorialize the borderlands," regions which have traditionally been the homelands of persons (human and non-human) outside state control (Oh, 2016, p. 14). SEZs benefit from the particular marginalization of migrant populations. In Mae Sot, migrant workers face triple-layered risks of exploitation due to their "Otherness" as peoples of different ethnicities (including Karen, Karenni, Kachin, Bamar, Muslim) and without status; their inability to receive work permits; and the notion that they are low-skilled or unskilled (Tangseefa, Thame, & Paribatra, 2016). SEZs increase immobility for people living in border communities, because their success relies on confining workers to specific areas (Oo, 2013). In interviews with participants, when my questions prompted discussions about land, participants raised the displacement caused by the Mae Sot SEZ, noting migrant communities who'd lived in the area for decades were now being pushed out of zones that were currently under development.

While land confiscation and displacement has been an issue for the last 30 years and more, it has escalated in connection with ceasefire agreements. After the 2010 elections brought President Thein Sein's Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) into power, the USDP successfully included all ethnic armed opposition groups into ceasefire agreements. Ceasefires opened the way to massive infrastructure and development projects, most of which were designated for borderland regions involving SEZs (Buchanan, Kramer & Woods, 2013, p. 9). The moves to reform and ceasefire are part of a long game by the military government, always aimed at preserving the Tatmadaw's power (Brenner and Schulman, 2019). Between 1988 and 2008 there was rampant land confiscation throughout Myanmar, as land acquisition became a way for the government to gain both economic and military power (Woods, 2011, p. 750).

In 2015, the KNU signed the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) as a way to support "constitutional reform through multilateral political dialogue" (Joliffe, 2017, p. 1). This caused a lot of internal strife between differing factions, with 41 Karen civil society organizations signing an open letter expressing distrust in the ceasefire (Brenner, 2017). Ceasefires are widely viewed by local communities as the cause of increased land confiscation (KHRG, 2018). Participants in my study vehemently stated that the ceasefires had allowed the Myanmar government to further encroach into Karen State. They said that instead of bringing ethnic leaders to the table with members of the Myanmar government to convey the interests of communities, the ceasefires

were facilitating resource extraction and development projects, and in turn displacement. They described the development of mega projects for natural resource extraction, agriculture and infrastructure, and differentiated the new displacement caused by these projects from what had happened in the past. KHRG member Saw K (Karen State) explained:

> many different kinds of land confiscation [are now] happening, especially in Karen state, southern Myanmar. Where villager's lands are confiscated, their plantations can be confiscated, their farms are confiscated because their land is [in the way of] the plan and the projects that they are proposing for the development. Some [land is confiscated] for the government of Myanmar, some for the companies, some for the military, some for the ethnic armed groups and some for the wealthy individuals–they have different purposes for confiscating the land. [Saw K, Karen State, KHRG, CBO worker, 5+ years experience]

Saw K highlights that while migrant communities in Thailand had been produced by conflict and land confiscation mostly driven by the Myanmar military, now it felt like land confiscation was accelerating because of the interests of diverse parties, with different interests, all mounting pressures on villagers to give up their lands. These attempts include coercion, manipulation and force. Villagers face remarkable challenges as they try to keep their lands. Their struggles are all too familiar within a global trend: what's happening along the Thailand-Myanmar border is part of a larger process of land appropriation across Myanmar, and the world.

Myanmar and the global land rush

Currently, we are living through unprecedented displacement and land confiscation worldwide, often referred to as land grabbing or the global land rush. As Sassen's (2014) research documents, multinationals, foreign investment firms and nation-state governments collaborate to buy up lands at mass scale as a future investment, enacting capitalist logics "shaped by a few very basic dynamics of liberated profit seeking and indifference to the environment" that have culminated into severe ecological and human destruction (p. 215). Correlated with land grabs are water grabs (p. 191).

Land grabbing disproportionately targets communities governing via common land laws, many of whom are Indigenous (Dell'Angelo et. al., 2017). The International Land Coalition (ILC), a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organizations, defines land

grabbing as large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) or concessions that are: not transparent; violate human rights; do not seek free, prior, and informed consent; disregard social, economic, and environmental impacts; or are not based on democratic planning and participation (International Land Coalition, 2011). Myanmar, which is home to immense biodiversity and an extraordinary range of endemic species, is a target for land grabbing both because of its rich environment and its population, who in many cases continue to operate through customary land laws. Customary laws, which are based on generational relationality to lands, are not recognized by nation-state systems and multinational corporations that work with Myanmar's regime. Together, corporations and the military government are imposing laws that require people to have documentation to "prove" their ownership over land. However, the concept of registered land ownership is anathema to many people in Karen State, as Saw Eh Htoo Wah (Karen State) of RISE explained:

> when the government says, "you need to register the land," we don't [think we] need to register because this is our land. Our ancestors lived on this land for thousands of years, passing it from generation to generation. So it's causing a problem because if we are not registered within six months, we'll be in jail or fined! [Saw Eh Htoo Wah, Karen State, RISE, CBO worker, 10+ years experience]

Saw Eh Htoo Wah describes how for Karen peoples, relationality with lands, encompassed in customary land laws, are being weaponized against them as "illegitimate" within changing legal frameworks that say people need the right papers to claim ownership over lands. Communities do not institutionalize or regulate access to land: many farms operate on informal, noncontractual agreements using cooperative labour exchange, with reciprocity as an underlying principal (Rajah, 2008, p. 135). These relationships to the lands, waters and to labour are very different from extractive and private property models. So the prospect of laws coming into effect to punish people for living in the place they'd been living forever–to incarcerate people on their very own land–was a special form of cruelty, imposed by the Myanmar regime under the guise of legality. Disputing people's belonging to lands is not simply an issue of ownership or identity claims: it challenges spiritual, historical and material being.

The importance of land and place in Myanmar

To the question "is land important to the people you work with?" interview participants unanimously replied with an exuberant "yes." Conversations about land generated in-depth discussion about the relationship communities have to land as integral to their identities, heritage and culture, the importance of access to land for survival and livelihood, and the past and impending loss of lands, which flowed into detailed analyses of the causes and effects of land loss. The vast majority of participants brought up war as a driver of land confiscation, displacement and migration. The Myanmar government and its abuses within the conflict came up first as a reason for people having to leave. Participants explained that once people had left, it could be very difficult for them to reclaim their lands. This caused a cycle of displacement that had been ongoing for decades. Participants also discussed SEZs and ceasefires as facilitating the introduction of extractive development projects, which exacerbated land theft. They expressed a deep concern and dread with the coming imposition of the VFV land laws.

Land is identity, heritage and culture

Participants expressed the importance of land with passion and urgency. They often repeated the same language and phrases, so here I summarize the terms that came up frequently among a number of people. Participants stated that land is "hugely important"; "means everything"; "without it you can't live"; "it means life"; "it's immediate"; "it's your root." They explained that local communities have an expansive and layered relationship with land, emphasizing that "land is not just land but home"; "land is where you build your home"; "land is family"; "land is your soul," "land is identity," "land is community"; "the way of life comes from the land"; and land encompasses "food, medicine, and culture."

Two thirds of participants equated land to identity in some way, explaining that land is linked to ancestry, heritage and tradition, and is integral to culture. Participants talked about the importance of land as "generational," explaining that land and relations to land are to be passed on to future generations. They explained how land is the site of community unity, and is linked to spiritual and religious importance. They discussed land as creating security as well as mobility, because having somewhere to come back to meant you could leave. Participants

distinguished land from housing and property, saying the concepts should be kept separate. Crystal White (Myanmar) of RISE talked about learning that her various community partners distinguish between lands to live on and ancestral territories. She told a story about how while conducting trainings with Indigenous communities, they took her to visit places of meaning to them, which were different from the places where they actually lived.

> Naga, Chin, Zomi [people who we work with] in the northwestern part of Myanmar, fortunately they have access to the land where their ancestors have been living, generally. It really touched me… [I traveled with the] Naga… to a very remote area, but it's got beautiful scenery, a beautiful [place]. [We] passed many mountains and also many places, but they said, "no, we have to go a few hours farther." I said, "why don't you stay in the empty space of land which is even nearer to the town?" [They'd say] "because I'm not from there." They'll say this [specific place] is how they define themselves and also their ancestors. Even though they have property [in their new place]… they have the land… they can grow food and they can access the stream… but it's not where they are attached to. Their original land has a lot more meaning than property. [Crystal White, Myanmar, RISE, CBO worker, 10+ years experience]

As Crystal illustrates, for ethnic peoples in Myanmar land does not require occupation or use to be important. Spaces not inhabited by people carry historic and spiritual significance, and are meaningful unto themselves.

Participants noted that claims to ethnic identity meant claims to specific lands and territories. A few participants described Karen State as they discussed the importance of land. Through the interviews, as well as my own reading of what I can find in the literature, the Karen National Union and a sovereign Karen State were incepted to secure ethnic identity and autonomy over land as well as land itself: land and identity are not separate. Land plays a central role in the definition and governance of Kawthoolei, which refers to an autonomous Karen state with collectively and independently used land, forests, fisheries, water, and natural resources governed by a village community (Hong, 2017, p. 231). KHRG member Saw K (Karen State) defined the meaning of the name Kawthoolei as "land that belongs to Karen people, a land full of peace." In Karen culture, land is considered alive and as having its own form of desire (Rajah, 2008).[13] Spirits live in all beings, but their vitality is contained in places, so the further one goes from one's territory or locality the further one goes from spirits that give power (McConnachie,

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[13]Rajah's ethnographic research was undertaken with the Palokhi Karen

2014, p. 67). Land, place and geographic locality hold deep spiritual and cultural meaning for Karen communities, while also being a source of autonomy. In 1974, the KNU was the first armed group in Myanmar to draft their own land policy, and has highlighted land issues in its ceasefire dialogues. The KNU has signed onto the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fishers and Forests. Its land policy details both individual and community rights to land, and includes provisions for refugees and IDPs (KNU Land Policy, 2015). The KNU's land policies are part of their concerted effort to counter pressure from international investors and the Myanmar government (Hong, 2017, p. 233). While it was clear from our conversations that communities were fighting back against land acquisitions, many research participants expressed a sense of loss when it came to land, both as something that had already occurred and was impending.

Loss of lands

Participants discussed how loss of land strengthened people's connections to the land, through increased activism in fighting to get back to their lands. At the same time, land loss was a source of disconnect because once people's land was taken away, or they were displaced away from it, they might forget about its importance to them. One participant said that people who'd been living in urban areas may have lost their connection to land, but also that people living far from the land may feel even more connected to it through their longing for return. Five people mentioned land as important in particular for older people, noting that in many instances elderly people wished to go back to their lands regardless of how long they'd been away; they wished to die in their places of origin. These participants pointed out that their lands of origin would always be home, regardless of how long they'd been away, saying "we are defined by our ancestry." Participants discussed how even after being away for decades, refugee and migrant communities thought of Myanmar as home. At the same time, there was a feeling by some participants that the connection to land was being lost for younger Karen people. While one participant said that land was especially significant for young people, four participants discussed how land held lesser importance for the younger generations they know, explaining that young people had lost the ability to farm, had lost their connection to the land growing up as migrants

or in refugee camps, and had been exposed to different ways of life, so may not want to go back to the "old ways." They discussed how this loss of connection to the land made young people want to move into cities.

Two participants who had migrated to Mae Sot when they were younger, and were now working with INGOs and CBOs, said they were cushioned from the effects of land loss because they have steady employment. Now in their 30s and raising families in Thailand, they said they felt land itself was less important than having a place to live. They said land was useful to own because you would not have to rent from landlords if you had it; having land made you rich. They were working to try to buy land someday to bring more stability to their lives, and pointed out that a challenge to their owning land was the monopoly on ownership of land in Mae Sot by the wealthy class. This perspective demonstrates a shift from traditional relations to land as commonly owned, and reflects on how the humanitarian industrial complex supports a relationship of wage labour accumulation and land ownership, rather than heritable rights to land. It also demonstrates the way wage labour models of supporting one's family differ from livelihood models, in which people live with their lands to support themselves. Livelihoods emerged as a major theme in our discussions of land.

Lands, livelihoods and climate resilience

Participants conceptualized livelihood through a range of ideas, including: "resources"; the ability to grow and eat food; farming; income generation; access to services; and an alternative to wage employment which meant independence for villagers. These concepts were closely tied with notions of culture, identity, and the social health of communities. Paul Sein Twa of KESAN, U Thein Oo, a longtime democracy activist, lawyer and professor, and Saw K, a member of KHRG, all explained that people's livelihoods were tied directly to ancestry and identity, stating similarly that "land is culture. Land houses the ancestors. The way of life comes from the land… villagers in rural areas rely on everything they do for land." They all spoke at length about the ability of smallholder farmers to generate well-being, through the community-driven production of food and sustainable income, from their lands. They spoke of the importance of food stability created by smallholder farming practices, echoing the science that

small-scale farms have capacity to feed more people: they "outproduce export-oriented heavily capitalized farms on a per-land-area basis" (Ajl, 2019).

Participants emphasized that having land is necessary for survival because Myanmar is an agricultural economy. Over half the labour force in Myanmar are farmers (Moore, 2020), and the majority are smallholder farmers with less than 5 hectares and rotating crops (World Bank Group, 2016). Agencies like the World Bank qualify these farms as having "low productivity," but farmers are in rich relationship with their lands and purposefully keep farms small and diverse, and embedded within wild places, for the benefit of the environment, diverse animals and plantlife, and people. In addition to food security, participants noted that keeping traditional livelihoods, and securing autonomous lands to do so, make local communities better equipped to face the challenge of climate change. Paul Sein Twa expressed this as "the creation of climate resilience." He noted, however, that in Myanmar climate resilience means people living on and with their lands, not apart from spaces that would remain untouched by development. Saw N (Naga), a law student, pointed out that conservation projects where the Myanmar government sequesters lands for preservation as national parks, undermines Indigenous autonomy and claims to land. Saw N said it is imperative to keep lands autonomously governed by local communities to secure both livelihood and a future within climate change. KESAN's work on the Salween Peace Park is an example of this. A national park inside which people continue to live, it counters the conservation model in which nation-states mark out preserved lands and clear them of people. The Salween Peace Park is "a space that promotes peace, cooperation, cultural preservation, and environmental and natural resources conservation through a bottom-up, people-centred approach" (KESAN, 2021; Bracelli, 2020). KESAN is working diligently toward preserving liveable spaces for Karen people amidst an onslaught of development that makes places polluted and unlivable.

People's ability to have livelihoods and make income upon return from refugee camps and situations of displacement was directly correlated to their access to their lands. Participants discussed how loss of land leads to loss of income, which in turn affected access to health care and education and could cause social problems. Returning to lands was a major theme that emerged in discussions of the importance of land, with a third of participants raising how difficult it was for people to return after their lands had been taken, or access to their lands was under threat.

Challenges to return for migrants and refugees

Participants discussed the pressing problem of refugees' not having land to return to because their land may have been sold or occupied by others. They told stories about the challenges people face upon return, especially after living as migrants and refugees. Mr. Y (Shan State) who works with a political advocacy organization in Myanmar, explained the process of how lands were gradually taken from villagers who'd fled as refugees, and the ensuing social impacts.

> Because of conflict and economics, [people in Myanmar] have to flee from their country to the Thai-Burma border. After that, the Myanmar military or business people take the land [people have left], and then maybe [they take land from] the community [where] it's close to the village—[so the] village people run away. Some families may be left and the land will be sold to them. It's a hard issue for the people who left the land, then go back after 30 years and see their land is totally different. It's really hard for them. In my village, when I [went] back, we were gone less than 15 years. There was a military base next to our village. At that time, they [the military] just took part of it [the land]. But I went back last year and the base, which was at first very small, now has taken over the village. The village is 80 acres, but the military has taken it all, including the church. It's a really bad situation. My father complained to the capital and he went to the city in Shan state and he said nothing happened. People lost rice fields and other things. Some people had to move to another place without land, without rice fields. They don't have a job. Then they tried to plant opium in the mountain. This happened because the military seized the land: the methamphetamine or opium [trade became a last resort]. [This] left people in bad condition. [Mr. Y, Shan State, political advocacy organization, CBO worker, 10+ years experience]

Mr. Y's story details how refugees who leave for safety are then further mistreated when their lands are taken by an encroaching military presence. He describes the difficulty of not only losing one's land against one's will, but seeing that land mutated by industrial agriculture, mining and other extractive projects. Attempts at protesting through official channels yielded no results. The loss of land, synonymous with a loss of livelihood, forced villagers into the drug trade, leading to a loss of well-being.

Bo Phyu [Karen State] who has lived as a migrant in Mae Sot for over 20 years, explained from his personal experience:

> on the Burma side, mostly when I talk with my friends, they always talk about how the government takes back their lands, [even though] people there already lived there for a long time. But they don't have any papers. So when the government comes and says "if

you don't have papers you can't live here," you have to move. A lot of people have that happening. [Bo Phyu, Karen State, Right to Play, INGO worker, 10+ years experience]

Bo Phyu expresses how the government and companies declare a need for official documentation as a way to coerce people off their lands. The notion of documentation, however, was in direct contradiction with culture and tradition. Customary governance laws do not require "papers" but instead honour generational, long-term belonging to lands over state-imposed legal systems; when companies and the government ignore customary laws, they are telling communities that their systems do not matter. Several participants discussed the corruption in the process of land confiscation, naming in particular the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law (VFV) as a major stressor for communities governed by customary land laws.

Vacant, Fallow and Virgin (VFV) Lands Management Law, coercion, and colonial history

In 2012, Thein Sein's government passed the Farmland Law and the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law (VFV). The Farmland Law encourages farmers, households and organizations to sell, trade, lease and inherit land in exchange for credit, which facilitates state confiscation of land (Ferguson, 2014, p. 449). The VFV classifies unregistered lands as "empty and unused" to facilitate "a regulated private property system" and formalized land market in Myanmar (Mark, 2016). Both laws are major drivers of further land loss from damaging development operations. Local communities are organizing resistance to these laws through juridical action, action research, policy advocacy, and network and alliance building (Franco, Twomey, Vervest & Kramer, 2015).

Hundreds of civil society organizations immediately started to mobilize against the VFV Land Law. The law was implemented in contradiction with the National Ceasefire Agreement signed across Myanmar by Ethnic Armed Organizations, which contained an article on land management, stating that any decisions on land "should not be acted on unilaterally by the government in ways that conflict with existing ethnic nationality administrations or interests" (Gelbort, 2018). The VFV has been criticized for not recognizing shared land ownership practices including customary tenure. It also does not address land belonging to IDPs and refugees who may have been forced to leave due to conflict. It is meant to make way for natural

resource extraction, which in Myanmar carries more risk for human rights abuses than any other facet of the economy (OHCHR, 2019). Land In Our Hands states that the VFV has turned rural people into official "squatters" (2015). Participants explained the numerous ways that the VFV law was coercing people into giving up their lands. This included villagers' not having documents and titles to their land; conflict, past and present, that causes displacement and makes it easier for the government to call lands vacant; and lack of knowledge among villagers. Chris Wright (UK), teacher and CBO worker currently based in Yangon, described the approach of corporations:

> you have companies coming in and now saying basically "grow for me" to communities. And then saying, "well this is now our land." If there is no registration from the traditional users of that land or residents who live on it, then what recourse have they got? I mean, you've got big people who are powerful with money who'll say, "this is ours" and they will register that without the village people even knowing. [Chris Wright, UK, CBO worker, 10+ years experience]

Chris describes a bullying attitude taken by large corporations toward local populations, defended through the citing of registration. The feeling of a power imbalance was used to coerce people off their lands and into wage relations with corporations. Since customary laws do not require formal title to land, large corporations were using customary farming laws against communities through demands for paperwork. As Saw K (Karen State), a member of KHRG, explained, many in those populations are not made aware of what registration is in the first place, and that it is needed, until they are approached by corporations:

> many local community members, villagers, they have less knowledge of the land issue… villagers mostly in KNU-controlled areas never had a land grant from the Myanmar government. They never knew what it is. And then because of conflict, they will never access this kind of information. So when businesses come into the area, they [villagers] were targeted easily…because they don't have a legal document, their land can be confiscated. [Saw K, Karen State, KHRG, CBO worker, 5+ years experience]

As Saw K notes, ongoing conflict had worsened the problem of villagers' accessing their legal rights to land. They were not aware of or given information about the incumbent laws. Difficulty communicating with people in conflict zones hinders their access to information; at the same time, because Karen State is a zone that the Myanmar regime wishes to control, it uses villager's lack of information against them. Charlie Thame (UK), an academic focusing on the politics of mainland Southeast Asia, describes how conflict has made people more vulnerable:

The land confiscation is happening in contested areas. So you're having an ongoing civil war that's displacing people from the land and the land is signed into somebody else's hands, which means that internally displaced persons and refugees have nowhere to come to. So it's contributing to a situation of permanent displacement. It's also an ongoing process of primitive accumulation so that the state and crony capitalists can keep accessing productive land, land that is valuable because it stands on trade routes or because it's valuable agricultural lands. Those trends then push people off lands, removing their access to secure livelihoods, pushing them into low waged labor. [Charlie Thame, UK, academic, 10+ years experience]

Charlie called what's happening a "process of displacement, appropriation, the loss of livelihoods and proletarianization of rural populations." Corporate and state appropriation of land, producing a labour force pulled away from lands, and from the wellbeing that comes with with autonomous land ownership and traditional relations with land, is a legacy of colonialism. As I show in the next section, the designation and idea of "vacant and fallow" lands is learned from British colonialism, which created a concept of private property in tandem with racial subjecthood.

Vacant lands and private property as settler colonial, racial capitalist logics

Ferguson (2014) shows how the VFV laws are inherited from British colonization in Myanmar. During their rule in the 19th century, the British invented the legal category of the "waste land" and "vacant land" with the intent to convert lands into use for agriculture. The British structurally and legally transformed Myanmar via the use of "Waste Lands as an economic classification, with the ultimate goal to bring more of the country's natural resources and agricultural products into the fold of global capitalism, and therefore be controlled and taxed by the British colonial apparatus" (p. 296). In 1894, the British established the Land Acquisition Act, which charged landowners for land that laid fallow, and connected the idea of land to revenue. Ferguson argues, "by forcing the population to enter into a titling and commodity relationship with the land, the colonial state thus provided the intellectual and ideological justification for the ultimate undermining of indigenous peoples' claims to property rights and native practices" (p. 298-299). After Myanmar gained independence from the British, its government continued its attempts to gain power and socioeconomic control through land and agriculture (p. 299). While colonial rule in Myanmar came to an official close in 1948, processes

of power and control over the country, implemented by the military dictatorship, have followed settler colonial logics. In the next paragraphs, and in the final section of this chapter, I explain how I understand settler colonialism to be operating in Myanmar through Indigenous scholarship and theory from settler colonial places. In North America/Turtle Island and in Oceania, Indigenous peoples are living the realities of generations of past land loss, as well as current ongoing coercion from and destruction of their lands. This is very similar to challenges faced by ethnic/Indigenous groups in Myanmar, but on a longer time scale: Indigenous groups in settler colonial countries have survived hundreds of years of systemic attempts to assimilate their cultures and drive them from their homelands. Their scholarship offers a powerful framing for understanding the processes of land loss and theft faced by people in Myanmar.[14]

Brenna Bhandar (2018) traces how settler colonial modalities and logics are used to justify stolen lands through ideas of property, commodity and improvement that operationalize Western European racial superiority to imagine Indigenous and local communities as premodern. Bhandar argues that property laws produce racial subjects and hierarchies of value, "modes of subjectivity that render indigenous and colonized populations as outside history, lacking the requisite cultural practices, habits of thought, and economic organization to be considered as sovereign, rational economic subjects" (p. 3). She traces how the discursive "onward march of progress" is couched in "English agrarian capitalism" (p. 2) so that "legal forms of property ownership and the modern racial subject are articulated and realized in conjunction with one other" (p. 5). Reading Ferguson and Bhandar together, it is clear that Myanmar is a place in which "racial regimes of ownership have retained their disciplinary power in organizing territory and producing racial subjects through a hierarchy of value" (Bhandar, 2018, p. 2). In this hierarchy, those who do not generate revenue are classified as inferior, their politics and philosophies less meaningful within capitalism's goal to "progress" through bringing evermore lands and peoples under its control.

The notion of vacant lands in Myanmar echoes the doctrine of *terra nullius,* the law deeming any empty territory to have been "discovered" by settlers, and thus open to their legal

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[14] Uditi Sen (2017) similarly analyzes the representation of India's Andaman Islands as within the doctrine of terra nullius, tracing their production as a "no-ones land" as within a settler colonial epistemology (p. 945).

occupation and ownership. Terra nullius is foundational to the expansion of the Western empire, and also relied on English conceptions of intensive and widespread agriculture to define permanent habitation and cultivation of the land; other (Indigenous) forms of cultivation and living with land were unrecognizable to it (Jagot, 2017). Legal scholar Carole Pateman (2007) shows how terra nullius was based on a foundational lie, because the lands were never empty. Indigenous scholars have written at length about how terra nullius is a grounding logic of settler colonialism. Dene theorist Glen Coulthard argues terra nullius was a "racist legal fiction that declared Indigenous peoples too 'primitive' to bear rights to land and sovereignty when they first encountered European powers on the continent, thus rendering their territories legally 'empty' and therefore open for colonial settlement and development" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 175). Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd calls it a "convenient colonial construct that maintained lands were empty of meaning, of language, of presence, and of history before the arrival of the European" (2011, p. 64). Terra nullius has multiple effects: it bases the guise of legality in a fiction, setting a standard for settler colonial culture in which society can openly and *legally* delude itself about its origins and its legitimacy. It bases the settler colonial legal system in the notion of a hierarchy of humanity, and thus in racism. It also defines peoples with relations to land that are not based in commodity as, like the land, devoid of meaning, replaceable, and meant to be put to use for capitalism. When they refuse, as they have done from the beginnings of colonialism, they are considered enemies of the nation-state.

As research participants in my study point out, traditional relations to land do not require lands to be in use for them to have meaning: fallow or unused lands are imperative to culture and heritage in Myanmar. Calling something "vacant, virgin, fallow" as a way to remove lands from communities is a direct enactment of colonial logics that can only ever understand land as commodity, and also cannot recognize the laws and the peoples who live on lands as having rights. Land grabs resulting from the VFV and other laws are a form of settler coloniality because they aim not only to physically displace peoples, but to erase their social structures and cultures. Indeed, several participants noted that the push toward accessing land for capital happened in tandem with "Burmanization": as the government gains access to territories within Karen State it is also trying to impose Bamar language and culture through institutions such as schools.

When capitalism and financial accumulation are valued above relations with land and livelihoods, Indigenous peoples themselves, their philosophies, desires and perspectives are denigrated. This was summed up by Paul Sein Twa, who grouped the Myanmar government, the international community and corporations together as he explained that land grabs are happening because of a refusal to understand and respect customary land laws:

> Customary land laws are complex, they are systems we've been using for generations. But no one respects or tries to comply with them. They understand land as private property, as possession. They apply their own laws to places that have different sets of laws. They don't take care to learn what common land law means; they only understand it as private property. When the land is only something you can own, you can't respect people's relationships to the land. [Paul Sein Twa, Karen State, KESAN, CBO worker, 20+ years experience]

Paul Sein Twa emphasizes how the notion of land as private property causes a double form of oppression in Karen State: people both materially lose their lands and are intentionally misunderstood, their political positions, heritage and relations ignored. Property law structures "colonial capitalist modes of accumulation. It is also a central fixture in philosophical and political narratives of a developmental, teleological vision of modernization that has set the standard for what can be considered civilized" (Bhandar, 2018, p. 4). As a civilizing project unto itself (as detailed in Chapter 4), it is clear how the humanitarian regime would refuse to consider or understand the importance of customary laws. The following section presents my research findings on INGO and CBO work around land issues.

INGOs, CBOs and land

In answer to the question, "How, if at all, is your organization responding to the challenge of land confiscation in this region?," all nine of the INGO workers I interviewed said their organizations do not work directly on land rights issues. In discussing this question with participants affiliated with CBOs, the vast majority–eight of ten members–of CBOs noted their organizations work directly on land rights, while also affirming that no INGO truly works on land issues.

CBO work around land rights and land theft

Interview participants in my study offered lengthy descriptions of the various ways that their work with CBOs center land. CBOs were avidly working to raise awareness about how development projects in the region undermine the rights of communities. They run trainings with landowners and farmers on how to advocate for their legal rights to their lands, and educate them on the VFV laws. They write about land rights as part of their work, mount legal battles over land and work to promote and advocate for customary land policies.

KHRG members talked about how training community members in their rights to land is a centerpiece of its current work, while others from CBOs said that these types of trainings arose alongside other issues. Naw, (Karen State), a member of KNU Generation Youth, a community-based organization focused on young people, discussed how through their work, the group would learn of specific lands confiscated by the Myanmar army, which led them to give trainings on land rights and human rights to affected communities. They were also campaigning for public awareness on land rights, organizing protests, engaging in other forms of advocacy including writing reports and making statements, and working with other CSOs and CBOs.

Other members of CBOs similarly discussed how their work on land issues arose indirectly as a result of other social issues, in particular environmental degradation and displacement. Mr. M (Myanmar), Director of a political advocacy organization, explained,

> [Since] land is related to their culture and their identity… that's one of our priorities, which is sustainable development. We talk about the problem of mega development projects not benefiting or undermining the rights of Indigenous people… [and] causing a lot of land confiscation. We work with land rights organizations… we talk about rights, especially land rights, labour rights, Indigenous rights…. and those include the [rights to the] land they live on or they use. [Mr. M, Myanmar, political advocacy organization, CBO worker, 15+ years experience]

Mr. M here expresses the interconnection between land rights, indigeneity, environmental issues and development projects in the region, all issues that arise with the problem of displacement. James Harrison (UK), with the same organization, explained,

> We work quite closely with a lot of ethnic CSOs, especially along the border. We're a research and advocacy organization. And so we have done research not directly into land confiscation or land issues, but in issues related to that. For example, [the issue of] refugees and IDPs… [we're] trying to advocate for restitution of the lost land, housing, and property when it comes to any kind of return process. [James Harrison, UK, political advocacy organization, CBO worker, 10+ years' experience]

As James Harrison expresses, along the border, the reason for the existence of migrants is land loss. For this community-based advocacy organization, it is clear that return processes, which are a priority of many INGOs, need to be done alongside work that helps people access their lands. This is something that many INGOs miss, as discussed in the following section. When INGOs focus on nation-state models of land as property and commodity, they miss that local communities have long-term customary policies and practices in relation to land that already are working and don't need to be replaced. James Harrison went on to explain "there's an opportunity to promote and to advocate for the better protection of customary land use policies."

Customary land use policies are a major concern of KESAN, which understands communal title to lands in Karen State as key to self-determination, better governance for people and more environmentally sustainable management of lands. Ms. L (Singapore) with KESAN described how one part of their work was to map customary lands using Geographic Information System mapping technology:

> demarcating customary land using GIS is also very central to KESAN's work… [it's a way] to articulate things that locals already know, but translating it into scientific technical jargon that is legible to people in corporations. If you say 'this line is a specific number of square kilometers, this is exactly where it is, we can pinpoint you on a map' then that is also another self-protection mechanism. [Ms. L, Singapore, KESAN, CBO worker, 5+ years' experience]

Ms. L here describes how her organization, on top of so many other tactics to train and empower communities, is also fighting corporations on their own terms: by mapping lands in ways they understand, by methods that might be used in court.

CBOs are using legal and policy avenues whenever they can, countering statelessness as a consequence of not having lands by issuing IDs, so that people can cross borders and access employment opportunities. They described working with the KNU to tackle the ongoing problem of land loss. Saw Elvis (Karen State) Executive Director of the KED (Karen Education Department), talked about how INGOs were returning people into Myanmar, but once there they needed legal help to be able to live on their lands. Internally displaced people faced a similar issue. When the KED encountered people who needed help claiming lands they formerly lived on, they referred them to the policies declared by the KNU, which prioritized rights to land. Saw Elvis explained KNU authorities would then "measure land and have a type of paper issued... But maybe it's not recognized by the government [but] locals [are] trying to use this type of

evidence to show it's issued by the KNU… it's better than nothing." Referring communities to the law, however challenging that is given the dictatorial nature of the Myanmar regime, was one way CBOs were helping people to secure and live on their lands. U Thein Oo (Myanmar), a longtime lawyer and environmental activist, talked about how he has been working for years to help villagers to secure their lands through legal cases. In his former work with the Burmese Legal Council, he explained that villagers facing land confiscation would come to his group for support: "if they had any problem [about] where to go, [if they needed] authority to make a legal challenge [we would help] them… as a main tactic."

Participants defined a difference between land rights and land theft, and participants from six of the CBOs noted their organizations were not involved directly in the problem of land theft; one noted they had to steer away from being "too political" as the reason why. At the time of these interviews, much of their work was still preventative, focused on helping people to keep their lands. One participant remarked that land confiscation is an issue that activists discuss in public, while INGOs and CBOs manage the fallout of loss of land as they attempt to repatriate people in a context of extreme uncertainty. Simon Dickinson (UK), former Deputy Director at the Mae Tao Clinic, noted that large presences in the region such as the Mae Tao clinic are very affected by the issue of land confiscation, but could not fight the issue publicly. Participants noted they work with people who may be victims of land theft despite not working directly on the issue, pointing out that although land theft felt like an issue their organization does not address, their work on refugee repatriation inevitably leads them to encounter the problem of land loss. Saw Elvis (Karen State) talked about the problem of people trying to repatriate and being faced with their land being gone. He explained that because of INGO pressure to repatriate, local organizations previously not talking about land theft are now discussing it as a phenomenon that needs to be urgently addressed.

Overall, participants discussing on behalf of CBOs observed that their organizations were extensively addressing land issues, working directly with stakeholders and attempting to help them secure land rights through relations to land generated and honoured by local communities. This approach contrasts greatly with how INGOs were and were not addressing land issues.

INGO work around land rights and land theft

Participants working with INGOs unanimously said their specific organizations don't work directly on land issues. However, they observed that they work with people who have no lands, and who often have no fixed address. They acknowledged the importance of land, saying INGOs *should* be focusing on providing their stakeholders with land grants, on securing land restitution, and in particular, mapping the lands currently belonging to local peoples ahead of grabs. However, they said this was not being done by border-based INGOs. Four respondents discussed how their organization's work is and has always been about land, but this was not directly addressed in any policy; land was not "dealt with" but always under the surface. Catherine Daly (Ireland), former Country Director of World Education noted: "were we discussing land confiscation or even discussing [refugee issues] as an impact of land confiscation? No, but we were discussing it in terms of, how does a child transition from a refugee school back into a government school [in Myanmar]."

Participants offered some theories for why there is a general organizational evasion of the issue of land in Myanmar. They reasoned that because many INGOs work with refugees, and people in camps had already lost their land, it was now the organization's job to facilitate people's renting of land in Thailand, so they could remain in camp: refugees' land in Myanmar was already lost, and it didn't feel like there was a way to get it back. They discussed INGO support for the KNU and local partners as a form of indirect work on land, saying that their organization's work acting as mediator between international funders and local actors was a more impactful and sustainable approach than directly addressing the political issues the local actors were facing. They also argued that their organization's focus on democratic and other rights, such as rights to education, health care, and rights of the child, was enough of a preoccupation: delivering services kept the work away from land issues. They offered that their organizations do not work on land issues because of the generally temporary nature of INGO work: because INGOs are supposed to be designed as "first responders" and not meant to be in a place for a long time, it did not seem like land should be part of their mandate. They noted that INGOs do not really deal with the issue of land grabs because of an uncertainty about what would happen with governments. They recalled that as the 2010 election took place, INGOs were trying to be sure that outreach and collaboration with the government could happen.

Resettlement and transition back to Myanmar was a recurring theme in the discussion of land, with both INGO and CBO members addressing it as an ongoing part of political and

service work. Three participants with INGOs used the terms "durable solution" and "preparedness for return" when discussing land in the context of refugee repatriation, phrases commonly used in INGOs to connote the need for a transition from Thailand over the border into Myanmar. Participants talked about how organizations like TBC and UNHCR are currently engaged in negotiations around buying lands for the purpose of relocating refugees. This presented myriad challenges: refugees are hesitant to go back to lands that they did not come from, and were skeptical about being able to find work and safety in Myanmar, especially after the trauma of fleeing conflict. Mr. K (UK), who's worked on the border for decades with CBOs and INGOs, broke down the tripartite INGO approach to securing places to live for migrant communities: 1) renting land from local landowners; 2) supporting sites where people live on the other side of the border; and 3) working with the Myanmar government to acquire pieces of land designed as sites for return. He emphasized that none of these approaches were "actually about land" in the sense that Karen people traditionally understand it, but rather are aimed at finding places for refugees to go. He gave the example of a town called Lay Kaw Kaw, located directly opposite Umpiem Mai refugee camp on the Myanmar side of the border, which was set up as a site for return in a joint effort between the Tokyo-based Nippon foundation, which bought the site and funded its construction, the KNU and the Burmese government. All were aiming to govern it together.

> It's a travesty of development. Just concrete houses in a row. No market, no livelihoods. You basically work daily labor on the Thai sweet corn monocrop agriculture. There's some hills, but there's no trees. It's kind of being marketed as "there is somewhere to go back to without land mines where it's safe and you can eke out your own living." It's one of the places where the UNHCR sent its first group of facilitated returnees, 71 of them in September 2017. A number of families also went there from Nu Po camp, and within three days they'd sent their kids back to Nu Po to carry on studying in the camp. The school [in Lay Kaw Kaw] was shit, just wasn't working. All I'm trying to say is that for Nippon Foundation, the [solution] in terms of land acquisition, is how large international aid agencies are following the Burmese government line to try to incentivize refugees to return. But it's not sustainable. It's not dignified. It's safe I guess. [Mr. K, UK, INGO and CBO worker, 25+ years]

Mr. K's searing description of Lay Kaw Kaw brought to mind the changes I experienced in Mae Sot, and the effects of the SEZ and extractive development projects in Karen State: less nature, less variety of landscape, less diversity in farming; more concrete, more monocultural farms. The story of how people reacted to this new place to live reminds of the Chapter 6 discussion of how refugees are treated as commodities. INGOs are not considering what refugees and migrants

truly need or desire, or what they are asking for. Rather than honouring and sustaining relationships to land that have been passed down for generations, they are doing what works "economically" and within the frame of the Myanmar nation-state. In constructing zones such as Lay Kaw Kaw, and ignoring the effects of SEZs and loss of lands through ceasefires and land laws, INGOs are following nation-state models of development that treat lands and places as if they are terra nullius: without their own history, agency, spiritual significance; without peoples who love them, live and make meaning alongside them. Instead, INGOs support settler colonial projects of transforming lands into places that serve capitalism, complete with wage labourers who are the very people they claim to be helping. What is most difficult about this is the clear and obvious stake local communities profess in *keeping* their lands and livelihoods, and managing their relations to land autonomously, according to their own desires. While respondents knew about the importance of lands, the organizational mandates of INGOs do not consider customary relations to lands; understanding land as more than property seems beyond their capacity. Their work exists because of land loss faced by the Karen and other ethnic groups, who have been driven from their lands for decades. Yet they have more or less ignored ethnic relationships to land and the need to stop people's lands from being confiscated. In this final section, I argue that INGOs on the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands ignore land and place as an inheritance of settler colonial logics and racial capitalism.

Humanitarianism supports settler colonialism

In this chapter my data has made clear that for Karen and other Indigenous groups across Myanmar, land is foundational to identity, to the future as well as the past. Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman's keyword exploration of land reveals that similar relations to land and place– as heritage, history, as a commons system for future generations–are found among Indigenous peoples from many other parts of the world, for whom land is "a meaning-making process rather than a claimed object" (Goeman, 2015, p. 73). Citing Kanaka Maoli scholar Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua's (2013) notion of "logics of containment," which describes how Indigenous sovereignties are subsumed into "the settler state's domestic laws, and in ideological forms . . . that [allow] a sprinkling of indigenous history and culture only to maintain its marginality" (p. 72), Goeman shows how notions of private property lead to both philosophical and geographic containment. Indigenous philosophies of land, however, are expansive and storied, and exceed

colonial definitions while also always having to counter and contend with them (Goeman, 2015). Goeman defines settler colonialism as the dispossession of land alongside the denial of recognition of Indigenous personhood (p. 74), noting that within colonial legal systems, Indigenous peoples are forced to make strategic claims to land using logics that delegitimize their own laws and relations (p. 75). As Karen interviewees pointed out, they shouldn't need papers to stay on their lands; when made to provide them, they are being coerced into fighting against their containment through laws that further constrain them.

Struggles for land rights, and land defense movements (military and otherwise) in Myanmar are part of a constellation of global resistance to settler colonial and racial capitalist structures that continually move to seize lands and waters from Indigenous peoples. It is clear that humanitarianism is not a part of this resistance, but instead, seems in many cases to help along capitalist expansion. As outlined in Chapter 3 (Humanitarians report), my search for the term "land" across eight of the world's biggest INGOs yielded a resounding silence: six out of eight of the reports never or almost never mention land. What was occurring on the Thailand-Myanmar border is not unique, but global. Land is invisibilized, ignored, and treated with a kind of vacancy by INGOs.

In the chapters leading to this one, I have mapped Western humanitarianism as a continuation of colonial logics in which peoples deemed in need of "help" are considered less than human. They and the places they live in are exoticized and fantasized, open for tourism and travel, and ultimately consumption, by publics who call themselves humanitarian. On the ground and from afar, the work of "helping" accompanies a market logic of development.

In the Western humanitarian imaginary, the best kind of life is understood as one led by homoeconomicus, the income-generating, property-owning, able-bodied cisgendered heterosexual human. Modelled according to this form, humanitarian aid focuses on saving rather than solidarity: its project is to improve rather than meet people and places where they are at. Because of this, the humanitarian regime is unable to identify other ways of being, other forms of life that require understanding on their own terms, so that to "help" them would mean considering other lifeways, and ultimately building a different kind of world. Instead, the humanitarian regime serves capitalism. Originating from settler colonial and former colonizing countries, humanitarianism brings policies and logics that are underpinned by the invisibilizing

of lands and the people (human and nonhuman) living with them. Instead of being enriched by the knowledge and livelihoods of the people and places it claims to help, humanitarianism treats them as in need of assimilation into the markets and lifestyles of its world. It practices a form of terra nullius when it pretends that laws and ways of being don't matter to a future it brings from elsewhere. It is difficult to consider the way that humanitarianism spends billions of dollars globally to deliver aid right alongside the intensive pillaging and destruction of lands, and the mass displacement they cause, while ignoring what people in those places are saying about their lands.

Chapter 8

Ethical dilemmas and ethical practices in qualitative research interviews on the Thailand-Myanmar border[15]

"When I was [a student in a migrant school] lots of PhD and Masters always contacted us to do interviews. The headmaster will do them. But [his answers are] not from the heart. It's not deep. It's just general. Because we don't know them. So if you go to Myanmar [to do research], make sure people know you." -Bo Phyu (Karen) teacher and INGO worker in Mae Sot, Thailand

"I think it's always about the "what next?"... okay, you do this [research]. So what next? What you're going to do to connect [your work with] the organizations who can use your research to implement it on the area or the society... [what's] the purpose for a survivor who gives you research... can it be a benefit to them? How can you send it back? I don't know if universities make sure you have plans for that." -Naing Win (Bamar), activist, teacher and community-based worker on the Thailand-Myanmar border

"All the academic papers I read, I'm halfway through and I'm like, I didn't get anything, haha. These convoluted words and sentences. It's really too complicated for no good reason." -Elise Tillet (French), lawyer, activist and INGO worker in Thailand and Myanmar

These were some answers to the final two questions I asked participants: "How can this research be helpful to your organization or the issues faced by your community? Is there something I can do to make this research useful to you in the future?" Learning from Tuck's (2009; 2019) scholarship on how academic study has too often been carried out in extractive ways: "on" communities, rather than alongside them, I built these questions into my research as a way to understand the effectiveness and necessity of my own PhD research project. This chapter summarizes discussions I had about research with participants in this study. They gave insights about what is truly needed (and not) from academic researchers, and set out some guidelines for how to move away from damage-centered practices and toward research practices that can more effectively benefit communities. The interviews also revealed the ways that INGO research practices can parallel the ineffectual and extractive style of academia. The INGO focus on acquiring funding through research reporting, and the academic focus on career building through the swift collection of information, rather than slow, long-term relationship building and

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[15] A slightly different version of this chapter was submitted to be published as a book chapter, titled, "Researcher's refusals: Ethical dilemmas, ethical practices in cross-cultural qualitative research interviews," in P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Cross-Cultural Research: A Social Science Perspective.*

movement support, reveals how research in INGO and academic culture is informed by a logic of extraction.

Damage-centered research practices document and describe harms inflicted on communities defined as "marginalized" and "at-risk," to report them back to audiences who often are not a part of those communities (Tuck, 2009). These practices are not grounded in movements working for structural change, and do not focus on how the social issues confronting communities are perpetrated by the very systems in which researchers' organizations and institutions are embedded, and profit from. The result has been decades of academic work, entire careers, dedicated to illustrating humiliation and sadness (Tuck, 2009). Too much academic work has been committed to defining and imagining "Othered" populations, and especially the other's imagined deficits, rather than focusing analysis on systemic changes that are needed and desired by those others, and the many ways people are actively working for those changes. Tuck and Yang (2014) outline that damage-centered research operates on a faulty theory of change that presumes policymakers will adjust their systems just because people report on damage. However, there is no evidence that those in power, many of whom benefit from the structures that cause social problems in the first place, will change anything just because academics report on social problems. There is no way to know that what we write from our research will lead to any positive changes for research participants.

Academics should have a deep concern and cynicism for academic institutions and the effectiveness of research, especially when working with local communities who may be oppressed by the very structures that help the academy thrive (Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Simpson, 2007; Tuck, 2009). To approach research in a more ethical and transformative way, academic researchers must include questions about the effectiveness of research itself into their fieldwork. I present some Indigenous theoretical approaches to changing the way we do research, and how I took up these recommendations. This chapter contains instruction specific to the Thailand-Myanmar border, which makes it important for those setting out to conduct research there. However, I hope these suggestions will be taken up by anyone planning to conduct research with migrant and refugee populations, or populations who are systemically marginalized. I begin by summarizing general findings from the answers given to these questions, followed by more detail with participant quotes.

The usefulness (or not) of research: Participant discussions and suggestions

The Thailand-Myanmar border is a place where research gets done on an almost constant basis and in dynamic ways by a number of different players. The majority of participants, whether INGO or CBO workers, described the huge amounts of research their organizations had conducted over the years. They were themselves research experts who grapple with processes of design, dissemination, ethics and community participation. They also had extensive experience hosting visiting researchers, who were often commissioned by INGOs or who arrived in the region and reached out to request participation in research projects. Participants noted that researchers wishing to visit temporarily, or for the longer term which required embedding themselves in the region, had increased greatly over the past 10 years. Overall, participants expressed a negative view of academic research, as well as research conducted by consultants hired by INGOs and large funding bodies. They expressed a general feeling that academia is not useful for communities and community organizations. They critiqued the careerism of academia, the feeling of mistrust created by academics and consultants who dropped in and out of communities with little knowledge of context, or willingness to engage communities in the research planning process. They also remarked on the inaccessibility of academic writing and publications: the thing people did with communities, asked of communities, was then made illegible to those communities.

While participants critiqued research practices and the way research is disseminated, the overwhelming majority also stressed that academic research is important, can help generate ideas, nurture paradigms, and speak to power. Participants had a positive perspective on research as useful when it was used to inform planning. They stated that there are vast areas of research that need to be done in the region. They told stories about their organizations wanting to do a project, then scrambling to either find research to help them proceed and/or needing to conduct the research themselves. They believed in the importance of both qualitative and quantitative research: of tracking numbers and statistics in the region and of thinking about diverse ways to solve problems. The necessity and respect for the idea of research made it more difficult to hear that so much academic research being done in the area, either by individual academics or coordinated through INGOs, did not feel useful or effective. Participants noted the exception was

when academics and organizations had aligned desires, and the academic research could support what the organization was doing–if the research was collaborative. However, most noted that this type of research, when not directly planned by the local organization, was a rare occurrence. The few positive remarks made about academic research included the view that academic research could lend legitimacy to organizations' messaging to the state and other governing bodies, and that ethics procedures could act protectively toward participants.

Local organizations' research practices: An integral part of the work

The majority of participants planned, conducted and sought out studies as an ongoing part of their work. Their organizations used research to inform future and current projects and to get community feedback and support. They discussed the myriad ways research is used, including for needs assessments, feasibility studies, evaluation of trainings and programs, statistics on demographics, schooling and health. Members of the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) and other local CBOs talked about how research, documentation and reporting is a core part of their mission. Research undertaken by local organizations was rigorous and referenced, used informed methods, diverse tools, and ethical processes. KHRG noted its practice of citing others' research and checking its work with the stakeholders who provided information. Along with formal research projects, a few participants talked about how organizations embedded in communities do nonformal research all the time in order to inform their actions. Research in the form of constant check-ins and communication was a "natural" part of being in community, of operating day to day.

For INGOs in the region, research was a way to partner with local communities while learning what they thought best practices were. Mr. H (UK), a representative of a nonprofit that has worked for several decades in Myanmar, spoke of the extensive research taken on by his organization's staff teams. They worked both to get information on projects and to build communication between different community groups: "We have a research department which is focused on developing participatory research. And it's about research collaborations. It's totally community led research." He explained how important it was for communities to be there through every part of the data collection and analysis process, so that "they own the data… [which is] a hugely powerful tool in terms of structuring negotiations between organizations and

not just one side that has the data." Mr. H also described his organization's open approach to the community's decision on working with them:

> it really depends on the partners and the communities, you know, it's up to them. If they don't want us involved then we are not involved and that's fine. And if they changed their minds depending on the circumstances, we never take it personally. It's up to them to decide. [Mr. H, UK, INGO worker, 15+ years experience]

Andrea Costa (Australia) who has worked with INGOs on the Thailand-Myanmar border for over a decade, spoke about the extensive time and effort given to research studies: "we do a lot of research. It seems to be all I do. I think it's incredibly important because you need the evidence to one, figure out what you should be doing, and two, figure out what's needed." Andrea said that one INGO she worked with repeated research studies whenever necessary and directly interviewed their refugee beneficiaries to inform program planning. They conducted research with local community stakeholders, such as the Karen Education Department in Karen State, to tailor their educational programming to children and families in Karen State. She described how the INGO conducts research prior to establishing large regional educational projects. The research design is collaboratively made with community members:

> they are seen as technical consultants to help design the research. Essentially we all sat in a room and designed it together. So like, what do we really want to know, what are our research questions… we mapped it all out together. We develop the tools together, their staff were trained [to conduct the research]. [Andrea Costa, Australia, INGO worker, 15+ years experience]

Andrea's description of working in iterative relationship with local people, as researchers themselves, provides an example of how research can be designed and conducted effectively. A few participants noted that INGOs that have long been embedded in the region often turn to the work of local individuals and organizations to inform their program planning, as Catherine Daly (Ireland) described in her work as Country Director of World Education (WE) Thailand & Myanmar. She expressed that academic research "could be incredibly powerful," but questioned the way academic research as a whole was structured in the region: "I don't know if… what is happening is of the quality that it is able to harness that power." This was because academics, even the ones who live in the region full time, exist outside organizations and therefore did not always bring the contextual knowledge that was needed to best assist in research projects and the recommendations that ensue from them.

A few participants had conducted or participated in helping with research design as part of consulting work with large INGOs, and discussed that it was better when organizations recruited from those already working locally and who were actively embedded in organizations and activism. They explained that the specific contextual difficulty of conducting research, including an unstable ever-changing population, meant that the people most qualified to conduct research were those who deeply understood the needs and specificities of the communities. They valued knowledge of the context–of language, cultural nuances, political issues, and dynamics between organizations and groups–over academic research credentials. This sentiment was compounded by the ways in which academic and INGO consultants from abroad were perceived.

Academic careerism, extractive practices and mistrust

The vast majority of participants expressed cynicism about the impact of academic research, saying they doubted there were positive outcomes from academic work. Participants noted the circularity of academic research, saying they experienced academic research as a way for academics not to speak to communities, but only to other academics, commenting on what Jack Dunford (UK), former Director of TBC with over 25 years' experience, called the "ivory tower and conference loop," and pursuit of career goals like tenure. They critiqued academic researchers for being divorced from the Myanmar context, for arriving without basic cultural knowledge, for "parachuting in" in a "parasitic way" to work on their projects without a solid explanation of how those projects could serve communities. Participants said that brief visits by researchers were especially problematic when researchers came to CBOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) which had limited time and resources to spend answering questions and hosting foreigners. Participants talked about how the biggest INGOs and agencies facilitated a "fly in fly out" research culture, and how researchers contracted by INGOs often arrived without enough knowledge of the context. They expressed frustration at the environmental pollution and financial cost of visits from foreign countries for short consultancies that locals were just as capable of doing. Many participants noted the volume of researchers dropping in briefly to the region to conduct research, and the feeling that they would never return to follow up.

Simon Dickinson (UK), former Director of the Mae Tao Clinic, said, "communities on the ground often can't use the research. What is academic research talking to? Who are they talking

to?" Ton Baars (The Netherlands), a longtime teacher at Nu Po camp and CBO worker with the Borderline, said that communities were disconnected from the research outcomes of visiting academics, or did not follow up with communities to explain what they had done:

> I've seen many projects that do something admirable, something positive, but then I thought, what is the outcome? What is your input and what is the outcome? Could you have done something better with your time? With your energy, with your resources? I see actually quite a few projects in the [refugee] camp… and it's almost like 'we do the project and then it has been done. We can write a report about a project. We have our pictures.' But with your project you were planting a seed and you forgot to look if the seed has been watered, if your plant is coming up… so what you try to do, very good, but you forgot the follow-up. [Ton Baars, The Netherlands, teacher and CBO worker, 25+ years' experience]

Ton's metaphor of planting a forgotten seed is evocative. After all the effort it takes, from both sides, to connect with people, to spend time and resources on research, placing more energy into academic reporting than into deeper engagement and follow-up with communities is a lost opportunity.

Patrick Kearns (USA), former Executive Director of World Education and Youth Connect Thailand, noted that he had experienced many academic researchers visiting to conduct research that didn't feel relevant to the context, and didn't seem like it would be of any use to the organization in the future. He said that requests from random researchers to have access to vulnerable community members for their research projects was not something members of the organization were comfortable granting: "that always was kind of problematic for me. You know, especially when somebody doesn't have a background, that isn't familiar with the context, isn't familiar with the problems, and hasn't been a development worker."

While academic researchers unknown to communities were seen as problematic, consultants who were hired and brought in by INGOs often acted in ways equally out of context. Mr. K (UK), who's worked for decades with CBOs and INGOs, described

> the typical kind of consultant who flies in and says, you know, 'I've been hired by IRC… I'm here three days to assess the gender-based violence program. I need a car, I need an interpreter, I need lunch. Um, and I'm going to go to Mae Hla [refugee camp] to speak to three Muslims and three children, one disabled person and maybe the camp leader.' And so… it's not effective. It's derogatory to the locals. These local communities have been surveyed enough. They've had enough people knocking on their door. Like every month there's someone, or maybe once every six weeks. [Mr. K, UK, INGO and CBO worker, 25+ years' experience]

With the caveat that he was being "stereotypical a bit, because some consultants are very nice," Mr. K went on to describe the cultural insensitivity that many foreign researchers displayed: "the interviewee will sit on the floor out of respect, and the white Anglo-Saxon man with his boots on will sit there on the chair, that had to be brought in from the neighbour's house." Mr. K's description evokes the problem of powerful INGOs and agencies bringing in consultants, on a repetitive basis, with the mandate to speak to specific people, quickly and perfunctorily, and with little cultural awareness. His story expresses a fatigue with this practice, which as other participants explained, does not necessarily glean true and complex information.

Bo Phyu (Karen State) explained his experience working with research coordination between his INGO Right to Play and foreign researchers, including those who are commissioned by the INGO to conduct Monitoring and Evaluation. He described

> a group of people from Europe [who were] a little bit lost because of the local languages. Their whole job, their duty is to do this all the time. They come to us like almost every quarter. They need a translator because none of them could speak Burmese, or Thai language. They interview a lot of people. And the answers they got–they were okay. But some of the questions, people in the community did not understand. [Bo Phyu, Karen State, Right to Play, INGO worker, 10+ years' experience]

Bo Phyu similarly illustrates how research consultants, hired by INGOs, do this work as part of their profession but are contextually lost, and therefore were not well understood by local communities, who gave answers that were not as accurate as they might have been. Bo Phyu cautioned that the hiring of translators needed to be done well because many researchers, especially those who did not previously build trust in the region, would not get good translations of their interviews if translators were unknown to communities. Bo Phyu concluded that foreign researchers were necessary, but that local organizations ultimately designed their work from community needs, not from research findings.

Cultural incompetence extended to researchers' assumption that Western ways of knowing are universal. Chris Wright (UK), teacher and CBO worker currently based in Yangon, told a story of how a major INGO was planning a land mapping project within ethnic areas, but assumed that people knew what a Cartesian map looks like and how a GPS worked, which was not the case. Training had to be provided to the communities in order to begin the research. However, the assumption that people would understand concepts of mapping and measurement made those on the ground feel that research "experts" were generally unwilling to learn more

about the context prior to visiting; that they did not want to take time to engage other forms of spatial knowledge. This seeded mistrust.

Participants were also skeptical about scholars who have worked inside Myanmar on a long-term basis. This was because of perceptions of careerism and examples of moments when research had been problematic. One participant, who I have elected to keep anonymous for this quote, noted:

> There's a whole crew in Yangon, so much more interested in their own reputation as experts than in actually helping the groups or the people… [they] frame things that are happening in Myanmar for their own academic purposes… [often] peddling the popular narrative at the time. [Anonymous participant, INGO worker, 10+ years' experience]

This participant refers to the way academic research can be used as a career without centering the best interests of community members. Participants gave examples of direct harms this type of research had done in the region, noting that white male academics in particular were often listened to by funders and had in some cases argued for work that was counter to what organizations really needed. Myanmar scholar and fieldworker Anne Décobert writes about this issue, saying that academic researchers have in some cases earned distrust from local communities because they contribute to the debate around humanitarian aid in Myanmar in ways that have had harmful consequences for organizations on the borders (2014, p. 40).

A few participants expressed that they found academic research practices unethical because they did not involve communities in the research planning process and in the ways they conduct interviews. Chris Wright (UK) said,

> I've seen over the years academic research that would be very ethically questionable… that often is done purely for that researcher's benefit and not really that of those people that are taking part in that process. The involvement of CBOs, CSOs, local NGOs, grassroots organizations in that research program and process is minimal, apart from usually a translator or an assistant, and research that comes from within [the academic] groups tends to be focused to proving their point. [Chris Wright, UK, CBO worker, 15+ years' experience]

As Chris explains, not involving local communities in the research from the outset is a big red flag, and gives the impression that researchers are more interested in their own points. Catherine Daly (Ireland), former Country Director of World Education Thailand/Myanmar, noted similar experiences with researchers arriving and giving the feeling to local groups that they had already

completely designed and planned their work, and were needing to just conduct the questions, with the promise that they'd one day "share findings."

Mr. H saw his organization's role as sometimes helping community partners avoid participating in research they did not want to be a part of, or helping to make the research fit their needs:

> [researchers] can be a steamroller, not even intentionally, but it's just sort of a product of a culture that, you know, someone turns up and just wants to do this [research] and watch that [activity]. And then [community partners] comply to a certain degree, but they're not really happy with it and they don't really feel it. It's not going to benefit them, but they're just too nice to say that they don't want it, you know? So… they can tell us, and then we can go and give the bad news or we can go and negotiate and help to facilitate the relationships so that it's an equitable relationship that it is responding to what the partners want. [Mr. H, UK, INGO worker, 15+ years' experience]

Mr. H's description shows how long-embedded organizations sometimes act as a go-between for academic researchers and local communities. He went on to describe how his organization often works with communities to create ethics review processes in order to make the research work in a better way, a way that "can help researchers as well, to do their research in a proper way… which is probably going to be most productive at the end of the day in terms of bringing through the most accurate material." In this case, the INGO actually facilitates the researcher working with more integrity, and in turn getting answers from participants that are more robust and authentic.

Participants explained that in interviews, who the researcher was made a big difference in how interviewees answered their questions. Mr. Y (Shan State) who works with a political advocacy organization in Myanmar believed that academic research is useful, but noted that participants would change their answers depending on who the interviewer is: "[if we] find a good person in the community to do the interview, the interviewee will talk openly with them about their history… [but] if people don't trust you, they'll give you the wrong information." A number of participants similarly noted that such researchers would "never really get to the heart" of the issue, and would not hear the authentic experiences of their research subjects. Crystal White (Myanmar), the Program Manager of RISE (Rural Indigenous Sustainable Education) also pointed out that trust was a major issue in sharing information with researchers, and that because

of that researchers often got a shallow response from participants. She said to me, "if I hadn't known you before [through a mutual friend] I would never have talked to you."

A big part of trust stems from the ways participants encountered, or did not encounter, the results of the research: they often felt they would never see the findings. Presenting findings to local communities was a major point of contention for participants, who expressed particular frustration with the genre of academic writing.

Academic research and writing is inaccessible to communities

One third of participants remarked that the results of academic research are too often inaccessible to communities; the biggest reasons cited for this was that the writing is often inaccessible in terms of readability and access to publications. Participants said that having to pay to read journals was a major barrier for CBOs and the general public. The time it took to receive findings was a problem; participants felt the research might have become irrelevant to the context by the time publications came out. They noted the insularity of academia meant few people actually read or are exposed to the work, as Jack Dunford (UK), former executive director of The Border Consortium, expressed: "they stick you in academic circles. People attend conferences... but how much of it has an impact? Very little, I would say. [Academic writing] just loses the impact on the people that could make a difference… politicians and decision makers."

Most participants expressed frustration with trying to engage with what a few called "academic jargon," writing that Jack Dunford called "indigestible." They described the way they felt while trying to read. KT Julian (Aotearoa/New Zealand), founder of Mote Oo Education, narrated her (frustrated) inner dialogue with the academic writer:

There have been a number of theses that I've thought, 'gosh, that sounds really interesting. I hope you write a version of it in words of two syllables or less, with pictures so that the findings from this can be made accessible and ideally entertaining to the people who will benefit from that knowledge.' [KT Julian, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Mote Oo Education, CBO worker, 25+ years' experience]

KT describes that since those who are supposed to benefit from the researcher's work are often extremely busy, what is needed is a version of the work that is legible. Greg (Canada), Director of TeacherFOCUS based in Mae Sot, similarly remarked:

> how is this [type of writing] going to help, especially when it's research working with vulnerable populations. That's what really hurts. How is this going to help those people? And if it's not, then why are we [doing this]. I think there's a certain group of people who have the time and energy and focus to dig into heavy research and that's great. But if you want to have an impact, there's got to be a way to present research in a way that's human friendly. [Greg, Canada, Director TeacherFOCUS, CBO, 10+ years' experience]

Greg expresses frustration that while academics declare they want to help local communities, it is not helpful to have writing that is very difficult for those communities to read. While the lengthy versions of academic work have their place, the way to truly help local peoples to access academic information is through making publications accessible. In the following section, I summarize all the other ways participants suggested academics could make research more useful.

What academic researchers can do to be more useful for communities and organizations

Participants offered practical advice for how they thought research could be more useful to local communities and their organizations. The majority suggested to make research findings accessible for communities. The next most common point of advice was to make sure that the work has a direct impact on communities. Related to this, collaboration with research subjects was raised by a number of participants. Finally, the building of trust was viewed as a fundamental way for academic researchers to work in better relationship with research participants.

Make the research writing more accessible

Participants noted that a major problem was making sure the research was returned and reported to communities, as Mr. M (Myanmar), Executive Director of a political advocacy organization noted: "the knowledge has to go back." U Thein Oo (Myanmar), democracy activist, lawyer and professor, emphasized the importance of sharing research: "the research

you're doing it as your own, but at the same time you should share your research. What you have done and is it good for the people? Research is not just for [you]. It's for the people."

Direct suggestions about how to make academic writing more accessible included: translating materials, giving presentations that are understandable to communities, making handbooks and/or curricular materials for communities, writing and sharing short pieces with communities, and sharing results and raw data with the communities. Paying for academic publications that are often behind firewalls, then sharing them with community members, was a common request, along with abridging the language of publications so communities could understand it. Participants suggested to make simple executive summaries translated into relevant language(s), or more PDFs of a few pages with "with snappy layouts and readable recommendations with all the results."

Make sure work has direct impact

Participants requested researchers make sure that the work has a direct impact on communities by using research to design and influence future work done within communities. Suggestions for how to go about this include asking organizations what they need first, giving research results directly to interested organizations, highlighting ways that community groups can use the work when disseminating results, always having a plan for "what's next" and making connections between the research topics and larger global phenomena.

Saw Eh Htoo Wah (Karen State) of RISE was adamant that researchers connect their work to the broader issues, saying "advocating for land rights and human rights issues with evidence from the research is more effective… if you are just saying what you think and what you see, it won't be effective."

Members of KESAN said they make sure that research work has direct impact by bringing in visiting researchers for the express purpose of doing research they needed. They said this approach worked well because the visiting researchers could help them fill gaps that they had. This also contributed to trust-building since from the get-go researchers were working in a collaborative way with the organization.

Collaboration with communities was closely related to having a direct impact on communities. Interviewees' interpretation of collaboration included being sure that interviews took place with people who are directly affected, rather than just service providers, sharing preliminary findings with communities to get their feedback and assessment of the work, and also getting their feedback and input on ethics. Participants stressed the importance of making sure that community voices are heard clearly through the data. Co-authorship was seen as an important way of giving credit to local groups.

Building trust

Building trust with local peoples and organizations was an important element in making research useful. Locally-born participants especially noted that prior and ongoing building of relationships, over a number of years through time in the field, was imperative. A few said they would not participate in research with those unknown to communities, and asked that researchers *never* engage only one time with communities for a topic of research. Mr. M noted it is important for the researcher "to be seen" at the community level. Crystal White suggested generating trust by referencing the publications of community groups, which shows that the researcher respects their expertise while also supporting the political and academic relevance of the researcher.

Academics and research consultants on the whole were taken to be untrustworthy when some acted in ways that were interpreted as disrespectful. So when arriving in places they are unfamiliar with, researchers need to learn about people's past experiences with research. Multiple participants said mistrust happened often when there was a duplicating of research: this indicates that researchers are unfamiliar with the context and had not themselves done basic investigation on the situation in a place. Participants recommended that researchers make sure they search scholarly publications and also learn about the work of organizations before they embark on contract work that may be duplicating research questions, results and recommendations.

A number of participants also discussed the use of consent forms and said researchers should explain these clearly to participants before starting interviews and other research projects. The practice of giving copies of the consent forms, providing questions ahead of time and always

inviting participants to not answer questions was highly valued. Rose Metro (2014) has written about the cultural and language issue faced by consent forms in Myanmar; researchers should be familiar with this work before designing consent forms.

Academic research falls short because it is based in colonial logics

Participants perceived researchers to be culturally and contextually unaware and career-oriented, rather than driven by a long-term commitment to social change and support for social movements. Participants offered reasons for the constraints on academics. They understood that institutions can place pressures on academics that prevent them from having time to engage in work outside academia due to the culture of "publish or perish." Charlie Thame (UK), an academic focusing on the politics of mainland Southeast Asia, said "there's clear structural reasons why [this happens]… academics aren't just exploiting respondents here. It's also that universities are exploiting academics and [universities] are exploited by [their] investees… we're all bound up in it…" Ms. L (Singapore), who worked with KESAN while completing a PhD, noted that academic institutions do not support scholars to publish legible versions of their research for the general public. She noted the kind of "code switching" that falls often on women of colour academics, as they translate between their academic work and making accessible pieces to give back to communities.

Mr. K (UK), who worked with CBOs and INGOs for decades, noted "you can't always blame the consultant. You can also blame the donor or the hosting NGO." Chris Wright (UK), CBO worker currently based in Yangon, said that there can be "an astounding lack of coordination" between INGOs in terms of contracting academics to conduct research. He recounted seeing four to five different contracted researchers request to do the same sorts of research on the topic of mental health without knowing that someone else had just been through the area to conduct a very similar study. He believes this occurs because the knowledge within INGOs is treated as proprietary: "it's giving them the edge when they put in their submissions for more grants, or proposals [to various funding agencies]… [but] they're all asking the same questions to the same populations." This observation of how the ground-level effects of competition for funding takes energy and resources from local groups was echoed by other participants. Scholars and practitioners have also critiqued the role of funders in promoting

competition rather than collaboration, arguing that competition hinders the ability of local organizations to make political moves toward change (Kothari, 2005; Perez, 2007; Smith, 2007).

Research practices that are extractive and that seem to disregard the relevance of local community research stem from academic and international development/humanitarian structures that are themselves reliant upon and reproductive of colonial and capitalist logics, in which relations are based in exploitation and the hierarchization of humanity: certain types of people are considered superior, while others are there to be helped and studied.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (Methodology), academic institutions have been built on, and profit from, settler colonial practices, including the theft of Indigenous lands, and colonial racial capitalism, including stealing the labour of enslaved and indentured peoples. As Indigenous peoples and local communities begin to speak back to the academy, academic researchers wishing to conduct research with communities they are not a part of, whether in their own countries or in the Global South at large, must consider whether their research and publication practices will benefit those communities, will change anything at all for them. INGOs sending consultants abroad also must consider what it does to communities when they send people for quick visits, without a deep relationship to the context. They might also ask whether they are even garnering authentic information from the sites these consultants go to: many interviewees expressed that local populations don't provide deep answers when they don't know the researcher. The most successful research approaches were ones that trained up and/or included local groups in the design and conduct of the research. These approaches do not go about research as if it is a quick business, as if information can be extracted and translated; rather, they approach research as slow and continuous work, that takes place while embedded with communities, and treats those communities as research experts and consultants.

Refusal in research

In Chapter 2 (Methodology), I detail Simpson's (2007) and Tuck and Yang's (2014) approaches to refusal in research: refusing to further the objectification or othering of researched populations, refusal can be a method that affirms the desires of research participants. These scholars suggest using refusal as a framework for one's research practices. Learning from these

approaches, I included the opportunity to refuse in my recruitment materials, my consent forms, and during the interviews. By including a discussion about the effects of research with participants, I refused to assume some of the most basic parts of academic training: that we are experts, that our research is necessary, that academic institutions lead the charge of change and progress in the world through research "innovation." Instead I ground my project in my participant's wisdom and in my own learning during my years of experience and work prior to academia. I consider my own positionality, not superficially as a passing, introductory point, but as an integral part of the project, threaded throughout my work. I have tried to disseminate my results, as I analyze them, to participants in a way that is accessible. I remain politically active outside the academy, dedicated above all else to supporting movements–especially land and water defense led by Indigenous peoples–financially and through organizing work. I am actively teaching about these movements through anticapitalist, antiracist, decolonizing frameworks: this means centering Black and Indigenous scholarship in my reading, study and citation.

Critical place inquiry in research

There is an ethical imperative to consider that lands and places are alive, with their own sentience and their own meaning and worth outside capitalism. Academic researchers should remember we are all in places, and those places are under threat and duress from violent extractive capitalism, by the military industrial complex, and by imperial drives to domination– co-producing forces that have nation-statehood as their fulcrum. As Tuck and McKenzie (2014) explain, "discussions of place are located on the periphery in most social science inquiry" (p. 9), which often use "nation-state, not the community or place, as the main geographic unit of account or concern" (p. 7). Yet, places and our experiences of them matter: the ways we interact with our geographies, the lands we live on, and the relationships we foster between nonhuman beings–animals, plants, ecologies–all shape the systems we live in, our societies and social lives. Thus, Tuck & McKenzie argue that critical place inquiry as a methodology is vital: social science research must include "a relational ethics of accountability to people and place" (p. 19). If we are to do research that matters for political change, we need to center relationships to place and people's theories about lands. I have tried to do this in this study, taking up Tuck & McKenzie's call to do research that "addresses spatialized and place-based processes of

colonization and settler colonization, and works against their further erasure or neutralization through social science research" (p. 19).

Doing academic research in a useful way

Beginning research with a healthy skepticism and an anti-colonial perspective sets us along a different pathway to thinking not just about research but about knowledge itself. If academics want to make a better world with our work, we need to ask seriously not only how our research practices and outcomes of research will benefit the populations we learn from, but also what needs to change about our university institutions, including the way they are financially structured and the way they profit from certain forms of knowledge-making. Institutions need to provide more resources for scholars to share back data and information with research subjects. Universities might help fund the translation of materials, and give time for scholars to abridge, summarize and lay out data in legible ways. Institutions must provide resources–financial and otherwise–to encourage the hiring of local communities to collaborate with research.

It is a problem that academic institutions do not provide resources for scholars to provide inclusive materials and collaboration options for communities. Still, it is not enough for researchers to say "I didn't have the resources." We still have an ethical obligation to work in better relationship with research participants, especially when those participants are living in difficult circumstances. Consultants hired by INGOs similarly have ethical responsibilities to pressure the agencies that hire them to undertake better ways of retrieving data from communities, and sharing the data back. When they do take on consulting work, they need to consider how they act toward their research participants. They should refuse fly-in fly out modes of research and instead collaborate with and respect the on-the-ground ongoing research local organizations are doing.

Research and travel culture often intersect. Both use material infrastructures (passports, visa admission, financial privilege) and also benefit from concepts that make it easier for certain kinds of travelers to move around: as explored in Chapter 5 (Humanitarians travel), Western Europeans have long understood themselves as natural inquisitive "explorers" who should travel to frontiers and "discover" (conquer) new places. Recently scholars have noted the ways that

Burma studies is permeated by whiteness, which is a result of scholars being able to travel, while those from Myanmar cannot (Paing & Aung, 2021). Critiques of travel and mobility need to be included in our work. Outsider-scholars, in particular those from the Global North researching the Global South, or scholars visiting local communities with whom they have no previous engagement, should especially feel confronted by a conundrum of purpose and intent, and should consider the long history of racism, colonialism and the white gaze in which objectification of the "Other" has been a culturally and materially profitable project for Westerners. Western institutions are built quite literally upon the idea of an "Other" who is there to be studied, dissected, and analyzed, but traditionally were not considered capable of study and their own analysis. We have a responsibility to refuse that tradition.

Rather than assuming our research will bring change, we must openly and publicly confront that our research may *not* be an effective way to make change. Research practices should embed methods that encourage critique and exploration of the research's effectiveness in creating social change, and scholars should explore alongside their participants not only what they are researching, but *why* they are doing research. It is imperative that academic researchers approach our work with hearty skepticism and hesitation. We need to consider whether the research has already been done, whether it could be done better by someone else, and why we are doing it in the first place. We need to ask: "is there reason for this work beyond advancing my career goals, or a vague hope that it will make change if read by the right people?" "How can I get these theories and studies back to communities in the most timely and accessible manner?" We must engage these questions and concepts within the research design, practice and in disseminating our results.

In my own research I have tried to communicate back to participants as much as possible about the progress of this work. My first update included a slide deck of notes explaining some initial findings–the results around the question of organizational response to land, and the results on research effectiveness reported in this chapter. I designed the slide deck in point form written in clear, non-academic language. I included links to videos of myself recording talks for conferences that included some discussion of this research. Later, I sent more updates and offered participants the option to read the work and make suggestions. Upon completion, I plan to make a final slide deck offering results from the larger study, summarizing the dissertation. I plan to ask advice from participants on whether some part of this work might be translated into

Burmese, or any of the Karen languages. It is possible that the discussion on land, and some of the research there, would be of particular interest because it is a direct and ongoing problem for communities, and one that they are actively resisting. I plan to make myself available for presentations or talks about the work if desired.

Despite making the work available to participants, and including them in analysis by offering for them to read and give feedback, it is hard to know how this study can actually be useful to people on the Thailand-Myanmar border. That is a hard and difficult thing to admit for someone eight chapters into a dissertation! But the truth is, theorizations, tracing trends through history, and targeting the underlying structures of social problems does not jump off the page easily, into a protest to stop mining or industrial agriculture. People working on the border (INGO/CBO workers and migrants from Myanmar alike) are certainly interested to philosophize about reasons for injustice, because they are experts in these topics through decades of lived experience. Perhaps I have contributed in a small way to providing greater clarity on some of the issues; maybe I offer a different angle on them. I know in some cases from initial feedback that the perspectives I bring together has been well-received. However, it will ultimately not be very *useful* to any of their day-to-day work. I know this because people told me quite directly during our discussions of the question, "how can this work be useful?" … no one said, for example, "please provide a lengthy explanation of the institution of a racial hierarchy by Western European colonizers; please explain what Black and Indigenous philosophers would say about why Western funders so easily abandoned us." They did not request this, but still, I imagine that some of the ideas in this text are intriguing and enriching for their work. But not all was left to my imagination; they did tell me exactly what to do: 1) answer the calls of community organizations by offering help with their specific research projects; 2) be respectful toward people by having lots of (hopefully *years* of) contextual knowledge prior to arrival; 3) collaborate (on publications, finding, analysis) with local groups already conducting research; 4) publish materials that people can read and reference; 5) come back and keep working with people on the ground. While not all academics can and will do all five of these things at the same time, we might aim to do at least three out of five–that might be useful!

I thus return to an understanding I had prior to conducting this research: that there is a difference between my academic self–theorizing, tracking knowledge, gathering up writing from others; my nonprofit self–working day to day with communities; and my activist self–joining

protests, speaking to power, raising and sending funds. These selves are not discrete: academic work can contribute to being a better nonprofit worker, a better activist. Academic research can be useful when it is conducted in coordination with the realities people are facing day to day; when it stays humble; and when it pays attention to the ways it is easily imbued with problematic logics, when pushes back to the university's training to extract from communities. Academic research will be most useful when the scholars who make it realize that research itself needs to transform and morph, through practices and methods, by sharing resources, changing its audiences, listening to the ones calling on it to do things differently.

Chapter 9
Conclusion

On February 1, 2021, the Myanmar military, led by army general Min Aung Hlaing, staged a violent coup, taking control of the government and unseating democratically chosen leaders throughout the country. The protests that ensued fomented one of the biggest civil disobedience movements in the world. At time of writing, the regime has killed 2463 protesters, arrested 16191 and are detaining 12974 (AAPP, 2022). According to UNHCR reports, half a million have been newly internally displaced. Millions of people have fled to border and ethnic regions where they are harboured by nonstate armies and governments.

In Myanmar, humanitarian organizations were left with a difficult decision of whether to engage with the military regime or abandon the country, after having just recently established offices and projects. Many INGOs and UN agencies put their work on hold and largely refused to comment on the situation; critics lament their arm's length approach of neutrality; that they refused to call what happened a "coup" (Fishbein, 2021). The World Bank and Asia Development Bank, mega-funders of the sector, froze funding immediately, which was punishing to civilians (Peter, 2021). Currently in Myanmar, close to three and a half million people are severely food insecure, and 75% of households have seen a drop in income (Tun, 2022). Political bodies such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) uses discussions over the humanitarian aid sector and aid delivery to evade holding Myanmar's junta to account (Blazevic, 2021). INGOs find themselves in basically the same scenario as before the 2010 reforms began: if they work within Myanmar, they must cleave to the demands of a murderous leadership.

After the 2021 coup, hundreds of thousands fled to the border regions, once again in retreat from the military dictatorship. At the frontlines of the revolutionary struggle to resist the military regime's take-over, many of the research participants cited in this text have been working fervently on securing supplies for relief efforts, at reporting on what is happening, harbouring people in safety, and so much other work, including exactly what they were doing before the coup but in much more strained circumstances. I hold them, and their efforts, in the highest regard. They have dedicated lifetimes to work in Myanmar, and do the work in deeply informed ways that takes leadership from communities.

People who are drawn to aid work want to serve others, believe that there is a form of justice that matters and is worth fighting for, put their love and commitment into making life better for other people. Humanitarian work, as expressed by participants in Chapter 4 (Humanitarians are human), is something we all can do, everyday, as part of being human–in the sense of the word unloaded from hierarchies and notions of progress. Humanitarianism might mean helping to bring into being a better world and existence for everyone; a recognition that we are interdependent, that we need help, that we can offer help, that we have responsibility to one another. A lot more theorizing about what quotidian humanitarianism is and could be is merited, and theorizing has been done for the notion of "development" (Campodónico et al., 2017). Development studies scholars are critiquing the field's positioning as a whole, and pointing in new directions, ones that are informed by Black feminist thought and intersectional praxis (Kagal & Latchford, 2020). The aim of my work has been to map the ways that humanitarianism disavows the truths needed to do the real work for social change. My hope is that future studies can focus on forms of humanitarianism that are working to create positive changes, are pushing structural changes, and most of all are taking leadership from Indigenous, Black, nonwhite, nonstatus peoples (these categories are not separate).

Unfortunately, as was pointed out by participants in this study, while the ideal of humanitarianism may be to serve and help others, as an organized regime stemming from Western interests and perspectives, humanitarianism today has become "a noun," a thing you do, a career path, a way to earn a salary and a way to represent yourself as good. Polly Pallister-Wilkins (2020) catalogues a number of humanitarian theorists to show that, as I find in this study:

> humanitarianism as it has developed over time allows white supremacy to go unchallenged but also to thrive. As such, humanitarianism offers no reparative possibility within its current terms of reference… Eurocentric thinking is so dominant that… any attempts at change remain firmly within liberal approaches…

Pallister-Wilkins' work similarly concludes that any critique of humanitarianism must include not only recognition of its role "as a form of liberal government with colonial roots," but also how it continues to racialize and secure whiteness and produce the human as a universal category that negates Black and Indigenous life.

Rather than being about solidarity, coalition-building, and asking difficult questions about where Western privilege comes from, humanitarianism as a regime moves us away from the project of liberation. In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013) Fred Moten writes:

> the ones who happily claim and embrace their own sense of themselves as privileged ain't my primary concern. I don't worry about them first. But, I would love it if they got to the point where they had the capacity to worry about themselves. Because then maybe we could talk (p. 140)

Referring to Fred Hampton's theorizing about the possibility for Black-white coalition, Moten imagines Hampton arguing,

> The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us. I don't need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker… (p. 140-141).

Here, Moten (channeling Hampton) points out the major problem with the idea of "helping": that it can distract from the way we are intertwined in systems that are deadly for us all. When the humanitarian impulse comes from a place of recognition of one's privilege, and wanting to "give back," it elides analyses about how white supremacist capitalism and its logics, which dehumanize and commodify all forms of life, is a threat to all of us, to all life on Earth.

Capital H humanitarianism, as the participants in my study expressed, is not something you do with your neighbours, in your own community. It's something you bring. Loaded in a context of bringing aid to others as a duty of those who are privileged and Western, humanitarianism helps excuse the privilege we have in the West, through a story of our aid: it works to disavow the violence that belies so many facets of Western life. It moves people's energies away from political and social organizing, and thus avoids authentic structural change, not only in how we govern, but in how we relate to one another. Constituted in travel, tourism, and the white gaze, it has too often been about the identity-making and self-fulfillment of the one doing the so-called helpful work, which has required objectification of people and communities as "receivers" of the help. Yet for people inside the communities on which Westerners perform humanitarianism, who can't move around and away so easily, there is often no choice but to step up, help out, and organize. Local communities have always practiced complex forms of humanitarianism. However, too often, when the aid agencies show up, they dismiss local

methods and establish their own practices. Paradoxically, Western humanitarianism undermines and tries to replace local communities' ways of coping with and responding to violence perpetuated, directly or indirectly, by colonial and capitalist structures coming from the West.

This dissertation has focused on a specific part of Myanmar, a particular context on the border with Thailand, where a cross-section of the effects of the violent regime, the fallout of colonialism and the way it created ethnic tensions and shaped property laws, and the pressures of modern global capitalism, are faced by a long-established humanitarian community. When participants discussed the challenges experienced by organizations, what stood out most clearly was that the withdrawal of funds to border groups, in favour of working with the Myanmar government, had been a devastation. At the time of the withdrawal of funds to the border, a massacre and mass displacement of Rohingya people was occurring, and would escalate over the following years until over a million Rohingyas had been forced to flee Myanmar. While this crisis tempered humanitarian agencies' zeal to work with the government, and led them to return some funding to border groups, they still remained anchored to working within Myanmar and with the regime. After the 2021 coup, which took place just under a year into the COVID pandemic and a few months after heated democratic elections across Myanmar, it seems more clear than ever that aid agencies and their funders should have known that the government they jumped to collaborate with is not one that will ever respect its people.

When INGOs and the donors that fund them moved their work away from the border and into Myanmar after the 2012 reforms, they revealed that they did not respect the legitimacy of Indigenous nonstate actors–in this context, Karen governance and civil society. This is because the humanitarian regime has always been concerned with governing as a responsibility of Westphalian nation-states. Humanitarianism, and later international development, has grown from Eurocentric worldviews that are constituted by the idea that other peoples, political systems and governance formations outside the nation-state are irrational, incapable, and less valuable. These constructs of otherness have been crucial to colonial logics and hierarchies of race that categorize some peoples as disposable commodities under capitalism.

Rather than trying to build a new world to counter the violence it purports to help alleviate, humanitarianism as a field sought from the beginning to amalgamate the other into the world of Man2: to "raise up" those supposed as underdeveloped, rather than respect them as

equals. As it matured into a more bureaucratized, global regime regulated by financial and nation-state constructs, Western humanitarianism has more fully taken up the project of building a world that recruits the racialized other into neoliberal and settler colonial logics, now relying on and supporting the very structures that cause the problems it sets out to solve. Humanitarian aid hinges on the notion that markets, the cornerstone of liberal democracy in the West, will pull people out of the problems they face. This is paradoxical because markets–and the capitalist accumulation they support–are largely at fault for displacement, poverty, and the supplying of weapons of war and conflict; all factors that drive the need for humanitarian aid. Because of this paradox, Western humanitarianism is destined to fail.

As nation-states have become more enmeshed with capitalist expansion, international development institutions have evolved in support of that expansion. Bringing othered peoples into the sweep of international development has meant assigning them a value as productive: so development work focuses on enfolding receivers of aid into the global economy, into the market and into citizenship, or at least participation in the nation-state through capitalism. In doing so, Western humanitarianism perpetuates Indigenous erasure. It is unable to imagine outside notions that underpin nation-state logics: capitalism, private property, a hierarchy of humanity, and the disavowal of violence, even as violence happens in real time, even as we are seeing and experiencing it. Rooted in Western onto-epistemologies and market logics, the humanitarian aid and international development industries will never be able to achieve real change for people because they wind up replicating the systems of harm they are in.

I have argued that the humanitarian regime ignores, or fails to address, the global phenomenon of land loss and confiscation (theft) because of its origins in settler colonial logics, which are based primarily in the theft of Indigenous lands and the erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing. In foregrounding Indigenous and Black theory in this work I attempt to intervene on and expose the logics of humanitarianism. Indigenous theories of land and place provide alternative understandings of relations with land, nonhuman persons and othered persons outside the lens of property and ownership. Black feminist theories of geography and political economy identify capitalism's ongoing dependence on racial hierarchies. In this hierarchy, whiteness provides structure for what development and benevolence looks like: humanitarianism as an imaginary ethos supports settler colonial violence through supposing white/Western people and their nation-states are best positioned to "help" *while they benefit from and produce the systems*

that cause harm. I explore the duplicitous nature of aid and development as a symptom of imperialism and white supremacy that are grounded in a series of evasions and lies.

Black and Indigenous theories and movements challenge the nation-state formation as the best way to organize our world. In Mae Sot, seemingly benign forms of humanitarian aid provided by international groups–provisions of food, supplies and social services to refugees and migrants–were still bound to nation-state and capitalist logics and funding that ultimately pressed people to glean to Myanmar governance through repatriation. The not exclusive categories "refugee" "migrant" "Indigenous" are important targets for governance by humanitarian organizations, and the international institutions that fund them, precisely because they challenge nation-state formations: humanitarian governance tries to bring people into the fold of the nation-state, of markets.

It is a cruel kind of hypocrisy that humanitarianism as a global regime dedicates so much of itself to helping refugees, while also having nationality and citizenship as its philosophical and material fulcrum. The unprecedented fortification and militarization of border zones and incarceration of migrants, not to mention that borders often cross through Indigenous people's lands without their consent, makes clear that nationalism, of the type inherited from colonialism, espouses a special form of brutality and very often kills. More work might be dedicated to studies on the necessity of the nation-state to humanitarian aid, and the ways this undermines Indigenous rights, struggles, and effectually produces refugees, since many people are pushed off their lands by the interests of corporations working in tandem with the nation-state in the interest of capitalism. This phenomenon was all too obvious along the Thailand-Myanmar border, a place in the world on a "systemic edge," an intersection of capitalism and Indigenous armed struggle. This region is paralleled in many other parts of the world. It is what Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017) would term an "extractive zone," a place where in the "heart of resource-rich territories… Indigenous peoples exist in complex tension with extractive capitalism and land defense" (p. xix). Learning from Indigenous scholarship, Gómez-Barris recommends methodology that considers ""realms of differently organized reality that are linked to, yet move outside of, colonial boundaries… [that] lift submerged perspectives that perceive local terrains as sources of knowledge, vitality, and livability" (p. 1). I have attempted to do something similar here, merging data from participants with theories that critique capitalism as a continuum of settler colonialism, Indigenous erasure and the theft of lands.

While Sassen's (2014) study provides a major contribution into understanding and tracking global extractive capitalism, it lacks serious consideration of the role of Indigenous peoples in fighting the theft of lands and ruinous development projects, as well as the role of racial capitalism in generating and accepting who is considered "surplus." There is an overarching omission of Indigenous theory and voices in social science scholarship, which takes Westphalian nation-state systems for granted, and posit Western and "technologized" societies, along with their markets and legal systems, as de facto superior to other possibilities for being human and for organizing our societies. This type of scholarship critiques the violence of capitalism, yet fails to identify the clear markers on which that violence continues to be founded. Scholarship that elides Indigenous relations to land and place, the ways that Blackness grounds global capitalism, and how slavery and stolen lands subtend systems of mobility and migration, will never be able to fulsomely contend with solutions to these issues. More importantly, this scholarship fails to recognize that Indigenous land defense is one of our best remaining hopes for a liveable future. Indigenous peoples around the world are at the frontlines of struggles for the rights of biodiversity and planetary health. Land defense movements exist around the world and are connected to lineages of resistance since the beginning of colonial occupation and global land grabbing regimes. Today, at the frontlines of extraction, Indigenous and local communities stand up against corporate, government and military forces who are trying to move them off their lands so that they can seize natural resources in order to generate profits. Biodiversity is declining in all parts of the world; however, it is declining much less rapidly in those lands still managed by Indigenous communities (Yellowhead Institute, 2019). Indigenous land management practices are essential to slow ecological collapse.

Peruvian theorist Marisol de la Cadena (2015) writes,

> even the most remote territories [are now] the subject of financial investment. The reach of the current destruction of indigenous worlds is historically unparalleled… [it] has acquired a scope and speed early extirpators of idolatries and nineteenth-century explorers (turned rubber and sugar plantation investors) would envy (p. 3).

de la Cadena alters the term "anthropocene" to "anthropo-not-seen" to refer to struggles local communities are waging not only against development and destruction, but against the notion that there is one world; the anthropo-not-seen is the collision between worlds and possibilities for alternative alliances (p. 7). de la Cadena argues for alliances that "queer the requirement of politics for sameness" in favour of struggles that encourage ontological difference and politics

across divergence as a way to understand that we (human and non-human peoples and communities) are from different worlds yet can struggle together (p. 7). If we want to be authentically helpful, Western scholars, and Western humanitarians, need to begin with the truth of how we got to be in different privileged positions and worlds, and how our institutions are complicit in the very systems we want to fight against. Our projects should center how plantation economics and stolen lands–antiblackness and Indigenous erasures–continue to be the basis of capitalism, which threatens all life on earth.

Indigenous theorists have emphasized the importance of land and place in theory. They argue that colonialism depends on a forgetting and erasure of place and ignoring land (Coultard, 2014; Simpson, 2014; Tuck, McKenzie & McCoy, 2014). I have grounded my work in critical place inquiry, a methodology developed by Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie (2015) that assembles and draws on Indigenous theorizations of land and place to consider human relationships to place, and the ways that land and the environment intersect with our social worlds. This project stems from the Thailand-Myanmar border region, and the town of Mae Sot. I learned so much from that place, from the physical environment and what was being inflicted upon it by development. Social science theorists who wish to take an ethical stance on the intense destruction happening around the world should begin in place, should extend their research "beyond considerations of the social to more deeply consider the land itself and its nonhuman inhabitants" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 19). In talking with participants about relationships to land in the Thailand-Myanmar border region, I have attempted to forefront the ways that places influence social worlds, and have importance for how we theorize the politics and structures we critique. This entails a deep listening to what Karen and other Indigenous groups in Myanmar have to say about land and place. Taking Indigenous theorizations of land seriously is to engage with the work of decolonization (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 11). Dene theorist Glen Coulthard argues that Indigenous struggles around land are central to decolonization, not only to reclaim land, but to understand "what land as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us" (2014, p. 13). Karen peoples have identified relations with land as the most important component of their autonomous governance and indeed of the future and "climate resilience." The Salween Peace Park, an Indigenous established area that bans capitalist development projects but in which people live on and with the land, is an example of an internationally supported project that is locally-based and locally-led. It is a land defense

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project, rather than a humanitarian one, that creates space for humanity and for a future that will benefit all of us.

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Appendix A
Detailed summary of participants

This Appendix provides details about the individuals I interviewed, as well as the work their organizations do. To provide brief explanations of organization's work, I combine the results of the interview question, "What is the name of your organization? Please explain some of the main activities you do" with the organization's self-descriptions on their websites. I also remark on my relationship with these participants, because it is an important aspect of how I came to this work.

I present this information by organization, starting with CBOs and then INGOs. I have listed them alphabetically; in cases where participants have experience across both INGOs and CBOs (there are a number of these), I list them according to the last job position they had. Four participants drew on experiences outside the CBO/INGO context; they are listed last.

I identify whether participants worked for INGOs, CBOs or both, the country or state they come from, where they currently reside, and years' experience if more than 25 or less than 5. Unless otherwise mentioned, all participants have been working in development work in some form for at least 10 years. Four participants have worked in the region for less than five years, and eight have more than 25 years' experience. Almost all the participants have worked for more than one organization, and many have experience with both CBOs and NGOs.

Several participants selected to stay anonymous for this research, and either gave me an assigned name to use or asked me to assign them a name. To protect the identity of some of these interviewees, I have kept the names of the organization they worked for anonymous.

Finally, there are more men than women interviewed for this research; part of this was coincidence and part was on purpose. Along the border, women, especially Karen women, hold positions of power in community-based organizations along with their social, familial, political and community responsibilities. I opted to not take their time for my dissertation project. It is also the case that positions of authority often go to men, and that organizations will send male members to do interviews with researchers.

Community Based Organizations

Burmese Law Council (BLC)

The Burma Lawyer's Council (BLC) promotes human rights and democracy in Myanmar from a legal perspective, campaigning against oppressive laws in Myanmar and connecting with overseas legal associations and academics for assistance. It helps individuals with legal cases and trains civil society organizations in the application of the law.

U Thein Oo (Myanmar, 25+ years experience) is a lawyer and activist from Myanmar who resided in Mae Sot for many years running BLC. With the reforms, U Thein Oo has moved back into the country and is currently Headmaster of a Law School in Pyin Oo Lwin.

Karen Education Department (KED)

The KED is a department of the Karen National Union and operates the school system within KNU-controlled regions of Karen State. KED-run schools emphasize Sg'aw Karen as mother tongue and focus on "implementing their own education policy which aims to teach their own culture, language, history, values, and traditions" (Shee, 2018, p. 3).

Saw Elvis (Karen State, 20+ years experience) is Executive Director of the KED (Karen Education Department), as well as a long-time employee with TBC (The Border Consortium). He is based in Mae Sot.

Saw Lay Taw (Karen State, 10+ years experience) is a Manager with KED, also based in Mae Sot.

Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN)

KESAN "works to improve livelihood security and to gain respect for indigenous people's knowledge and rights in Karen State of Burma" through programs including Community Based Livelihood Initiatives, Wildlife and Biodiversity Networking, Media & Advocacy Campaigns,

Environmental Education, Land and Forest Management, Water Governance Programs, and the establishment of the Salween Peace Park (KESAN, 2018).

Paul Sein Twa (Karen State, 20+ years experience) is Executive Director, based in Chiang Mai.

Ms. L (Singapore, 5+ years experience) is a researcher who worked with KESAN.

Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)

KHRG reports on human rights violations in Karen State–specifically, they stress, the region defined by the KNU as Karen State. KHRG traditionally gives interviews to researchers anonymously. It conducts field research, writes reports, and gives "Village Agency Workshops" that "provide a space for villagers to share their experiences and strengthen their self-protection strategies, by gaining knowledge about international human rights standards and available national mechanisms that they can use to claim and defend their rights," International Humanitarian Law workshops "for soldiers from local ethnic armed groups"; it also does local and international advocacy (KHRG.org). KHRG's stated goals are to "increase villagers' capability and opportunity to claim their human rights, and ensure that their voices, priorities and perspectives influence decision-makers… [and encourage other local and international groups and institutions to support villagers' self-protection strategies" (KHRG.org).

Saw K (Karen State, 5+ years experience), a researcher/writer based in Mae Sot.

Dave (USA, 5+ years experience), a researcher/writer based in Mae Sot.

Mae Tao Clinic

The Mae Tao Clinic provides health care for migrants from Myanmar. The Clinic has been a major reason why migrants moved to Mae Sot over the years, and is a vital part of the migrant community. It currently treats about 100 000 patients a year, while collaborating with eight

ethnic health organizations to provide medical training and care for people inside Myanmar and all along the border (Mae Tao Clinic website, 2019).

Simon Dickinson (UK, 10+ years experience) has consulted with CBOs and NGOs in the Mae Sot and greater Southeast Asia region; he was formerly Director of the Mae Tao Clinic. Simon is a wonderful friend. He generously lent me his home, two cats and motorbike while I was in Mae Sot conducting this research.

Migrant Education (ME)

ME was a CBO working to establish communications and standards between the 76 "illegal" migrant schools in Mae Sot, as well as improve access for students and provide an education that might eventually be recognized on either the Myanmar or Thailand side of the border. It transferred its activities to other organizations and ceased to exist in 2015.

Chris Wright (UK, 15+ years experience) was based out of Mae Sot for many years before moving to Yangon. He is a teacher who worked within the migrant school system and has taken on a variety of consultancies for both CBOs and NGOs. Chris is a dear friend; his legendary porch was a second home of mine at one point in time.

*Mote Oo Education*SEP

Mote Oo Education creates curricular materials "to promote social justice through context-appropriate education materials and services for the adult education sector" (https://www.moteoo.org/en/about-us).

KT Julian (New Zealand/Aotearoa, 25+ years experience) is teacher, manager and founder. Prior to moving to Yangon in 2013, KT lived in the border region–both in Mae Sot and Karen State–from the early 1990's. She also founded the Curriculum Project, a CBO which creates culturally relevant learning materials for schools along the border. I met KT while working in Umpiem Mai and consider her to be my big sister and dear friend.

Rural Indigenous Sustainable Education (RISE)

RISE is "an organization representing Indigenous Peoples across Myanmar… established by a collective of Indigenous education focused organizations, which work together and support their own communities in remote, often conflict-affected areas across Myanmar" (https://www.devex.com/organizations/rural-indigenous-sustainable-education-rise-75339). RISE's main activities are pre-service teacher training, and in-service teacher training, in some of the most remote and rural areas of Myanmar.

Crystal White (Myanmar, 10+ years experience) is Program Manager, based in Pyin Oo Lwin.

Saw Eh Htoo Wah (Karen State, 10+ years experience) is a media/documentary expert, based in Pyin Oo Lwin.

Naw (Karen State, 10+ years experience) (anonymous) is a teacher who also answered on behalf of the Karen Youth Generation, where she was a longtime member. Currently based in Pyin Oo Lwin.

Saw (Karen State, 15+ years experience), (anonymous) is a teacher who formerly worked in Mae Sot migrant schools, and is one of my dearest friends. His support for this project has been vital. Currently based in Pyin Oo Lwin.

TeacherFOCUS

TeacherFOCUS' mission is to "develop a flexible pathway for the recognition of marginalized teachers from Myanmar" (https://www.teacherfocusmyanmar.org/). TeacherFOCUS works with migrant teachers, who had worked for years along the border and in IDP zones, to gain certification to be able to go back to Myanmar and work as teachers.

Greg (Canada, 10+ years experience) is Director of TeacherFOCUS and a longtime, much loved teacher in Mae Sot. I originally met Greg in Ottawa during a talk I was giving on the educational context in Mae Sot.

Naing Win (Myanmar, 15+ years experience) is currently a manager at TeacherFOCUS in Mae Sot, but also worked with World Education and Youth Connect Thailand, as well as with migrant schools. I first met Win around 2007 when he was a bartender at a favourite Mae Sot haunt; later, we worked together while we were both at Youth Connect.

Anonymous- Political Organization

This organization works to document human rights abuses and advocate for a political transition to democratic federalism in Myanmar. Mr. M described the vision for his organization as bringing about "a federal, democratic country, without discrimination… [with] ethnic equality." He described the problems they are trying to tackle to get there to include constitutional amendments, the peace process, refugee-IDP issues and rule of law and stressed that members work very closely with grassroots communities, using a bottom-up participatory approach to create field research on policy issues.

Mr. M (Myanmar, 20+ years experience) is the Executive Director and a longtime democracy activist in Myanmar. He is a friend and big brother.

Mr. Y (Myanmar, 10+ years experience) is a researcher who went through the migrant school system in Mae Sot. He is the husband of one of my former students, who is a dear friend.

James Harrison (UK, 10+ years experience) is a researcher.

International Nongovernmental Organizations

Global humanitarian organizations (anonymous)

Andrea Costa (Australia, 10+ years experience) gave this interview on behalf of her experience with a number of global humanitarian organizations involved in refugee and migrant support through vocational trainings and other educational programs, formerly based in Mae Sot and later Yangon. Andrea is a dear friend and was the purveyor of outstanding dinner parties in Mae Sot.

Amnesty International

Elise Tillet (France, 10+ years experience) is a lawyer who has consulted with a variety of CBOs and NGOs in Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar. For this study she answered on behalf of Amnesty International, where she worked on the crisis in Western Myanmar for a number of years. Elise described Amnesty's biggest goals in Myanmar as getting "accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine State… and constantly pushing for accountability mechanisms in other areas as well." Elise is a dear friend.

Child's Dream

Child's Dream was established in Southeast Asia in 2003. Its goals for Thailand are to: "Provide scholarships to high school students; run bilingual education programmes for ethnic schools; Run a volunteer teacher programme; Run migrant schools; Run vocational training centres; Run post high school and university preparation courses." Its vision is "empowered people responsibly shaping their communities"; its mission is "improving health and education for sustainable development" and its strategy is to follow the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (**https://childsdream.org/thailand/**).

Daniel Siegfried (**Switzerland, 10+ years experience**) resides in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and is the Director of Child's Dream. I met Daniel while working for Youth Connect Thailand, which Child's Dream currently helps to fund.

Right to Play

Right to Play's global mission is to "protect, educate and empower children to rise above adversity using the power of play" (https://www.righttoplay.ca/en-ca/about-us/). It has been working in the Myanmar refugee camps in Thailand since 2002, running "sport-based learning activities" with children and youth that have "specific learning outcomes, promote healthy physical, emotional and social well-being" (http://www.ccsdpt.org/right-to-play). In 2013, Right to Play began working with the camp-based KRCEE (Karen Refugee Committee Education

Entity) on "teacher training, parent teacher association engagement, professional development, management training and capacity building of KRCEE and KED [Karen Education Department] staff, provision of textbooks, school supplies and teaching/learning materials, and provision of monthly stipends for teachers and administrators" (http://www.ccsdpt.org/right-to-play); the next year, it began working with migrants outside the refugee camp. Bo Phyu emphasized that the organization's activities are much more about life skills that just sports.

Bo Phyu (**Karen State, 10+ years experience**) is a manager at Right to Play, based out of Mae Sot. He came to Mae Sot in the 1990s, went through the migrant school system, and has worked for years in both CBOs and NGOs. Bo Phyu was one of the first people I met when I arrived in Mae Sot in 2004; he was a student at a migrant school I taught at, and later we worked for Youth Connect at the same time.

The Border Consortium (TBC)

Saw Elvis explained TBC's work as follows:

> Since the beginning [of refugees in Thailand], TBC has been providing mainly food rations and building materials. Those are our major activities inside the refugee camp. We support refugee nutrition. We also have what we call CMPP- Camp Management Program. We support refugee leadership on capacity building, and we do stipends for administration costs, and assist them on preparedness for return activities.

Jack Dunford (UK, 25+ years experience) has been working in Thailand since 1984. He was one of the founders of, and the former Executive Director, of The Border Consortium (TBC). He is currently based in Bangkok.

INGO workers- anonymous

Mr. H (UK, 15+ years experience) is a senior staff member, currently based out of Mae Sot.

Mr. K (UK, 25+ years experience) has lived in the Mae Sot region and in the refugee camps from the early 1990s, working with INGOs. He currently works with CBOs. He provided a huge wealth of information, as well as support, for this work.

Mr. T (Thailand, 10+ years experience) (anonymous) has been working with INGOs based in Mae Sot at the senior level for many years. I am grateful for Mr. T's friendship and generosity in conducting the interview with me.

World Education

Along the Thailand-Myanmar border, World Education worked on "access to quality education by providing training, resource support, and grant funds to develop the skills of local organizations and individuals." It now also works in Southeast Myanmar "with local education partners to strengthen non-formal and multi-lingual education while providing comprehensive support to landmine survivors and persons with disabilities to meet their social, physical, and economic needs" (https://thailand.worlded.org/).

Catherine Daly (Ireland, 10+ years experience) has worked for a variety of NGOs including as Country Director of World Education Thailand.

Patrick Kearns (USA, 15+ years experience) was a teacher and program developer in Mae Sot and the refugee camps. He was Country Director for World Education, created Youth Connect Thailand as well as the English Immersion and Wide Horizons Programs. Patrick is a dear friend. Currently based in Cleveland working with refugees.

Other

Charlie Thame (UK, 10+ years experience) was based out of Mae Sot for a number of years and now lives in Bangkok, working as a Professor in the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat University, specializing in migrant rights, SEZs and political economy. He has taken on a number of research consultancies for CBOs, NGOs and think tanks including Focus on the Global South.

Khaing Oo Maung (Rakhine State, 25+ years experience) fled Myanmar in 1988 and began running migrant schools while living as an IDP in Karen State before moving to Mae Sot with his family and a number of students under their care in the mid-1990's. He is the Headmaster of the Burmese High School for Orphans and Helpless Youth (BHSOH), one of the longest-established and largest migrant schools in Mae Sot. Khaing Oo Maung, his wife Mya Tway and his team of teachers are responsible for graduating hundreds of stateless students, dozens at least of whom have seen pathways to decent work. He espouses a cross-ethnic model of education that emphasizes what a truly democratic Myanmar could look like. He was the first person I worked for in Mae Sot; I consider him to be my grandfather and teacher, and one of the most noteworthy people I know in this world.

Saw N (Nagaland, 5+ years experience)- anonymous is a student at U Thein Oo's law school and politically active. He is based in Pyin Oo Lwin.

Ton Baars (The Netherlands, 25+ years experience) is a beloved teacher on the border, and lived in Nu Po refugee camp for many years. He currently volunteers with the social enterprise Borderline Collective, a restaurant and fair-trade shop in Mae Sot supporting local artists and artisans from all over the border region. Ton explained that Borderline was founded as a space where organizations representing stateless people, who could not travel or sell their products inside Thailand, could sell their products to help support their work. Ton is a dear friend.

Appendix B
Interview Questions & Guidelines for Participants

Pre-interview script:

       This interview is designed to be an open conversation about your thoughts, opinions and perspectives. You may answer as many or as few questions as you like. If you would like to add any questions to this interview, you are welcome to do so. Please feel free to ask for a break if necessary, or to take as much time as you need to think of the answer. If you need to return to a previous topic or question, you are welcome to. This interview will last about 30 minutes.

Questions:

1. What does the term "humanitarian" mean to you?
   a. (If applicable, to help the conversation: What kind of person is the humanitarian? Where do humanitarians come from?)
2. How, if at all, is your organization responding to the challenge of land confiscation in this region?
   a. How are the people you work with being affected by this issue, if at all?
   b. What are the opportunities around this issue?
   c. What are the challenges?
   d. Would you say your organization consults and works with local people on this issue? Explain why and how it does or does not.
3. Is land important to the people you work for? How/why? Please use description of the geographic region, if you like.
4. Name one major challenge your organization faces.
   a. Is this challenge coming from the organization itself (ie. The bureaucracy/administration, external funders and politics) or from regional issues (like the monsoon/weather, local politics)
   b. What could change to help your organization do better?
5. What is the name of your organization? Please explain some of the main activities you do.
6. What is the most important problem your organization seeks to solve? How successful has it been in doing so?
7. How can this research be helpful to your organization or the issues faced by your community? Is there something I can do to make this research useful to you in the future?
8. Do you have any additional questions or comments?

Appendix C
Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Eve Tuck
Associate Professor

OISE, University of Toronto – Informed Consent

Study Title: Humanitarianism on Indigenous lands: Dispossession by development on the Thailand-Myanmar border

Name of Principal Investigator: Nisha Toomey

Department: Social Justice Education

Position: Ph.D. Student

Contact information for questions or problems

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eve.tuck@utoronto.ca

This is an educational research study. This research study includes only participants who choose to take part. Please take your time to make your decision.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This research tries to understand the current situation at the Thailand-Myanmar border, and in Kayin State, as related to changes with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their relationship with civil society (CSOs) or local organizations (CBOs). The study is examining how NGOs, CSOs and CBOs are responding to land confiscation and acquisition in this region.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

About 30 people will participate in this study.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?

I would like to conduct an interview with you to learn about your experiences and expertise with issues related to land rights in your region, and also to projects conducted by your organization. In the interview, you will be asked questions and you will share stories or ideas about the questions. If there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, please feel free to tell me, or just wait until the next question to speak up again. The interview will be audio-recorded.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

The interview will last about 30 minutes, and no more than one hour.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There are minimal risks to you in this study. You can choose to answer or not answer questions as you like. You will be asked to speak about issues related to your job, and to share any relevant stories from your professional experiences.

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

If you agree to take part in this research, there may or may not be direct benefit to you. The main benefit would be a good conversation about topics that interest you.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

You can choose whether to keep your identity confidential, or to have your identity included in the study. You can inform me of this decision after the interview is finished, before we part ways after our meeting.

WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH MY INTERVIEW ANSWERS?

I will analyse the results of the study as part of my dissertation research. There is a chance I will publish some of that research. If you would like to keep updated on the study, please provide me with your email address on an index card, and I will send email updates to you in the future regarding publications.

HOW DO YOU KEEP MY DATA CONFIDENTIAL?

Interviews will be recorded using software on my laptop, saved in a password protected file and backed up on a password protected external hard drive. Identifying information will be removed during the transcription of the interviews, each interview participant will be given a pseudonym. These transcriptions will be saved in a password protected file on my laptop, and backed up to the password protected file storage program Microsoft One Drive. The signed consent forms, and other materials with identifying information will be stored in a lock box, with myself having the only access to its key. The key for pseudonyms/other identifiable information will be kept on an encrypted USB. Upon completion of my doctoral studies the consent forms, and original audio files will be destroyed. The transcribed interviews will be kept for 10 years, and then destroyed.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time without penalty. You may choose not to take part, may leave the study at any time, or not answer research questions, which you consider inappropriate.

Should you decide you no longer want your interview used as part of the data collection, you may contact the researcher or her supervisor for up to six months after this interview. Anonymity for this research is optional. If you decide today to not be anonymous, but later change your mind, you may contact the researcher or her supervisor for up to 18 months after this interview.

WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

If you have any questions about this research, you can call Dr. Eve Tuck at 416 978-0077 or email eve.tuck@utoronto.ca If you are concerned about the conduct of the interviewer or Dr. Tuck, you can email their Department Chair, Dr. Njoki Wane, at njoki.wane@utoronto.ca

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics (which is a group of people who review the research to protect your rights) at at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273

OTHER INFORMATION:

The Ethics Review Board of University of Toronto has determined that this research meets the criteria for human subjects according to Federal guidelines. You will get a copy of this form.

CONSENT:

I agree to participate in an interview for this study. [Circle one]:

Yes   No

I agree to be audio recorded during this interview. [Circle one]:

Yes   No

Name: **Date:**

Signature: _____

Appendix D
Table of INGO annual reports analyzed

Below is a list of the INGO, the self-described scope of the organization's beneficiaries, its headquarters, the year and type of report I analysed, its length, and any other notes.

INGO name	Scope of beneficiaries	Headquarter office	Type of report, year & length	Notes
World Vision International	Over 90 countries on all six continents	Monrovia

No headquarter office but its major partner offices are in Geneva, Switzerland, Bangkok, Thailand, Nairobi, Kenya, Nicosia, Cyprus, Los Angeles, USA and San José, Costa Rica, Its "global centre" office is listed as Monrovia, California.

], California, USA | Annual Report Myanmar

2019

30 page | World Vision does not release an international annual report, therefore I selected to analyse its Myanmar report. It is known as an evangelical organization but calls itself "multidenominational." |
| Oxfam International | 22 million people across 67 countried with over 3500 partner organizations | Nairobi, Kenya | Annual Report 2018-19

52 pages | Oxfam is a confederation of 20 different charitable organizations |

Save the Children International	56 million children reached with 29 national member organizations across 120 countries	London, UK	Annual Report 2016 17 pages	Save the Children lists its budget as a part of its scope, proudly noting it raised a "combined income" of $US2.1bn
Plan International	40 million children reached across 77 countries with nearly 35 000 partner organizations	Woking, Surrey, UK	Worldwide Annual Review 2019 36 pages	Plan lists its budget as part of its scope, noting how much it raised and spent in bubbles connected to the numbers of girls and boys, respectively, who "benefitted from our work"; notes that "supporters sponsored 1.2 million children" (p. 4) (2019, p. 4)
Médecins Sans Frontières	Over 70 countries; millions of people treated each year	Geneva, Switzerland	International Activity Report 2019 104 pages	Budget about 1.63 billion
CARE International	Projected 150 million people by 2020, across 93 countries, with 950 projects	Geneva, Switzerland	International Annual Report 2017 30 pages	In 2017 they claim to directly reach 63 million people
CARITAS International	162 National Organisations worldwide	Rome, Italy	International Annual Report 2019 17 pages	Caritas does not really estimate its scope but it is massive: it is in nearly every country.

ActionAid International	Nearly 6 million people reached with 1955 partners	Johannesburg, South Africa	Global Annual Report 2018 108 pages	ActionAid operates as a "global federation with different levels of membership across countries.