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Empowering the subaltern? Critical approaches to Japan's human security policy in Myanmar

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Empowering the subaltern? Critical approaches to Japan's human security policy in Myanmar

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Abstract

In 2010, Edward Newman proposed a Critical Human Security Studies (CHSS) that sought to bridge policy-making and academic divides over the concept of human security by marrying problem-solving and critical approaches. CHSS aimed to provide a clearer definition of human security, challenge the structural dynamics of human insecurity and engage communities whose existence was threatened. Whilst CHSS purports to offer a real opportunity to address human insecurity, the question remains as to whether CHSS can truly incorporate the demands of local communities into its framework and engender structural change. This paper considers post-colonial contributions to International Relations to explore the concept of empowerment. Taking Japanese investment into the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Myanmar as a case study, the argument demonstrates how Japanese policymakers and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) alike have defined empowerment in terms of resilience or through the provision of socio-political infrastructure. These approaches silence the subaltern voice, condemning the insecure other to a condition of bare life, and maintain existing social and political relations. Postcolonial approaches maintain that human security has to be inclusive by engaging local communities, listening to their needs, understanding the local context, and empowering individuals to design and guide projects to enable them to live lives in 'freedom and dignity'. This critique can be further extended to highlight the necessity for NGOs to question their complicity in neoliberal development policies and evolve novel practices that advocate structural change to realize human security as dignity.

Keywords: Japan, Human Security, Critical Security Studies, Myanmar, Subaltern

1. Introduction

In proposing the concept of Critical Human Security Studies (CHSS) in his 2010 article, Newman questioned why Critical Security Studies (CSS) and human security scholars were set against each other. (Newman 2010, 77–94.) Newman noted that CSS and human security should be natural allies as they both aim to challenge orthodox approaches to international security and privilege the individual as the referent of security analysis, yet the two approaches diverged significantly. On the one hand, human security scholars set aside conceptual debates to focus on improving people's well-being. In

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doing so, human security became an amorphous concept to which state elites attached a multitude of different meanings in order to realize their own self-interests at the expense of human beings. Critical security scholars, on the other hand, dismayed by the lack of conceptual clarity of human security, emphasized theorizing over practical measures to support human beings in their daily lives. By marrying critical security studies with the concept and practice of human security to create CHSS, Newman sought to overcome the critiques that bedeviled both approaches. Newman claimed that CHSS would offer pathways to overcome the state-centric nature of human security, challenge structures of domination, and emancipate human beings to realize their potential and ensure their well-being.

This article employs a postcolonial approach to demonstrate that the CHSS project is fundamentally flawed. We argue that CHSS silences the subaltern voice, condemns the insecure other to a condition of bare life, and maintains existing unequal social and political relations. The paper extends this postcolonial critique to examine the case of Japan and assesses how the concept of empowerment has been incorporated into its human security policy in terms of resilience or through the provision of socio-political infrastructure. Though Japanese policymakers have engaged with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in an attempt to engage local communities, the case of the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Myanmar highlights the limitations of Japan's human security policy. Postcolonial approaches maintain that a critical approach to human security has to be inclusive by engaging local communities, listening to their needs, understanding the local context, and empowering individuals to design and guide projects to enable them to live lives in 'freedom and dignity'. The paper concludes by noting that whilst postcolonial scholars provide few clues as to how to engender structural change (Kapoor 2002), relations of domination cannot be overturned if their discursive underpinnings are not challenged. With the national interest as their *raison d'être*, policymakers are unlikely of their own accord to question the notion of human security as resilience. It falls on NGOs to critically reflect on how their own actions substantiate this neoliberal developmental logic and evolve novel practices that do not settle for human security as resilience, but advocate structural change to realize human security as dignity.

2. CHSS, Emancipation and Empowerment

Newman's CHSS project sought to overcome the state-centric and problem-solving approach of human security and the lack of a practical contribution to human wellbeing on the part of CSS advocates by combining the two approaches. Newman began his article by examining how the concept

of human security evolved. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) advanced the concept of human security in its 1993 “Human Development Report” which focused on the development needs of human beings, including access to food, employment opportunities, and environmental care (UNDP 1993, 2). In its 1994 report, the UNDP subsequently added health, personal, community, and political security to the original three components, and divided the concept into freedom from want and freedom from fear (UNDP 1994, 24-5). Whereas freedom from want concerned issues related to economic development, freedom from fear expressed a need to confront threats that undermined the liberty of individuals and sought to protect their physical well-being. According to the UNDP, the state should be replaced as the key security referent with human beings. Human security was actively adopted by policymakers who perceived it as a label to cover all kinds of strategies to address concerns about human safety and needs. Some scholars and policymakers also welcomed the concept, seeing human security as an opportunity to sanction repressive states until they improved their human rights records, or face armed intervention and regime change if they persisted or to impose a neoliberal reform agenda on developing states in the periphery. (See Chapter two, Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007, for an overview.)

Despite its warm reception amongst some circles, human security has been widely criticized by the broader academic community, which perceived the concept as being too broad and ill-defined to address the myriad of threats that could fall under this label. (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, *ibid.*) According to Roland Paris, actors would interpret human security in line with their own interests leading to a plethora of incompatible definitions (Paris 2004, 371). These academics maintained that security and development should be kept separate in order to preserve their analytical clarity and practical utility. Critical IR scholarship also raised concerns about human security, questioning its emancipatory potential (Chandler and Hynek 2011). Thomas argued that the concept only presented problem solving approaches geared to short-term, state-centric policies that respond to the symptoms rather than the underlying causes of insecurity (Thomas 2001, 162-4). These state-centric approaches were also seen to serve the national interests of states at the expense of individuals and local communities (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007, 29; Newman 2010, p. 88; Christie 2010, 178; Wyn Jones 1999, 99), rather than empowering human beings in need.

Newman then turned his attention to CSS, which sought to reveal how current structures of global governance have evolved, challenge how these structures work in the interests of certain actors, and transform these structures to emancipate those people who toil under them (Cox 1981, 126-55). The CSS project aimed to expose how the existing structures shape how individuals understand and act in the world and to provide an alternative vision of reality (Booth 2007, 247, 338). As Booth argues,

“[e]mancipation is the philosophy, theory, and politics of inventing humanity,”(ibid., 112) of determining how we, the human race, might best live. CSS proponents argue that it is possible to determine what is infor the interests of all human beings, to promote projects in accordance with these interests, and critique alternatives (Ibid., 240-2). At the heart of the CSS project is the concept of immanent critique, which Jones defines as, “[t]he ability to identify immanent, unrealized, or unfulfilled possibilities within the reality of any given order”(Booth 2005, 220-1.) For Jones (ibid, 229) and Booth (Booth 2007, 272-4), this means not only setting out what a future “concrete utopia” might be, but also *engaging in politics* to realize emancipatory objectives today. Emancipation is therefore not an end goal but a continual process of refining how human beings might live to best fulfill their potential that starts now (Jones, 1999, 77).

For CSS proponents, realizing emancipatory objectives requires speaking on behalf of the subaltern. This may be due to physical constraints, such as intimidation by military or police forces, but can also derive from the “false consciousness” of subjects, namely their inability to exercise reason in order to extricate themselves from the myriad ways in which they have been socialized to behave and thereby determine what is best for their own security (Floyd 2007, 330-1; also Booth 2007, 112-3). In such cases, CSS scholars urge their audience to choose sides and intervene by speaking on behalf of the disenfranchised in order to emancipate them (Jones 2001, p. 30; Booth 2007, 110-2; Floyd 2007.) For Floyd, CSS scholars can employ consequentialist ethics to determine what is and is not good for another’s security and thereby “step into the security equation and on behalf of the actors encourage some securitizations and renounce others, depending on the moral rightness of the respective securitization’s consequences” (Floyd 2007, 339).

Whilst CSS proponents provide critiques of the current structure of global governance, they have largely failed to engage policymakers and provide concrete strategies to transform the current order (Booth 2005, 124-5; Booth 2007, 265-6, 268; Wyn Jones 1999, 161.) For Newman, human security offers the possibility for CSS to engage with policymakers and seek ways to pursue an emancipatory agenda that could have a real impact on people’s lives today (Newman 2010). Nonetheless, Newman concurs with CSS proponents that most human beings are unable to challenge structures that undermine their security and therefore need outside support (ibid., 93.) Newman therefore perceives empowerment in the following terms: “human security has at its core *the individual as object*. Some advocates of human security also identify *the individual as the key vehicle* for attaining security through empowerment” (ibid, 93. Emphasis added). Here, the insecure human being is to be identified and rescued rather than being considered as an active subject in conceiving and addressing their insecurity.

From a postcolonial perspective, human security can only claim to be critical if it acknowledges that human security must be articulated by individuals in specific cultural contexts (Shani 2014; Introduction, Pasha 2013). Rather than equating security with emancipation as CSS scholars have done, the emphasis should be on de-securitization; namely shifting security issues back into the domain of everyday politics (Shani 2014, 74-6). Drawing on the work of Giorgio Agamben, Shani argues that it is culture, society, and religion that imbues a life with meaning, or *bios*, as opposed to the human security approach that reduces people to bare life, a state or survival without meaning or political voice; lives that can be killed, but are not worthy of sacrifice (Shani, 2014, Berman, 2007, 30). Postcolonial IR scholars argue that both the CSS and human security projects articulate a neoliberal agenda to transform others in the name of “progress” (Shani 2014; Introduction, Pasha 2013.) This agenda emphasizes autonomy, self-reliance and the realization of self-interest through profit and accumulation at all costs and the repudiation of alternatives (Shani, 2014, Shani, 2007, 17-29.) It distinguishes between the secure, developed world whose inhabitants are “insured” and insecure people in the Third World who are “uninsured” (Duffield 2006, 11, 15.) This regulatory biopolitics works through global governance networks comprising states, international institutions and NGOs, to help the non-insured populations secure their own basic needs, become resilient in the face of perennial threats to their well-being, and contain these threats so that they do not spread to the developed core (Ibid, pp. 15-19, 24-5; Papuvac 2005, 161-3, 171-2).

Though the CHSS project claims to address human insecurities, it “position[s] colonized people as victims, incapable of answering back,” (Lomba 2005, 192; see also, Shani 2014, 77) and reduces them to bare life; echoing Spivak’s argument in her acclaimed article entitled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1988). Spivak highlighted how the voices of the women were lost in debates about the early 19th century practice of *sati*, the widow sacrifice, in India. She argued that whilst colonial authorities maintained that they were rescuing women from a harmful practice, the local patriarchy responded that *sati* was an expression of female agency, as the woman had volunteered for self-immolation.³ Echoing the approach of colonial officials, Booth details the false consciousness of communities who support the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (Booth 2007, 112-3), but fails to acknowledge how this practice is disputed by members of such communities (Soy 2014.) Though critiqued for being “defeatist,” Spivak’s claim expresses the “constructed, domesticated nature of the

³ Since the publication of ‘Can the Subaltern Speak’, Spivak has substantially reviewed and clarified her work. Her argument is not that the subaltern cannot ‘talk’, but rather that when the subaltern does talk, they are not heard. The ways in which the subaltern articulates their position is mediated by the colonial situation in which they exist and their message is re-inscribed with meaning in line with the hegemonic discourse of the colonizer. The subaltern remains perpetually outside this hegemonic discourse. See *Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors*, Landry and Maclean 1996, 287-92.

‘other’,” forcing the reader to question in whose interests discourses of emancipation work and to destabilize them (Polat 2011, 1269). Rather than emancipation being “the theory and practice of inventing humanity, *with a view to freeing people*, as individuals and collectivities, from contingent and structural oppressions,”(Booth 2005, 181, Emphasis added.) emancipation starts with open-ended dialogues that nurture an appreciation of and respect for alternative visions of our common humanity (Hutchings 2011, 641-3, 647). Humanity is invented with others, not for them. From a postcolonial perspective, how we move from identifying human beings as the key object or referent of security to them being the acting subject of security is central to the concept of empowerment.

3. A Post-colonial Critique of Empowerment in Japan’s Human Security Policy

Japan’s human security policy has also incorporated the concept of empowerment in problematic ways, echoing the approach of CSS proponents. The concept of empowerment entered Japan’s human security discourse following the publication of the Commission on Human Security’s (CHS) Human Security Now (HSN) report on 1 May 2003. The CHS was co-chaired by Amartya Sen and Sadako Ogata and the HSN report stressed a human centric approach to security that encompassed both freedom from fear and freedom from want as well as emphasizing an individual’s freedom to enjoy a life of dignity and respect (Fukushima 2010, 95; Osa 2012, 98.) Ogata and Sen maintained that human security required both the top-down protection of the state and the bottom-up empowerment of the people (Fukushima 2010, 95, and Ogata and Cels 2003, 273-82). The CHS failed to clearly define human security, preferring to see it as an all-inclusive concept that had to be flexible in terms of how different cultures around the world could interpret it (Osa 2012, 98). For Ogata and Sen, human security should make practical contributions to peoples’ lives around the world.

The practical approach endorsed by the CHS was echoed in Japan’s revision of its official development assistance (ODA) policy. This is not surprising as Ogata became the president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which coordinates Japan’s ODA program. JICA incorporated human security into its mission statement and ODA disbursement practices (JICA 2010; Kurusu and Kersten 2011, 129-30,) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) revised the ODA Charter in 2003 to include a human security focus (MOFA, 2009; Kurusu and Kersten 2011, 128). Following the publication of MOFA’s medium-term policy report in February 2005, Japan’s ODA policy incorporated the CHS’s concepts of protection and empowerment and aimed to involve NGOs and grassroots organizations more (Fukushima 2010, 98-100).

Despite purporting to work from the bottom up, Japan’s human security policy fails to adequately

engage local voices and continues to perceive human security as state-centric (MOFA 2008). Proponents of Japan's human security policy argue that its results-orientated focus is founded on both a top-down approach that builds the capacity of states to ensure the safety and well-being of their citizens and emphasizes the role of international "experts," as well as a bottom-up approach that helps to inform the development of human security policies (Hoshino and Satoh, 2013). How proponents of Japan's human security policy interpret this top-down and bottom-up approach highlights an insufficient engagement with local communities and individuals to ascertain their human security needs and the nature of the policy response, despite 'empowerment' being a central aspect of Japan's human security policy.

Hoshino, for example, sets aside local communities when he argues that human security comprises ownership in terms of bottom-up input from states and partnership in terms of top-down policy/aid from the international community (Hoshino 2006, 28.) By contrast, Ogata Sadako, a key figure in the development of Japan's human security policy, described her work in the CHS as bringing "together the 'bottom-up' socio-economic development programs with the strengthened "top-down" protection inputs by the state" (JICA 2006). From Ogata's perspective, "empowering people" equates to "guaranteeing them education, jobs, access to information, health care, and provision of a social safety net" (ibid.,) so that they can "develop the capabilities for making informed choices and acting on their own behalf" (Ogata and Cels 2003, 274). It is not apparent how individuals and communities can have an effective voice in the provision of these "socio-economic development programs." Instead, Ogata argues that a top-down approach is first needed to empower the victims of human insecurity so that they can then make "better choices" and voice their concerns. Takasu Yukio, then Japan's UN representative, perceives "empowerment" in rather different terms, stating that "[e]mpowerment strategies help people to increase their resilience so that they can survive downturns and difficult conditions. In other words, human security puts the emphasis on prevention through empowerment of individuals and communities"(MOFA 2008.)⁴ In Takasu's speech the focus is less on empowerment in terms of creating a more prosperous future for individuals, as Ogata stresses, and more on securing people's bare needs so they can fend for themselves. The myriad ways in which Japanese policymakers have defined "empowerment" has allowed them to keep the focus of Japan's human security policy ambiguous and malleable.

From the 1980s, international donors criticized the Japanese government for failing to cultivate

⁴ This position has been critiqued by David Chandler, who argues that we have entered a post-interventionist phase in which Western policymakers maintain that it is no longer their responsibility to intervene and save others. Instead, the emphasis is on helping people around the world be more resilient to threats to their security. See Chandler 2012, 213-229.

a human-centered approach into their foreign development policy through the inclusion of NGOs (Gilson and Purvis 2003, pp. 202-204; Osa 2003, 251-265; Kim Reimann, 2003, 298-315). Critics considered NGOs to be able to challenge state-centric approaches to human security, as NGOs can ensure the effectiveness, continuity and transparency of aid through coordination and dialogue (Noda 2006, 34-7; Osa 2012, 127; Fukushima 2010, 114; Hoshino 2006, 29-30; Gilson and Purvis, 2003, 193-207). Noda argues that NGOs provide the key link to place humans as the subject of human security rather than the object, helping to organize networks and empower humans, and acting as an alternative service provider to the state (Noda 2006, 35). NGOs are better at working at the local level, as well as being able to act as watchdogs and advocates for change (Gilson and Purvis 2003, 199, 203-205). In response to these critiques, Japanese policymakers attempted to engage local communities by involving NGOs in their human security policy to empower people, through such initiatives as the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP). JICA and MOFA identified clear roles for NGOs in responding to conflicts and natural disasters, as well as in terms of training and education and worked with the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC) in these areas (Fukushima 2010, 105, 113). Some Japanese NGOs have enthusiastically collaborated with the government. Bridge Asia Japan (BAJ), for example, became a JICA development partner in June 2000 and has consulted regularly with MOFA (Ibid., p. 115).

Though the Japanese government has provided grassroots funding for NGOs, MOFA officials remain hesitant to work with non-governmental actors on state policy (Yoshida 2004, 142). In addition, Osa ascribes the side-lining of NGOs in the official Japanese discourse on human security as being due to a lack of media attention to international crises and a tradition of the Japanese government tackling public safety issues (Osa 2003, 255-2600. Indeed, since the Meiji era, the Japanese state has always exercised a significant degree of oversight over civil society in a bid to employ civil society to achieve the national interest (Garon, 2003, 42-62). Japan's bureaucracy continues to control the behavior of NGOs through financial, regulatory, and legal means and hampers the operations of NGOs that challenge state policy (Pekkanen, 2003, 116-34).

Even when the Japanese government has incorporated NGOs into their human security policy, they have simply subcontracted work to the non-profit sector to fulfill its security and development needs on the cheap. Some Japanese NGOs are therefore reluctant to label their work as human security, as they see it as a government term that is only added after a policy has been implemented rather than guiding that policy (Fukushima 2010, p. 114). For example, the Japan International Volunteer Center (JVC) are more guarded about participating in government-led human security policies, perceiving that as human security is often employed arbitrarily and inconsistently, it can undermine trust that

NGOs have garnered at the local level or even work counter to the efforts of NGOs (ibid., 115).

Although dialogue between the Japanese government and NGOs has improved, Japanese NGOs still have little say in the quality and quantity of ODA, and, compared with other donor countries, Japanese NGOs are allocated a small fraction of the ODA budget (Noda 2006, 36). As Ohashi Masaaki, a JANIC trustee, argues, the Abe Shinzō administration's 2015 Development Cooperation Charter has not incorporated comments from Japanese NGOs. Instead, he states that the Charter is "very nationalistic and narrow minded, with large gray zones around the use of ODA for prohibited military purposes, and prioritizes the economic growth of developing countries as well as short-term benefits for Japanese private companies" (Ohashi, 2016, 341). Once again, when it comes to Japan's official interpretation of human security, the state side-lines individual communities in the policymaking process, as postcolonial scholars warn and as can be observed in the following section, in the case of Japanese investments into the Thilawa SEZ in Myanmar.

4. Developing "Asia's Last Frontier" – Japanese Investment in Myanmar

Japan's development of the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Myanmar highlights many of the issues outlined in this paper. Together with JICA, Mitsubishi, Marubeni and Sumitomo Corporations acquired a 49% stake in the development of an industrial site in Thilawa, situated 23 kilometers from downtown Yangon (Yomiuri Shimbun 2015a). Dubbed 'Asia's last frontier', Myanmar is depicted in the Japanese media as a golden opportunity for Japanese companies to establish new production sites and benefit from a cheap but well-educated workforce, a growing consumer market in the heart of Southeast Asia, as well as tax breaks and customs exemptions (Yomiuri Shimbun 2015a; Yomiuri Shimbun 2014). Such advantages have off-set a raft of problems, including corruption, as well as a lack of water and electricity supply, that had previously deterred investors (Yomiuri Shimbun 2014). As democratization proceeded in Myanmar, following the 'Saffron Revolution' of September 2007, so the Japanese government and industry was eager to counter Chinese efforts to seize economic opportunities in the country, especially following the establishment of the China-led Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) (Yomiuri Shimbun 2015b). Japanese officials have also assisted the Myanmar government by contributing to reforms of the country's legal system to foster a more conducive environment for investment (Roughneen 2014).

Japanese investments and ODA in Myanmar should abide by JICA's guidelines that were written with the concept of human security firmly in mind. Although Keidanren emphasized the importance of human as well as infrastructure development in Myanmar (Yomiuri Shimbun 2013), this did not

extend to the concept of human security as the Japan-based NGO Mekong Watch highlighted in its reporting on the Thilawa SEZ.⁵ Mekong Watch aims to represent ‘the voices of people affected by Japanese-financed development projects in the Mekong Region to relevant decision makers in Japan’(Mekong Watch 2016). Mekong Watch began monitoring JICA’s interest in investing in the Thilawa SEZ in the Spring of 2014, noting as early as 24 April 2014 that JICA was not abiding by its environmental and social guidelines concerning the distribution of aid and had failed to meet with local residents to discuss their concerns (Mekong Watch 2014a). According to the NGO, JICA officials continued to ignore the villagers’ appeals to discuss the development of the Thilawa SEZ despite the villagers raising serious concerns pertaining to the coercive means employed by the Burmese authorities to force Thilawa residents to give up their land, as well as the failure to adequately compensate the residents or find an appropriate relocation site (Mekong Watch 2014b). U Myint Thwin, the lawyer representing the villagers, noted that the government seized the land in 1997, but had not abided by Myanmar’s Land Acquisition Act and had required residents to pay land ownership tax until 2012 (Mekong Watch 2014c). The claims made by the residents were supported by a report conducted by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) (Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) 2014). The PHR’s director of programs, Widney Brown said,

[T]he Thilawa project exemplifies how devastating forced displacement can be on local communities when governments completely disregard human rights laws for the sake of a business development. The Burmese and Japanese governments should work to improve the living conditions for those displaced by this misguided venture, and ensure that this disaster is not repeated when hundreds of other families are relocated for future development projects (Mekong Watch 2014d).

In the words of U Mya Hlaing, leader of the Thilawa Social Development Group, a community organization protesting against the SEZ, “the people in Thilawa continue to suffer, but the Myanmar government isn’t listening and JICA isn’t listening. They don’t seem to care that the project is violating their own guidelines” (Mekong Watch 2014b).

On 4 June 2014, the Thilawa Social Development Group submitted a formal complaint to JICA requesting that an investigation be conducted into JICA’s funding of the Thilawa SEZ (Mekong Watch 2014e). Expressing his motivation for filing the complaint, Khine Win noted the failure of JICA to ensure that the residents’ livelihoods were maintained. He stated,

⁵ The case of Thilawa is not uncommon. As Myanmar has democratized since 2011 under the Presidency of Thein Sein, a parliamentary commission recorded 745 cases of land grabs across the country. (Roughneen 2014).

[T]he houses they built in Myaing Tha Yar [the relocation site] were so small and poor quality, so I decided to take compensation instead so I could build a better house for my family. Now I am in debt. And because it took so long to build my house, I lost my contract with the factory where I worked. This new life is very difficult for me (Ibid).

In response, JICA began its first ever investigation into a development project since its Guidelines for Environmental and Social Considerations were passed in 2010 (Mekong Watch 2014f). As part of the investigation, JICA's chief examiner, Dr. Harashina Sachihiko, met with residents to discuss their concerns (Mekong Watch 2014c). The case was even taken up in the Japanese Diet on 12 May where Mr. Ishibashi Michihiro of the then Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), quizzed Tanaka Akihiko, the head of JICA, and Kishida Fumio, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, about the failure of JICA to abide by its guidelines (Mekong Watch 2014g).⁶ Despite the attention the case received, the Burmese authorities continued to intimidate Thilawa residents in a bid to compel them to drop their complaint (Mekong Watch 2014h).

The complaint was ultimately rejected by JICA's Examiners' Office on 4 November 2014, which found that JICA was "not in non-compliance" with its own guidelines, despite emphasizing the need for improved dialogue with local residents (Annen and Harashina 2014). The local residents responded that JICA's examination had simply accepted the Myanmar government's position on land rights and had not properly evaluated issues relating to sewage and unsanitary water quality at the relocation site (Mekong Watch 2014i). The Thilawa residents voiced specific complaints against the manner in which JICA's report was produced. Mya Hlaing, for example, stated that "[Thilawa residents] mortgaged their houses and bought motorbikes for taxi businesses, because they don't have any job opportunities and they have nothing to eat... But it was written [in the JICA report] as if people bought motorbikes because they got extra cash" (Yen 2014). Though the examiner's report did not accept JICA's responsibility for the damage to people's livelihoods, the report did suggest a number of improvements that needed to be made at the relocation site, including to the sewage system and water quality (Mekong Watch 2015). From January 2015, Mekong Watch acknowledged that JICA worked with the Myanmar government and Thilawa residents to help the residents to pay off outstanding debts, organize microfinancing for residents to start their own businesses, provide vocational training so that residents would be more likely to find work in the new SEZ, and oversee improvements to the sewage and water supply systems at the relocation site (Ibid.).

⁶ There was, however, limited reporting on the objections of Thilawa residents in the Japanese media, especially when compared to the amount of coverage given over to Japanese investment and competition with China in the region. See Asahi Shimbun 2014.

The case of the Thilawa SEZ highlights a number of issues relating to the problem of developing a CHSS project along the lines that Newman suggests. Focusing first on the Japanese government, by its own admission, JICA did not do enough to ensure the human security of Thilawa residents following its support for the SEZ. JICA failed to discuss the development project with local residents or to adequately consider their claims that the Myanmar authorities had coerced them into giving up their land. The fact that JICA undertook its own report rather than allowing an independent inquiry to review its conduct further demonstrates the inadequacy of Japan's human security policy from a critical perspective. The report itself rewrote the experiences of Thilawa residents, as Mya Hlaing's comment above about JICA portraying residents squandering their money on motorbikes highlights. Once it became clear from the report that JICA's approach to financing the Thilawa SEZ had been less than adequate and that more had to be done to ensure the welfare of the community at the relocation site, the organization responded with programs and infrastructure designed to increase the resilience of the residents to the substandard conditions they now faced.

The activities of Mekong Watch also need to be critically evaluated, however. The NGO undoubtedly perceived their activities as working on behalf of Thilawa residents to publicize their cause, support residents' calls for an investigation and help to push the Japanese government to respond to their basic needs at the relocation site. Nevertheless, the NGO acted as a problem solving organization that aimed to adjust JICA's approach to development, rather than questioning the approach and seeking out alternatives to development. The interaction between Thilawa residents and Mekong Watch demonstrates how the residents were encouraged to articulate their concerns in terms of compensation and legal obligations; a language that adhered to JICA's developmental approach. The fact that Mekong Watch praised JICA's efforts following the report to provide debt relief, microfinancing, vocational support and improvements to water management at the relocation site is indicative of a Japanese NGO that has internalized their government's development policy and merely seeks to smooth its rough edges for those people whose lives have been bulldozed away.

5. Conclusion

Newman's CHSS project seeks a potential pathway for developing the concept of human security and to improve policies aimed to ameliorate people's well-being and safety, but the project is based on flawed foundations. This paper has engaged with postcolonial perspectives to demonstrate that far from empowering local communities, CSS proponents seek to emancipate people by speaking for them. Similarly, Japan's human security policy has adopted the notion of empowerment without

involving the local communities which Japan's policies allegedly seek to secure. In so doing, both the CSS and Japanese approaches to human security establish new patterns of biopolitical governance over local communities whose existence is reduced to a bare life.

The case of the Thilawa SEZ demonstrates how a hegemonic discourse determines how development is understood and the parameters according to which it can be challenged. Displaced Thilawa residents were directed to articulate their grievances in terminology that corresponded to JICA's complaints procedure. JICA's report absolved the organization of wrongdoing and instead placed the blame on the residents themselves. At the same time, JICA's report noted that adjustments to the situation of Thilawa residents at the relocation site were needed to make them more resilient. Mekong Watch, the Japanese NGO that defined itself as representing the displaced residents, praised JICA's actions and sought no alternative to the construction of the SEZ. Instead, the villagers of Thilawa were offered the possibility of working in the SEZ, a project based on exploiting the human and material resources of Myanmar, dubbed 'Asia's last frontier'.

New frontiers will be found in time as the developmental machine rolls on and over ever cheaper pastures, displacing lives as it goes. Alternatives to development are certainly needed to counter these trends. A truly critical human security needs to seek out and elaborate alternative discourses wherever they may be found. It necessitates a transfer of knowledge and skills when these are requested and a willingness to challenge dominant and repressive structures at the regional, state and international levels. It has to evolve an inclusive approach that engages local communities, listens to their needs, understands the local context, and empowers individuals to design and guide projects to enable them to live lives in 'freedom and dignity'. This requires at the very least respectful and open-ended dialogue with local communities and individuals about their traditions, culture, society, religion, livelihoods and aspirations, as well as constant self-reflection and a readiness to appreciate different ways of experiencing life as a human-being.

At the same time, whilst postcolonial approaches tend to focus on the local level and provide few clues as to how to engender structural change (Kapoor, 2002), relations of domination cannot be overturned if their discursive underpinnings are not challenged. With the national interest as their *raison d'être*, policymakers are unlikely of their own accord to question the notion of human security as resilience. Though operating within legal and budgetary constraints imposed by the Japanese government, Japan-based NGOs should critically reflect on how their own actions substantiate a neoliberal developmental logic. In so doing, these NGOs can instead evolve novel practices that challenge the equation of human security with resilience and advocate structural change to realize human security as dignity.

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