

Is Anyar Fragmenting? Changing Geography of Trust and Engagement

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Abstract

This presentation introduces our panel's effort to rethink the Anyar (dry-zone) region of central Myanmar through grounded, everyday perspectives, and to show how building new research on Anyar can sharpen how we understand Burma/Myanmar as a whole. After mapping past and emerging scholarship that has begun to give coherence to the field on central Burma, I address a paradox that has gained traction since the 1 February 2021 coup: Anyar is increasingly described as both a cohesive socio-spatial entity and as a region that is “fragmenting,” especially through the proliferation of local defense forces. I ask provocatively: is Anyar really fragmenting? Fragmentation presumes a prior cohesion; yet evidence from the ground suggests something else is happening—central Burma is dividing along multiple fault lines, and “Anyar” is simultaneously being made into a coherent object of politics, analysis, and identity. Since the coup, Anyar has become a word of expanding meanings, accumulating old and new cultural, geographical, and socio-political features. I trace a changing geography of trust and engagement: spaces that are “in-between” armed authorities where administration becomes chaotic, protection is uncertain, and civilians navigate fear from all sides. In villages settings near urban corridors for instance, residents describe being neither under SAC nor PDF rule, lacking stable leadership, and facing the risks of reporting disputes upward, alongside pervasive surveillance practices such as phone checks and checkpoint scrutiny. Everyday livelihoods register the war's spatial reordering: mobile trade collapses as villages are burned and routes narrow; farming becomes more selective as fuel costs rise and prices fluctuate; and coping strategies range from tractor rentals and risky fuel transport to the normalization of gambling economies. Finally, I show how emergent infrastructures of extraction reshape local authority and generate conflict within resistance formations themselves, further complicating simple narratives of territorial control and “fragmentation”.