The Internal Struggle:

The Fight for an Inclusive National Identity in Myanmar

Independent Research Network

Abstract

Myanmar's anti-coup uprising has brought together a diverse range of actors united in their opposition to the military. These actors have also been debating the terms of that unity. As revealed on social media, these debates suggest that they are trying to take the unity beyond tactical alliance – the enemy of my enemy is my friend – to a situation where they share political values. But by trying to create this common ground, they have created certain fault lines regarding how the revolution should be carried out and what vision for the country should be pursued if victory is achieved. The following report outlines these debates, focusing on five critical discussions: tactical disputes over how the uprising is being carried out; debates over tradeoffs between morality and pragmatism; conversations over who is leading the revolution – urban middle-class "Gen Z" youth or lower-class "Anyatha" peasants; discussions of whether it is necessary to address patriarchy in Myanmar and the importance of addressing "Burmanization" (*Bamar lu-myo-gyi wada*, *Bamar hmu pyu chin*, and related terms). Burmanization has dominated discussion, and so has compelled the research team to direct unexpected focus to the issue. First, the terms (Burmanization, etc) used to describe discrimination are ambiguous: they contain different meanings to different people. Second, non-Bamar people are skeptical of participating in the revolution if they do not see issues of discrimination being addressed. Third, *lu-myo-gyi wada* (supremacy; domination) is not just expressed by Bamar: "regionally-dominant minorities" (such as Kachin, Shan, etc.) have been accused by less populous minorities of discrimination. Fourth, colorism and religious bigotry are identified by those suffering it as different – and perhaps worse – than standard *lu-mo-gyi wada*. Taken together, these issues warrant further exploration and sustained policy focus by relevant stakeholders. Indeed, this report does not provide final answers to these debates, does not presume to represent them exhaustively, and so does not advocate a specific position. It seeks a humbler objective: to reflect what people are saying, particularly by paying attention to more marginalized voices. By doing so, it hopes to identify a set of starting point to work towards understanding and greater unity.

Contents

Executive Summary

The Importance of Debate

- The current uprising has been defined by **two simultaneous fights**: the first is against the SAC and its brand of militarism and domination of Burma. The second is within the anti-SAC movement.

- This second fight has not been physical but has occurred in the **realm of discourse – playing out everywhere and reflected on social media**. Burmese across the ethnic, class, gender, religious, and political spectrum debate what the country should look like and how it should function after the sit-tat (military) has been uprooted.

- Views on what this future should look like are more varied than they were before the coup. This is because the new political context has **widened the range of acceptable perspectives**: people are less likely to self-censor their opinions; others are less empowered to police controversial opinions, because there is no longer any fragile "transition" to protect.

- This means that there is a higher likelihood that conversations are difficult and even painful. Hence, internal reconciliation is unlikely to be linear – moving from opposition and confusion to harmony and understanding. Instead it will likely progress with "two steps forward, one step back." As such, it will probably **require a long-term process. During this time, it is critical to support voices that raise uncomfortable perspectives, with the longer-term goals in mind**.

- Such support has defined the last year of debate. While the ongoing discussion has been spirited and intense, it is impressive that the intensity has not produced total division. If the debates have been divisive, they have not been suppressed by calls for *nyi-nyut-yay* (unity). Instead, **the fight has also opened up areas of debate that earlier were themselves suppressed**. This has revealed how Burmese participants[1] in the democratic movement are trying to work through their own differences even as they fight the SAC.

- An ultimate goal appears to be the forging of **a politics of shared values rather than a short-term tactical collaboration ("the enemy of my enemy is my friend")** which may fail to mobilize people on the fence. Moreover, not addressing these issues may undermine a democratic future if/when the revolution is successful.

The many domains of contention

- **Tactical:** conversations have included whether opponents should negotiate with the SAC or not; whether "non-violence" or armed resistance should be endorsed; whether the current moment of "anarchy" is a problem that must be redressed or is it necessary for the revolution to be achieved; whether a longer and more protracted revolution serves the interests of the opposition

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1 "Burmese" refers to all citizens or subjects of Burma/Myanmar; "Bamar" refers to the majority ethnic group.

or undermines its ability to sustain; and whether social media is beneficial or whether it exposes its users to risk.

- **Moral:** military opponents find themselves under-resourced. They lack weapons and protective equipment. They also lack impartial security officials to whom they can refer prisoners: they are without information about whether a potential enemy is a friend, foe, or neither, simply a bandit. In these situations, opponents have taken actions (such as executing bandits) that have offended other regime opponents. Debates have emerged about whether the revolution must fight "with principles" or with pragmatism;

- **Generational:** "Gen-Z" has been presented by some as the revolution's vanguard. This has been true especially in the international media coverage of the clever word play displayed on the protest signs of young people. However, others have expressed skepticism: don't young people always lead revolutions? These critics suggest that there is nothing qualitatively special about young people's participation. A related critique is that "Gen Z" becomes a class term masquerading as a demographic label. In other words, "Gen Z" actually means urban middle-class young people. They are presented as refusing to go back to the time before the transition brought them new consciousness and "rights." Intentionally or not, this narrative is ideological-- meaning that it erases those damaged by, or excluded from, the transition. It is worth asking: are local People's Defense Forces (PDFs) fighting in upper Burma included in the "Gen Z" label? If they are not, is this because they do not conform, through the way they look and how they describe their struggle, to Gen Z class aesthetics?

- **Gendered:** some activists, even those who oppose each other, agree that the revolution cannot succeed without dismantling patriarchy in Burmese society first. This is necessary, they say, because patriarchy supports militarist values. Others counter by saying that this is not the time and place for addressing every social ill in Myanmar. The revolution must be victorious first.

Ethno-religious difference is the most critical divide

1. The key debate identified through the research is around **ethnic and religious difference within Burma**. Burmese across the political, social, and ethno-religious spectrum are discussing this issue. People are questioning whether a nation so divided can form a multi-ethnic/religious democracy.

2. Not only has Burma's multi-ethnic make-up been acknowledged in local discussions, but the **challenges faced by non-Bamar individuals (*taingyintha*[2]) have been recognized**.

   - Many say that the military's brutal treatment of Bamar protesters and communities has forced Bamar people to re-evaluate the military campaigns against *taingyintha* people over the last half-century.[3]

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2 According to official state rhetoric, Bamar are included as one of the taingyintha. In vernacular conversation, however, the term *taingyintha* is used to identify Myanmar's indigenous non-Bamar nationalities, differentiating them both from Bamar and from those - such as the Rohingya, Indians, and most Chinese - labeled as foreigners. Bamar enjoy a double position, standing both as and above the taingyintha category.

3 See Thawnghmung, Ardeth Maung and Khun Noah. "Myanmar's military coup and the elevation of the minority agenda?, Critical Asian Studies, 53:2 (2021): 297-309, at p 306.

3. The extra benefit enjoyed by many in the Bamar majority has been named: **"Burmanization"** or **"Bamar privilege,"** in English; or in Burmese: **"Bamar-lu-myo-gyi-wada"** ဗမာလူမျိုးကြီးဝါဒ or **"Bamar hmu pyu chin"** ဗမာမှုပြုခြင်း (although these latter two terms are not quite the same).

4. **These terms lack clear meanings. They may not reflect the experiences of those accused of benefitting / suffering by them:**

    • <u>Lacking clear meanings</u>: the various terms (in both English and Burmese) describe **divergent kinds of abuse**. Thus, when a specific term ("*Bamar-lu-myo-gyi-wada*") is spoken (by an activist or a political leader), what is heard by the audience may not match up with the speaker's intended meaning. This may lead to significant confusion and misunderstanding, as well as distrust and anger.

    • <u>Lack of a matchup between what the term seems to mean and people's actual experiences</u>: when a term ("Bamar privilege") is spoken but not explained, an audience may **not feel that the description accurately describes their experiences**. Even if an assertion of a term such as "Bamar privilege" is clarified - "Bamar enjoy privileges in Burmese society simply based on their language and their culture" - such assertions may be rejected based on recipients' interpretations of their own realities. For example, poor Bamar argue that they enjoy fewer privileges than upper class taingyintha. Or some Bamar (such as "Anyatha," the term for peasants from the rural upper Myanmar regions of Sagaing and Magwe) highlight that they are teased and discriminated against in ways that appear similar to what ethnics experience. Both are taunted for having accents. Both wear clothes that are not the same as Bamar in the cities, etc.

    • <u>Burmanization of militarization?</u>: some people, Bamar and *taingyintha*[4] both, understand Burmanization as complete domination coming from all Bamar people. They see it as channeled through the regimes in power (whether military or NLD). As a result, a certain set of political responses seems reasonable: such as **confederation** or even **secession**. By contrast, others we should talk about militarization rather than Burmanization. They say that getting rid of the military will make federalism easier.

5. **Patriots/*Myo Chits* may object to reform and pro-*taingyintha* polices even if class is considered:** Bamar people, and groups that people identify, rightly or wrongly, as being Bamar dominated (NUG), may support federalism. They may even support more ethnic symbols (history and culture) in public institutions (such as school curricula). This may be difficult to accept for those citizens used to Bamar supremacy. They may see these attempts as selling out (ရောင်းစား) the nation.

6. **The different interpretations can be categorized by social group**. Divergences in understandings are patterned depending on who is speaking / hearing the terms. Some key divisions concern **location** (whether people live in "Bamar spaces" in lowland Burma or in "non-Bamar spaces" in upland Burma) and

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4 The term "*taingyintha*" designates the 135 "national races" who the state asserts are indigenous to the territory of Myanmar.

class (elite subjects tend to have a different understanding of discrimination because of different interactions with the state and other cultural institutions).

7. *Lu-myo-gyi-wada* **(ethnic/racial supremacy) is not just coming from Bamar:**

- Sub-oppression: dominant / majority ethnicities within a particular sub-territory (states or regions) may reproduce kinds of discrimination that are similar in form to Bamar supremacy.

- Colorism / religious bigotry may be as relevant as non-Bamar-ness: Muslims or those who look South Asian face different exclusions than Buddhist *taingyintha*. They are also excluded in different ways than non-Buddhist taingyintha as well. So, the situation in Myanmar should not be presented as Bamar versus all non-Bamar.

Introduction and Motivation for the Study

In the aftermath of the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, Burmese citizens took to the streets to protest the seizure of power and derailment of the "transition" to quasi-democracy. Ignoring military prohibitions and threats, they also simultaneously took to social media, especially Facebook. They have used it so much, in fact, that it remains the central platform for conveying important messages and hosting debates about the revolution.[5] Our research was motivated by a desire to determine what these conversations were about – particularly how they might impact both the on-going revolution and the society that could be formed if the military is uprooted.

The need for these debates has become increasingly clear as the revolution has unfolded. This is neatly showcased by the widely reported dispute between allied groups that emerged in Kayah State over territory and local administration. A People's Administrative Body (PAB) in a Kayah state township attempted to set up local governance. The Kayah National People's Party (KNPP) saw this as the National Unity Government (NUG[6]) overstepping its authority, and not acting under the Federal Democratic Charter of Myanmar's National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC[7]). Federalism, often invoked by opponents of the military, was being tested in real time, and showed the challenges of implementing it.[8]

Figure 1. A popular meme/illustration that reads: "Uproot the Fascist Army"; source unknown

5 Ryan, Megan and Van Tran. "Social Media as A Double-Edged Sword: The Evolution of Digital Repression & Resistance in Post-Coup Myanmar," Prepared for V-Dem East Asia Regional Centre Online Workshop: "Democratic Backsliding in Southeast Asia?" 28-29-Mar-2022.

6 NUG is a parallel government created under the authority of the Federal Democracy Charter. It organizes a range of actors involved in the pro-democracy resistance. It covertly exercises the functions of the state, in instances where it is possible to evade SAC-imposed restrictions. It seeks to disrupt the flow of resources to the military and its allies. It also responds to growing humanitarian crisis in the country, as it seeks, in part, to maintain the population's willingness and ability to resist.

7 represents a range of Myanmar's pro-democracy actors in envisioning a future federal union. It provides a platform for political dialogue across a range of actors involved in opposition to the military. It has convened the most inclusive political dialogue in Myanmar's recent history, as participants have agreed to a new political settlement under the Federal Democracy Charter. For more, see https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/11/new-myanmar-forum-aims-unite-democratic-forces

8 See Frontier Myanmar's Political Insider, May 15, 2022, for details.

While some saw this as a moment that could threaten the delicate alliance between Bamar (the majority ethnicity of Burma) and non-Bamar peoples, others observed potential benefits. As Frontier Myanmar put it: "These are arguments worth having: the federalism debate in Myanmar has rarely had the opportunity to go beyond abstractions, so what's happening in Kayah offers an exciting glimpse of what a post-junta Myanmar might actually look like." And for the most part, calls for unity (*nyi-nyut-yay*) - ones that have been so prevalent in suppressing dissent in Burmese politics in the past[9]– have been acknowledged but also rejected. One of our key informants described how he felt the pros outweighed the cons: "On one hand the insulting online is a problem, but on the other hand the positive side of swearing is that people are working through things, online now. They are actually addressing them. It is a check and balance. I'm not sure they will listen carefully but at least there's a voice."

We do not focus in this report on different perspectives to simply highlight disagreement. Rather, we highlight how the debates can be productive. They are productive because Burmese revolutionaries are trying to work through their differences and create a common ground. They recognize that short-term tactical collaboration ("the enemy of my enemy is my friend") may fail to mobilize people. That what the movement needs to sustain itself through a long struggle are positive unifying visions of a better Myanmar. Further, while there is a risk that scarce resources are wasted on these fights, there is an equal risk that without spending effort to create a politics of shared values, the tactical alliance may falter ("we will work together against that which we both are not – the military"). Acknowledging these internal divisions appears to be a necessary element in building consensus. Indeed, if democratic movement leaders comprehend the divisions in Burmese society vis-a-vis the coup, then they can develop specific appeals to different sub-groups who currently are being ignored. Further, leaders can attempt to resolve conflicting positions, thereby unifying positions that may have hidden commonalities.

The following will briefly describe the research methods; then summarize the divisions within the movement; before focusing in on "Burmanization."

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9 Walton, Matthew. "The disciplining discourse of unity in Burmese politics." Journal of Burma Studies 19.1 (2015): 1-26.

Methods

A key objective of the report was to identify the range of voices that participated in debates around the future of Burma. We identified key places where people were discussing issues. These places were particularly but not exclusively on social media. We then traced the circulations and interactions of discourses. For example, we analyzed public statements by CSOs or activist groups (such as the General Strike Committee of Nationalities; Oway and Sitho magazines; etc), and of ethnic media outlets, EAO leaders, and ethnic CSOs. But we also hypothesized that certain figures became icons or representatives of specific sub-discourses, and so analyzed the public Facebook posts of Spring revolution leaders and commentators such as Tayzar San, Ei Thinzar Maung, Pancelo, and Naw May May Oo Mutraw (see Annex 1 for justification for their selection). This hypothesis turned out to be unsupported as many of the icons generalized their statements as they became more popular, turning into cheerleaders for the revolution as opposed to representative of specific sub-discourse. One of our key informant interviewees (R-11) said as much: "The social influencers don't really say anything. The more famous they get, the less they say." That said, because Facebook is a relatively democratized site – meaning that anyone is free to comment on a public post – we were able to track the comments of posts by icons, paying attention to how their statements were interpreted by average people (see Annex 1 for the methods we employed for examining their Facebook pages).

As we analyzed social media, we conducted 21 key informant interviews. The first set was with six icons, trying to determine how they crafted their messages. The remaining interviews were conducted during a field visit to Mae Sot and Chiang Mai. These interviews were with a different population than the icons and so we asked different questions. We asked them how they observed online discussions, how they aligned themselves with certain discourses and why, and what they thought of the divisions. These populations were mostly elites who occupy leadership positions with NUG, CSOs, or think-tanks. A handful were workers or teachers. We also analyzed as much of the English language literature on the coup as we could reasonably process, and the lead researcher incorporated analysis of secondary literature on Burmanization from the last 30 years as well.[10] During this process, respondents both across the political spectrum and across many different platforms identified ethnic discrimination as the dominant issue. And so, while we did not initially focus on ethno-religious conflict *per se*, as the research period continued, we began to ask explicitly about it.

Finally, as a caveat, given the rapid nature of the research and the qualitative focus, we do not claim representativeness in any of the findings outlined below. In fact, much the opposite: a key objective, particularly once moved away from icons, was to uncover discourses and perspectives that were marginal or otherwise ignored. A related objective was to determine new lines of inquiry to follow – new questions that members of the democracy movement could ask – rather than to determine clear and certain answers to those questions.

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10 see Annex 2 for lists literature consulted but not directly cited in this report.

Section 1.

Summary of Divisions

At this point, about two dozen reports or collected testimonials have attempted to characterize certain aspects of the anti-coup uprising, with a large proportion identifying "Gen Z" as an agent of outsized importance.[11] But other reports stress the importance of workers movements,[12] soldiers,[13] and ethnic nationalities.[14] Moreover, 'typical' NLD supporters have not received much analysis. And while Su Mon Thant does identify groups by their political affliations (democrats; federalists; intersectionists),[15] a method we endorse, the analysis does not stress conflcts and dissonance. Our research on the different discourses circulating on Burmese Facebook and conveyed through interviews, however, reveals the existence of many kinds of political disagreement. The following will outline the main domains of debate that we observed.

Tactical divisions

Figure 2. "Haven't we told you not to sit on the fence if you don't hold the same objectives with us?" Answer: "My butt is splitting"

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11 Jordt, Ingrid, Tharaphi Than, Sue Ye Lin. "How Generation Z galvanised a revolutionary movement against Myanmar's 2021 military coup," Singapore: ISEAS, 2021. RSNT (Real Stories Not Tales) "A Collection of Youth Stories from Post-Coup Myanmar," Part I (2021) and II (2022); Su Mon Thant, "In the wake of the coup: how Myanmar youth arose to fight for the nation," Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2021. Chiu, Francesca. "Personal struggles, political lens: how the coup unites and divides Myanmar's youth," TeaCircle Oxford, 17-Jan-2022.

12 Ko Maung. "Myanmar's Spring Revolution: a history from below," Open Democracy. 15-Dec-2021; Khin Thazin. "Keeping the Streets: Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement as Public Pedagogy," PRATA 1.1, 2021; Aung, Geoffrey. "Dead Generations", N+1, 8-Apr-2021.

13 Kyed, Helene, and Ah Lynn. "Defecting soldiers are a significant symbolic blow to Myanmar´s military rule." Danish Institute for International Studies, 16 November 2021.

14 Min Naing Soon. "The Current Crisis in Myanmar: The Different Political Position of the Mon People, Transnational Institute, 2-Nov-2021; Kun Wood. "The Need to Review Mon Politics: An Eight-Month Journey under Dictatorship," Transnational Institute, 2-Nov-2021; RSNT (2021; 2022).

15 Su Mon Thant (2021) defines "democrats" as those who "support an NLD government based on the 2020 election results, or rule by the exiled NUG, or even a new government formed on the basis of the CRPH's 'Federal Democracy Charter', which lays out a road map: draft a federal constitution, approve it in the people's assembly and form the people's government" (10); federalists "reject returning to the status quo with an NLD government formed from the results of the 2020 election, which they point out was held under the 'abolished' 2008 Constitution" (11); intersectional-ists stress "a just society that guarantees fundamental rights, justice and equality for all" (11)

Figure 3. "When will the revolution be over? Answer: A lot faster if you help those of us doing it by ourselves"

A year into the coup, leaders and average people were asking how long the fight would continue (figures 2 and 3 above). They asked what role violence should play. They asked whether social media was beneficial or whether it expose users to risk, and so forth. All these debates focused on the best way to efficiently defeat the SAC. Regarding violence, in September 2021 when the NUG officially called for a "people's defensive war", they were months behind the situation on the ground, as local People's Defense Forces (LPDFs) were already defending themselves, and underground guerillas were leading targeted (and not-so-targeted) bombings of regime members and installations in urban centers.

One key informant, the head of a prominent political party, joined regime events and gave us an interview where he endorsed engagement and negotiation. "The economy is falling down with massive IDPs and refuge population. We don't know how long this situation will last. We don't know what will happen after this anarchy. Everyone should think about this possible long, dark anarchy scenario. It is possible that Myanmar could be split into smaller nations: armed groups are governing their own territories." The specter of *min-meht-sa-yaiq*[16] (anarchy / situation with no king) has been used by the military for more than a half-century, but we see here how it is shared by elite politicians too. This does not mean that the key informant political leader and the military are the same, of course. But it is noteworthy that elite politicians of differing stripes similarly deploy a paternalistic narrative about what the people should fear the most. While others challenge this narrative, suggesting that more engagement could break the stalemate (figure 2 critiques being "on the fence" as an unsustainable position; figure 3 suggests that collective action could solve the problem), our research data suggests that the outcome of the on-going stalemate is ambiguous. In several interviews respondents described how "we must wait and see" or that "the revolution is coming but it will take time" even while acknowledging the exhaustion that people were facing, which suggests that time is not on the revolutionaries' side. Likewise, revolutionaries grappled with the fact that both (1) the military must be torn out by the roots and (2) the military is likely to persist in some form in the near future are simultaneously true.

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Figure 4. A popular meme describing the many divisions in Myanmar today
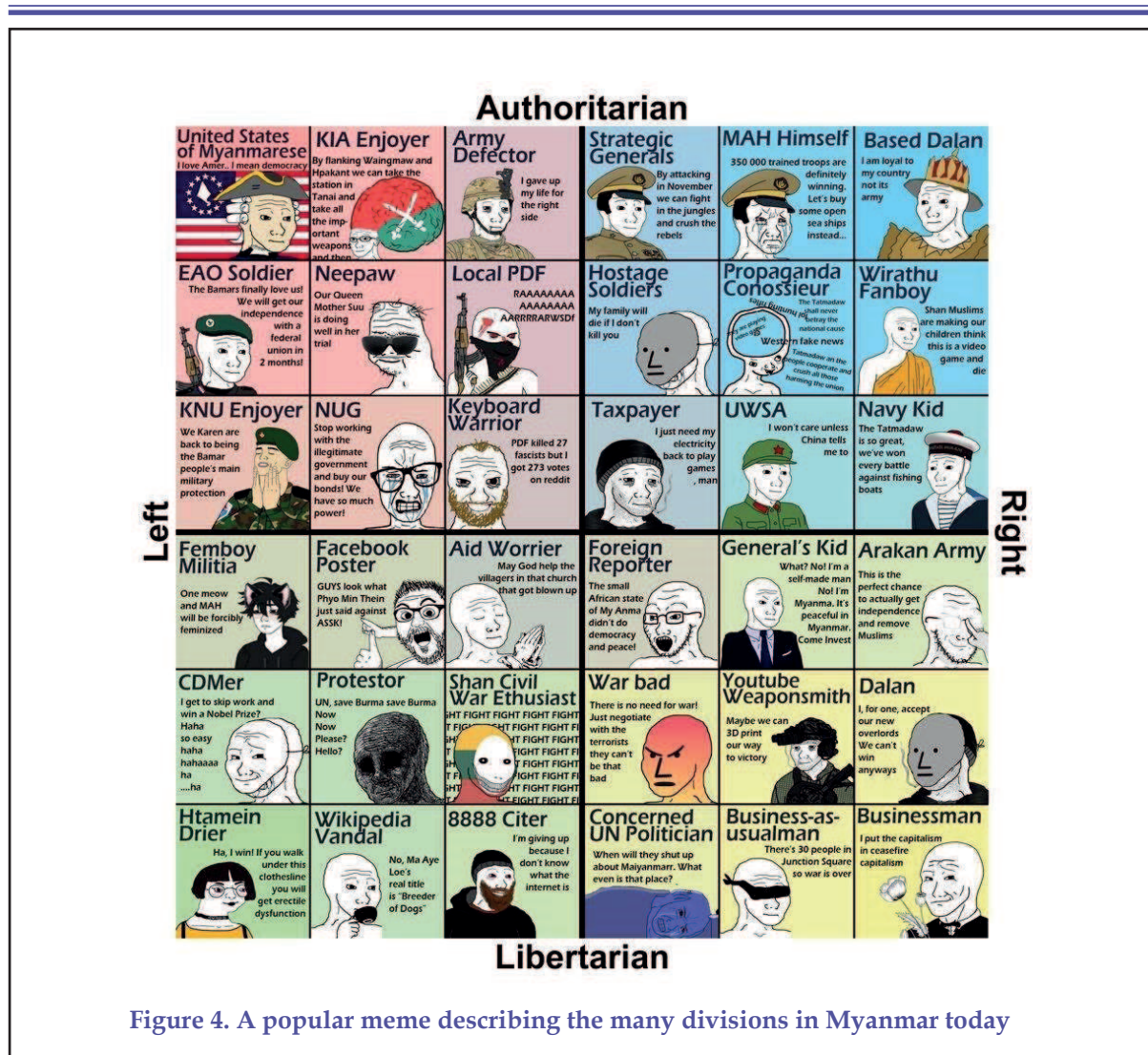
Moral debates / Strategic fears

As war has raged, PDFs have become an object of contention. This is because they are disconnected or decentralized groups. They share a commitment to protecting their constituencies and fighting the sit-tat, and, at least for some, perhaps little else. Some are loyal to the NUG and coordinate with one another.[17] But others (1) operate without a command control structure (there is no one in charge above the local level) and hence (2) they have little loyalty or concern with each other or other groups of organized violence. This has spurred a legitimacy crisis on the part of other political groups. For instance, the NUG receives funding from donations both from inside Burma and from the Burmese diaspora but has been accused of being disconnected from the actual fighting. We interviewed grassroots revolutionaries who felt that NUG took high salaries but were separated from the people (*pyi-thu-lu-du neh gin-gwa ta*).[18] While there is no proof that high-ranking NUG office holders are enjoying high salaries, interviews with grassroots activists who have remained in Yangon and Mandalay to fight the military reflect that this is the presumed reality. EAOs (such as Yawd Serk of the RCSS who has given interviews warning PDFs to not

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17 Independent Research Network. "Myanmar's Shifting Pro-Democracy Movement: Reviewing its adaptations and resilience amid mounting pressure." June 2022.
18 ပြည်သူလူထုနဲ့ကင်းကွာတာ

come to Shan state) appear as concerned with protecting their territory and business considerations as for leading ethno-nationalist goals (not to mention union goals).

Regarding the point that PDFs have no loyalty to other organizations, internecine fights between PDFs have broken out with tragic consequences. Some have identified these executions as evidence of impunity not befitting the revolution. One key informant, who we will call YT, an upper-middle-class young woman who publicly advocated for Rohingya even before the coup, condemned these PDFs. She advocated for a revolution of the spirit and a need to fight "with principles" rather than with pragmatism. Her public position on this was condemned in ways similar to the NUG. She was presented as out of touch and moralizing rather than in line with the realities that revolutionaries face. This leads to a broader point: the movement continues to debate who is a legitimate target for punishment, social or otherwise. Soldiers and police are reasonable targets... but what about their families? Local government administrators are reasonable targets... but what about their clerks or assistants? And what about re-engaging state institutions: should people seek health care at state hospitals? Should students refuse to return to school?[19] What does an EAO (Ethnic Armed Organization) have to do to become considered an ERO (Ethnic Revolutionary Organization)? In other words, do EROs hear moral demands made on them as reasonable? Or do they merely look out for their own organization or their ethnic constituents?

Generational divide

In the early days of the anti-coup uprising, global media treated the world to a barrage of clever protest signs, often written in English, held by courageous Burmese young people. Early on "Gen-Z" was identified as the leader of the revolution. Phrases such as "you have messed with the wrong generation" were used to explain why the current uprising would not fizzle out as previous ones had. Reports have endorsed this analysis, foregrounding Burma's young people.[20] These analyses seem to argue, only implicitly, that liberal reforms brought during the "transition" have given the young people the social media savvy and the hunger for democracy to make the backsliding of the coup unthinkable.

But a question is whether the young people identified in many of these media stories and reports were representative of the demographics. In other words, are all the people in Myanmar who constitute "Gen-Z" (in terms of birthdates) included in the discourse about Gen-Z? A Facebook video entitled "Southern Myanmar and Northern Myanmar, Difference in Pictures" (figure 5) marked the differences in class expression of people from the two areas. Southern Myanmar are fresh-faced youth protesters holding signs in English and wearing branded clothes. Darker skinned poorly dressed betel chewers were in the Northern Myanmar section.

When compared with each other, the differences are clear. Could the latter "northern Burma" people be easily incorporated under the "Gen Z" label? One of our key informants, a monk in living in the USA named Wisara, outlined the distinctions. He described the fact that the "transition" never arrived in upper Burma (anya). In a widely circulated post in which he announced the Anyathiyan Revolution, Wisara

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19 Chiu (2021).
20 See note 7

identified the fact that NGO projects on "federalism" and "democracy" remained in the cities, and that the "years have just flown by. Only the governors and generals have changed. There is no improvement in the area." He described the extreme poverty as *gan-yay thauq, myet-kyauk sa*, meaning that Anyatha drink the muddy water and eat the dry grass. If the revolution is presented as a collective rejection of returning to the previous era, this may overstate the progress brought by the transition, while erasing those damaged by or excluded from the transition.

Figure 5. A Facebook video juxtaposes protesters from "Southern Myanmar" (left) from "Northern Myanmar" (right). https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=130379329510589&id=100076155670226

Gender

A question asked by feminist activists is whether the revolution can succeed while leaving alone Burmese society's patriarchy. And if it must be addressed, how so? The key informant YT has created a social media platform campaign to highlight how sexual violence cuts across ethnicity in Myanmar – with Bamar women currently experiencing the kind of sexual harassment and abuse that ethnic woman has faced for decades. YT also highlights the intersections of class and gender, by featuring garment worker-focused content, including an ongoing campaign for garment workers (Fight Like a Garment Worker) and quotes by Audre Lorde about intersectional feminism. A question here is whether these campaigns are seen as central to the revolution itself – that if they are not addressed the revolution will fail, and why. Or are they timely campaigns, taking advantage of a moment when previous values are available for contestation. As YT put it, "I am trying to take advantage of the current vulnerability people have and … because the power institution like NLD itself is now vulnerable, that means we can input more ideas. And they became more receptive right so that's how I think we should change this challenge into an opportunity to change people's ideas."

Summary

All these topics are important in their own right. But we cannot do extended analysis into them, especially given that another key division is even more potent. Therefore, we encourage more research into these discrete topics, even as we turn to the key focus of our report: Burmanization.

Section 2.
Debates about Burmanization

While the debates above are important, the key domain of contention was found to be around ethnic and religious difference within the polity. We came to this conclusion based on the amount of posts on the issue and the number of different interpretations expressed. Moreover, many of the posts asked questions - "how can a nation so divided form a multi-ethnic/religious democracy?" - fundamental to the future of Myanmar. In this section we outline some of the varied understandings of ethnic relations in Burma and provide analysis of risks if issues are not clarified.

Figure 6. "You say we can't defeat Karenni region with airstrikes, missiles, and rockets? We just have to shoot this very typical (divide and conquer) rocket."

Mutual resentment between Bamar and taingyintha

In the weeks after the coup, mutual resentments between Bamar and *taingyintha* flared. Bamar discourses treated taingyintha instrumentally: they insisted on their participation and called for the *taingyintha* to sacrifice for the nation.[21] They demanded they grasp the chance to finally achieve federalism. They went as far as to advance ultimatums: help, or else! One statement (author unknown) circulating on Burmese Facebook read: "The *taingyintha* have only two paths. If they are not hand-in-hand with Daw Suu and her work, the only option they have is to work with than the sit-tat" (figure 7). Another (figure 8) said: "Some of the so-called EAOs are getting themselves away from the people and even sharing their interests with the dictators. What is the use of having them without cooperating with the people? The essence of federal democracy is now becoming like when you have arms, you have democracy. They in fact used to support democracy during the 1988 struggles for democracy."

21 Hannax, Moezat, and John Paul. "National Identity in Myanmar: Understanding Bamarr People's Perspectives on Burmanization and Ethnocentrism," Aruna Global South, March 2022.
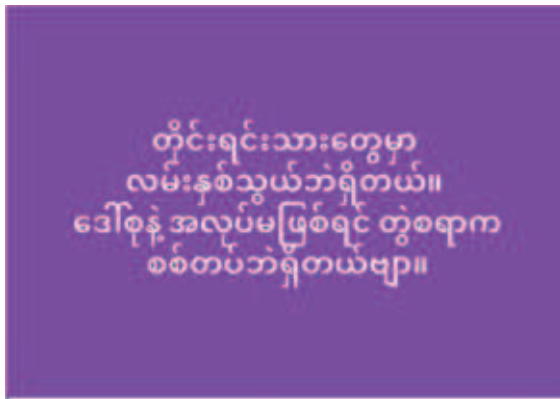
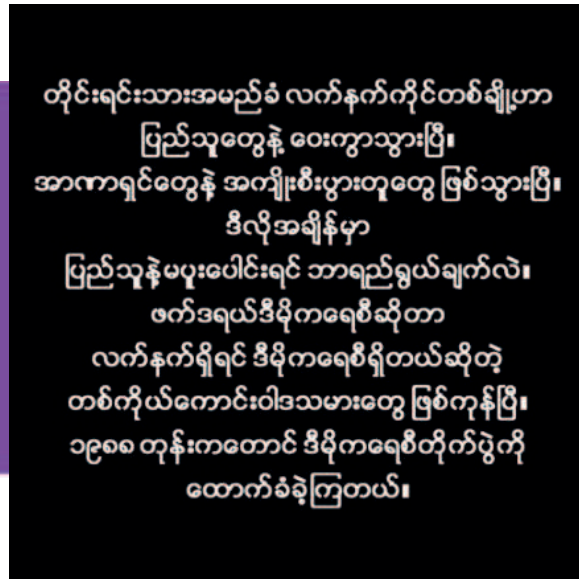Figure 7. "The taingyintha have only two paths…"

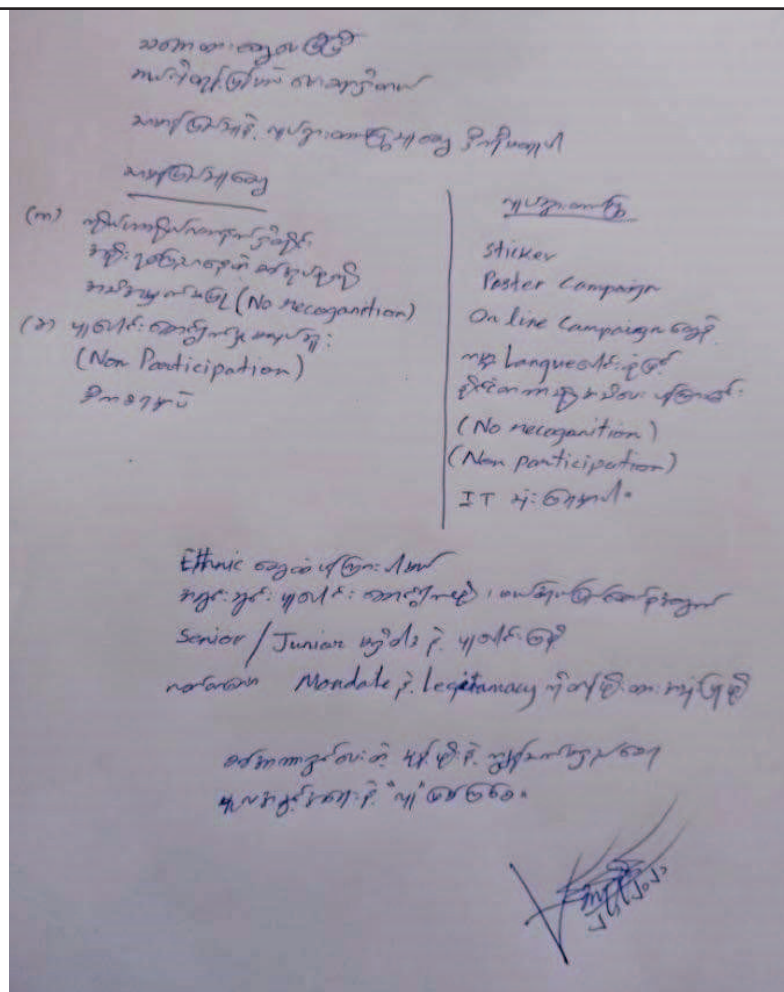

Figure 8. (right) Critique of EAOs

Figure 9. Min Ko Naing's handwritten letter, which includes the aside "beg the ethnics"

And when famous 88 Generation activist Min Ko Naing (MKN) sketched a description of plans for the CDM three days after the coup (figure 9), his appeal was noteworthy for describing the need to "beg the ethnics." *Taingyintha* responses, for their part, expressed hesitancy. They questioned whether they would want to fight to be part of a dysfunctional and bigoted country.[22] When MKN's message circulated on Facebook, people responded "when things are ok, you will ignore us again." Sai Wansai, a middle-class Shan pundit living in the diaspora, also condemned such appeals, tweeting: "It is entertaining false hope to thinking that EAOs will come to town on rescue missions."

But there were also other discourses that featured explicit apologies from Bamar. Others acknowledged the privilege that Bamar people enjoy. A convenient, and hence popular, way through which this apology was arrived at was through the narrative of Bamar ignorance: '*we never knew what the sit-tat was doing to the taingyintha communities, but it has become clear now that the sit-tat is terrorizing us.*' By relying on the power of the military state's propaganda to shield lowland masses from the truth, the Bamar are not held responsible for not knowing. This narrative has been repeated.[23] Whether non-Bamar people believed this narrative, they did seem warm to the revolution in the months after the coup. Sai Wansai, who had tweeted earlier about the unlikelihood that EAOs would leave their bases, was soon thereafter celebrating ethnic solidarity. Moreover, he was suggesting that EAOs could fulfil the international community's abdicated Responsibility to Protect. Such evolutions in thought could be explained by the excessive brutality of the sit-tat, and the bravery demonstrated by non-violent protesters in the Bamar heartland.
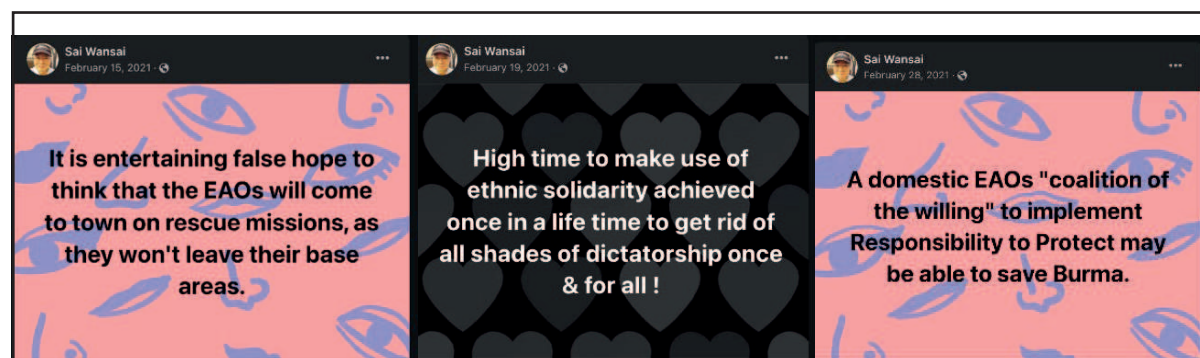
Figure 10. A progressing series of tweets by upper middle-class Shan pundit Sai Wansai

22 Khin Khin Mra. "Myanmar's Coup from the Eyes of Ethnic Minorities." New Mandala. 22 February 2021. https://www.newmandala.org/myanmarscoup-from-the-eyes-of-ethnic-minorities/
23 Kyed, Helene. "Hopes for a New Democracy in Myanmar: Multiethnic Unity against Military Power – Tea Circle." 2021. https://teacircleoxford.com/2021/03/19/hopesfor-a-new-democracy-in-myanmar-multiethnic-unity-against-military-power/

Diverse feedback about discrimination

As these conversations occurred, specific language congealed around the abuses endured by non-Bamar and the benefts enjoyed by Bamar. As the images below illustrate, not only were ethnic and religious discrimination issues foregrounded, but the phrase "*lumyo-gyi-wada*" (ethnic/racial supremacy) (re)emerged[24] as central. But what did this mean?

"Burmanization"

When asked what Burmanization was, YT mentioned military attacks on taingyintha areas, but stressed the insidious nature of the concept, in which oppression operated through institutions that privileged Bamar over others: "They are talking about the system, how the [Bamar] people were given privileges in this system... they were given privileges and priorities... [the country] has one uniform language, one uniform identity like Burmese, and one uniform religion." May May Oo Mutraw, a female middle-class Karen intellectual and leader, penned a pamphlet entitled the *Coalition of the Unwilling*, in which she described the ambivalence felt by *taingyintha* during the revolution. She described Burmanization similarly: in which ethnic individuals are "teased and bullied [for their accents], forced to learn Burmese literature, speak the Burmese language, honor Bamar history, get Bamar names, act like Bamar are the normal and common acts under the systems and policies in making ethnics to be Burman."[25] Burmanization here is based in indirect actions.

Other *taingyintha*, however, describe the phenomenon differently: Saw Eh Htoo, a middle-class Karen man, wrote recently that "The armed groups resist the government's Burmanization policies as much as the Burmese army fghts against them as part of the Burmanization strategy… Where possible, Ne Win's regime used forced labour, relocation, isolation and psychological techniques to Burmanize people."[26] According to Layeng Seng Ja, a Kachin intellectual, "Bamarnization refers to the process by which other ethnic and religious minorities are forced to conform with the majority" a coercion realized through "the permanent military presence in Kachin Land" which "promotes Bamarnization and ethnic cleansing."[27] Burmanization here is from direct coercion.

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24 While identifying the genealogies of (Bamar) lumyo-gyi-wada and "Burmanization" would be useful for this research, due to time and labor constraints, we have not been able to pursue it yet. We can only report that the first use of "Burmanization" occurred in Robert Holmes' 1967 article ["Burmese domestic policy: the politics of Burmanization," Asian Survey, although that first use took "Burmanization" to mean the cleansing of "foreign" elements (Western, PRC, and Indian capital) from the country after the 1962 military coup. In other words, "Burmanization" was not used as a way to differentiate Bamar from TYT, at least in this specific text. Burmanization that hews more closely to the contemporary definition appears to have begun to emerge in the 1990s and 2000s – see Gustaff Houtman (Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy, ILCAA Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa Monograph Series No. 33, 1999) and Mary Callahan ("Making Myanmars: Language, Territory, and Belonging in Post-Socialist Burma," in Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices (2004): 99-120). During this time the term was picked up and used by some EAOs.
25 See also Nai Hongsa ["The Way Forward for Peace, Stability and Progress in Burma/Myanmar," in Ashley South and Marie Lall, eds. Citizenship in Myanmar. Singapore: ISEAS (2018): 89-90] for a similar analysis.
26 Saw Eh Htoo. "Ne Win's echoes: Burmanization policies and peacebuilding in Myanmar today," in Schmidt-Leukel et al eds. Ethnic and Religious Diversity in Myanmar: Contested Identities, Bloomsbury Publishers (2021):63.
27 Layang Seng Ja. "Burmanization and its effects on the Kachin ethnic group in Myanmar," in Schmidt-Leukel et al eds. Ethnic and Religious Diversity in Myanmar: Contested Identities, Bloomsbury Publishers (2021): 93-5

Both these phenomena are described as Burmanization. We thus propose that "Burmanization" means the following

> *to transform, directly or indirectly, non-Bamar people into Bamar, and non-Bamar spaces and histories into Bamar ones. It tries to incorporate (within reason, along color lines) both directly through inter-marriage and indirectly through providing incentives for taingyintha to give up their culture and disincentives for them to assert that culture. Summing up, it expresses a desire to* **transform through incorporation.**

Our interviews helped clarify the point about incorporation.[28] Respondent 5, an NLD member, declared in a focus group interview that Burmanization could not exist in the country given that Bamar people deeply desired "white-skinned" ethnic girls. R5 claimed that this was a particularly "popular" choice – meaning that men chose them not just because of their beauty but because other people would think they are successful. If many Bama men do this, then intermarriage could have effects on demography. This is especially true if ka-bya (mixed progeny) more easily become Bamar. This is particularly likely because of patriarchy (if the father in a given pair is more often Bamar). It is also likely because of a logic of purity on the part of *taingyintha* which might reject a half-Bamar as non-taingyintha.[29] More research on this topic is clearly necessary. The irony here is that Respondent 5 rejected Burmanization while outlining an exemplary case of it.

Intermarriage at the family level is consistent with a broader discourse that denies or displaces the importance of ethnic existence, one articulated by academics and Burmese statesmen alike. This discourse argues that taingyintha may be currently distinct from Bamar, but taingyintha and Bamar share the same "stock,"[30] and will all become the same again through a gradual process of intermarriage. It should be added here that R5 drew a clear distinction between light-skinned *taingyintha* and dark-skinned people, particularly those who look South Asian. South Asians are not 'popular.' Therefore, they are less likely to be incorporated. This reminds analysts to beware the tendency to consider different minorities as belonging to a single category (non-Bamar/non-Buddhist).

"Burmanization" versus "Bamar supremacy"

Recall that R5 said that intermarriage disproved Burmanization. Why would he say this? The most likely explanation is that "Burmanization" means many things to many people. It is often used in Burmese elite discourses without translation into Burmese and may have been originally taken from academic discourses written in English.[31] When it is translated into Burmese, it is often given as *Bamar-lumyo-gyi-wada*. This translation is not without its problems. "Burmanization" implies transformation. It should likely be, and sometimes is, translated into Burmese

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28 See also Prasse-Freeman, Elliott and Andrew Ong. "Expulsion / incorporation: Valences of mass violence in Myanmar," in Eve Zucker and Ben Kiernan, eds Political Violence in Southeast Asia Since 1945, Routledge, 2021.
29 See Mehn Robert Zan (မန်းဘဇန်နှင့်ကရင့်တော်လှန်ရေး။ သစ္စာမြေ စာအုပ်တိုက်။ ၂၀၁၄။ 2014:196-97), the late chairperson of the KNU, for his take on the racial purity of the Karens and his views on Kabya.
30 Ne Win asserted that all the groups were Tibeto-Burman in a 1964 speech [Saw Eh Htoo (2021):61]
31 Its etymology is not completely clear. YT explained that she heard it first in English.

as *Bamar hmu pyu chin*[32] (with the use of *pyu*,[33] the verb for transformation or "to become"). By contrast, *Bamar-lumyo-gyi-wada* implies domination or supremacy and conveys a desire to maintain differences: "*we are superior and you are backwards and we want little to do with you.*" R5 seemed to be using the second meaning, because he identified Bamar desire for *taingyintha* girls as the opposite of supremacy. Thus, there is a need to be clear about what terms mean.

Whose privilege?

What's more, when a term ("Bamar privilege") is spoken but not explained, an audience may not feel that the description accurately describes their experiences. Even when an assertion of a term is specified - "By Burmanization I mean that Bamar enjoy privileges in Burmese society simply based on their language and their culture" - such assertions may be rejected based on recipients' interpretations of their own realities.

This has been argued explicitly by Anyatha people taking part in the "Anyatha revolution." *Anya* means upriver or upper Myanmar and describes those living in Sagaing and Magwe divisions. They have played a large role in the uprising.[34] Their large role in the revolution is not just in comparison with past uprisings. But it is large in comparison to other parts of the country: the front lines of the revolution are in *anya*. Their courage has hence compelled Burmese around the country to pay attention to what Anyatha say. They have in some cases rejected Bamar privilege claims based on their own daily lives in upper Burma.

TY, mentioned above, identified in our interview a middle-class female pundit from anya we will call LA. TY said that LA was her opponent, at least regarding TY's indirect Burmanization argument. TY pointed to a viral post penned by LA which identified how Anyatha experience ethnic animosity from *taingyintha* while suffering poverty that is amongst the worst in the country. LA questions whether "Burmanization" is fair to Anyatha. We interviewed LA as well. "That post is just to awaken the Bamar to realize how their identity is exploited by the military rulers to practice a divide and conquer method. We need to let unprivileged men know about male supremacy, patriarchy, and primogeniture if we want to see male engagement in gender equality activism. Similarly, if we want to see the military officers' cooperation in the revolution, we also need to talk about how dictatorship is sucking the blood of low-ranking officers. When we build a trans-local/transnational/transregional alliance, we need to seek a common ground that we can share together. This is class, which is needed to be intersected with other things (ethnicity, gender, and center-periphery concept)." LA calls for true "intersectionality" – which means that not every *taingyintha*, or woman, or sexual minority is oppressed in the same way. Class matters too. If people are poor, then their oppression as a *taingyintha*, as a woman, as a sexual minority might be much worse than if they were middle-class.

Further, we can question if Burmanization is a totalizing system of domination. If so, it would be reflected through any government (civilian or military). All Bamar people would benefit from it. If this was true, certain political responses – such as

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32 ဗမာမှုပြုခြင်း
33 ပြု   .
34 Callahan, Mary. "Myanmar's Dry Zone: The History of a Tinderbox," Fulcrum. 9-Feb-2022.

confederation or even secession – would be necessary for *taingyintha* to insist on. But let us examine Anyatha, and their benefts. Impoverished Anyatha do beneft by speaking Burmese. But they are also taunted for their accent, and for being poor. This appears to be fairly similar kind of exclusion that *taingyintha* face. LA argues that the sit-tat's militarization is more important, and getting rid of the military will make achieving federalism easier. A key point here is that Anyatha and other poor Bamar have a reason to challenge Burmanization too – as it is not helping them. At the very least, recognizing the harms that poor Bamar have suffered prevents resentment and backlash.

Finally, there is a concern that while many hopeful and courageous new solidarities are spoken about during this revolutionary moment, in the end, and even if a revolution is won, talk will prove cheap. In other words, it is diffcult for a Bamar, through the meager discourse of apology and "recognition of privilege," to credibly commit to a future politics of solidarity and equality. As Facebook comment about Min Ko Naing's letter above had it, "When things are ok again, you will forget about us [*taingyintha*]." This is why the class critique brought by Anyatha (not to mention students and unions) is so important: it forces a reconsideration of the players in the debate. Rather than Bamar as a group apologizing to *taingyintha* as a group, it suggests that poor Bamar and taingyintha have more in common with one another than with elites or cronies in their own ethnic groups. This may work to weaken the viability of those group identities (or at least elites' abilities to mobilize people through them), thereby upending old ways of doing politics.[35]

Who is saying what?

While we have mostly sought to highlight diverse discourses, we have also tried to identify who is saying what. The data is expressed in the following table:

Group	Political perspectives
Elite activists / *taingyintha* living in Bamar spaces:	Use "Burmanization" (in English, without translation, as a loan word) or *Bamar-lumyo-gyi-wada* (or occasionally Bamar-hmu-pyu-chin) to describe an overarching system of domination in which oppression works indirectly through institutions and structures.
Marginalized Bamar:	Their discourse foregrounds discrimination by urbane Bamar – taunting them for accent and lowly status (တောသား) – that mirrors complaints from *taingyintha*. Bamar peasants from other areas (Ayeyawaddy Delta) also share such complaints.

35 For similar analysis, see Jap, Jangai. "Protesters and Bystanders: Ethnic Minorities in the Pro-Democracy Revolution," Tea Circle, 22 March 2021.

Group	Political perspectives
Taingyintha living in non-Bamar spaces	Burmanization is understood not necessarily as a subtle system of exclusion, but as violent occupation, colonization (or attempted colonization) as a daily reality, and hence one reasonable solution is confederacy or secession.
NLD / NUG / nipaw	This group perhaps has the widest range of responses. Some have proposed affirmative action / reparations type policies (such as labeling only one state "Bamar state" rather than there being 7 divisions which are unmarked as Bamar). Others have acknowledged that the dream of a Myanmar union may not be shared by *taingyintha*, and thus that a confederacy structure – or even secession by certain states – would be preferable to ongoing abuses. On the other hand, others say that while Bamar supremacy exists, it is something that *taingyintha* must "get over;" that must wait until the revolution is complete to address; or that attending to is not worth the risk of the union's disintegration. Others go further, asserting that Burmanization or Bamar supremacy are over-stated or no longer exist (due to the revolutionary consciousness formed in the last year).
Nationalist Buddhists	while nationalist monk organizations condemned the coup, they also endorsed the USDP / military's pre-coup actions (challenging the NLD election victory) as consistent with the objectives of "protecting race and religion."[36] More research is needed to determine how they feel about accusations of Bamar Supremacy – whether they deny it exists; whether they acknowledge that it exists and assert that this is how it should be; etc.
Non-elite Burmese / non-elite *taingyintha* subjects	Generally, there is little research done on average perceptions of these relationships.[37]

Figure 11. Meme critiquing NLD supporters' supposed unwillingness to entertain federalism

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36 Iselin Frydenlund and co-authors have found them to be remarkably quiet in general (Frydenlund, Iselin, Pum Za Mang, Phyo Wai, and Susan Hayward. "Religious Responses to the Military Coup in Myanmar." The Review of Faith & International Affairs 19.3 (2021): 77-88.)

37 Ardeth Thawnghmung's work on the Karen is an exception (The 'Other' Karen in Myanmar: Ethnic Minorities and the Struggle without Arms, Lexington Books: New York, 2011).

Lu-myo-gyi-wada is not just for Bamar

A striking finding from the research was the general use of lumyo-gyi-wada (ethnic/racial supremacy) - it is as if now that the term has become popular, it has escaped its original connection with Bamar Supremacy, specifically, and become available for use by other marginalized people to describe their own situations. Indeed, our research identified numerous complaints by "double minorities" against the dominant / majority ethnicities within their particular sub-territories. See figure 12, where a Ta'ang complains about Shan *lumyo-gyi wada*.

Figure 12. The comment on the murder of Ta-Ang leaders' infant children: "Incidents like these are also the extremist acts of practitioners of lumyo-gyi wada."

As the Arakan Army ambitiously builds its mini-state, "the way of Rakhita" seems to welcome Rohingya only as second-class citizens.[38] In Kayah state, Kubo reports on the "Kayahfication" of the Karenni peoples.[39] Even while Ta-ang and Pa-O complain about Shan domination, Pa-O had coerced local non-Pa-O people (Intha, Taungyoe, Danu, etc) to classify themselves as Pa-O during the 2014 census.[40] Within Kachin hegemony (as R11 put it: "There is a Burmanization [equivalent] also for other ethnic people, for example Kachin to Shanni"[41]), there is also Jingpaw hegemony.[42] For such populations, while Burmese language is presented as symbolizing Burmanization, it is often identified as desirable as well,[43] and perhaps significantly desired by a doubly marginalized group. This is because a doubly marginalized group would otherwise likely have to submit to instruction in the locally-dominant group's language.

Moreover, colorism / religious bigotry may be as relevant as non-Bamarness for particular populations. A Muslim respondent with South Asian physiognomy described the necessity of rethinking who constitutes the "majority": from his perspective it is not Bamar but all 135 "official" taingyintha (meaning those recognized by the 1982 citizenship law) who enjoy that status. Taking these cases together, while Bamar-lu-myo-gyi-wada is identified as the central evil which if addressed will rectify all ethnic problems, the existence of localized hierarchies expressed through differential access to resources (both material and institutional) means that federalism will have to attend to these local power dynamics.

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38 Myat Thet Thitsar. Paper presented at EverJust conference, March 2022.
39 Kubo, Tadayuki. "Ethnocentrism or National Reconciliation: Rethinking Ethnic Relations and the History of Karenni." Journal of Burma Studies 25.2 (2021):155-191, see 169-170 and passim.
40 This was reflected by personal experience of a member of our research team.
41 see also Kyaw Yin Hlaing. "The Politics of Language Policy in Myanmar: Imagining Togetherness, Practicing Difference?." Language, nation and development in Southeast Asia. ISEAS (2007):150-180 at p 156.
42 B Seng. "Internal Conflicts of Kachin Ethnicities: Identity Politics Among the Six Tribes of the Kachin Ethnic Group," Aruna Global South. 24 March 2022; Sadan (2013).
43 Choo, Liyun Wendy. "Of citizens and strangers: the privilege of being Burman." Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education (2022): 1-18; Lall, Marie. "The value of Bamar-saga: minorities within minorities' views in Shan and Rakhine States." Language and Education 35.3 (2021): 204-225; Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007.

Section 3.
Conclusion

The report has used various data sources (social media statements, key informant interviews, and close readings of the academic and policy literature before and after the coup) to identify the key fault lines dividing participants in the anti-coup uprising. The key findings from this analysis include:

1. **Online space is critical forum for airing concerns and debating values**. Even though the SAC has tried to police social media space, anti-coup participants have continued to use it. While there are security concerns to connecting on social media, it is arguably more secure than meeting face-to-face. It is certainly more efficient, allowing messages to gain wide audiences. It is also more democratic, as the comments section in Facebook has allowed diverse opinions to be raised.

2. **Discussions are volatile but valuable:** The coup has authorized a broader range of opinion. No one can any longer say, "Do not say that, it may threaten the delicate transition." Therefore there are many opinions, including people taking drastic positions: identifying all Bamar with the military's chauvinism; suggesting that secession is the only viable option. But others have used this space to learn more about perspectives different than their own. Respondents commented that they benefitted from observing open debates.

3. **Five key divisions were identified:**

    1. <u>Tactical</u>: whether to resist using violence or not; whether to have a strong command-control structure; etc.

    2. <u>Moral debates</u>: some believe that the revolution needs to act "by all means necessary" to defeat SAC. Others counter by insisting that the revolution needs to be a moral revolution as well as a strategic one.

    3. <u>Generational divide hiding a class divide</u>: while "Gen Z" has received a great deal of attention, closer examination suggests that "Gen Z" as an identity is more easily represented by middle-class youth.

    4. <u>Gender divisions stressed</u>: leaders stress that the revolution must address patriarchy as well, so as to undermine the underlying values that make the military mindset possible.

    5. <u>Race/ethnicity/religion</u>:

        - "Burman supremacy (*lu-mo-gyi wada*)," Burmanization, and other terms have dominated discussions. These terms are ambiguous: contain different meanings to different people.

        - Non-Bamar people are skeptical of participating in the revolution if they do not see issues of discrimination being addressed.

        - *Lu-myo-gyi wada* is not just for Bamar: "regionally-dominant minorities" (such as Kachin, Shan, etc) have been accused by other minorities of discrimination.

        - Colorism / religious bigotry is identified by those suffering it as different – and perhaps worse – than standard *lu-mo-gyi wada*

The following set of recommendations are geared towards leaders within the democratic movement, activists and grassroots civil society, and international development partners. They cover improving the nature of discussions, addressing current fault lines, with a focus on the issues surrounding Burmanization and the opportunity provided by the moment. We recognize the issues raised are complex and our recommendations are intended as starting points for others to build off and debate.

Recommendations to leaders of the democratic movement

- **Articulate clear visions:** Set a positive vision of the changes you want to see in the country (beyond just removing the SAC), to inspire those whose will to fight is falling.

- **Acknowledge diverse opinions and experiences**: Foundationally, all stakeholders can recognize the existence of diverse divisions and varied perspectives on those divisions. This is inevitable given that Myanmar faces multiple challenges, is a country of vast diversity, and has suffered a long history of authoritarianism. The nature of the transition, in which the military's thin skin influenced the realm of acceptable discourse, prevented these issues from being adequately addressed until now.

- **Do not quell discussion and disagreement. These are difficult issues and need space to be resolved:** Nation building is never easy. Disagreement is important for democracy. In fact, encouraging debate is one of the core ways in which the democratic movement is different to the SAC. The military silences dissent and excludes. This movement represents a newfound openness and place for dialogue.

- **Active participation can positively direct democratic discussions:** Online discussions may not, on their own, necessarily result in improved understanding and advancement on issues. So-called "trolls" or the "loudest voices" may dominate and distort these spaces. Leaders, however, can play a role in directing discussions. They can encourage others to adhere to values: such as civility and presumption of good intentions; respect for difference. The personal examples they set in leaders' communication can be powerful.

- **Temper talk about "Gen Z" with talk about other strugglers, such as Anyatha:** to balance against the way that the "Gen Z" narrative serves to over-emphasize the role of the middle class, NUG should counter by highlighting the Anyatha Revolution.

- **Consider gendered discrimination:** Recognizing how patriarchy influences other harms can help those harms be better understood and can mobilize those – particularly women but not limited to them – who are concerned with these issues.

- **Acknowledge, reflect on, and address "Burmanization" (and related terms):**

  - <u>Recognize terminological ambiguity</u>: The confusions over "Burmanization" and other ways of describing ethnic discrimination

means that different actors may be quite literally talking past each other: the words they are using and the presumptions they hold about how race/religion/ethnicity impact lives in the country may not match up with others.

- ○ <u>Clarify terms</u>: ensure that when using terms, speakers use specific examples to show the listener how they are using them.

- ○ <u>Address symbolic grievance with easy fixes</u>:

    - • re-visit past policies on naming infrastructure (bridges) and the placement of statues (avoid installing Bamar heroes in spaces where non-Bamar live),

    - • continue to promote diversity in hiring practices within NUG;

    - • identify that curriculum reform is necessary and possible, and begin planning for it.

- ○ <u>Recognize that apologies are necessary but not sufficient</u>: to retain movement cohesion, *taingyintha* interests must be promoted (with potential short-term losses to Bamar). An early positive example has been the greater ethnic representation in NUG and NUCC. While such steps now will build trust, they will run the risk of dismissal as superficial symbolic overtures unless devolution of power and resources are also forthcoming.

- ○ <u>"Federalism" therefore must be clarified, defined by what it would grant and guarantee to various constituencies</u>: specific policies could include reparative resource redistribution, revenue sharing, decentralized decision-making, and rebuilding of the state's institutional culture (historical narratives, school textbooks; museums; naming practices; statues).

- ○ <u>Understand that for religious minorities or "double minorities" living in taingyintha areas, addressing "Burmanization" may not improve their lives</u>, as localized oppression would remain or even be enhanced.

- ○ <u>Recognize that addressing Burmanization without addressing class oppression risks backlash from average Bamar</u> who do not enjoy privileges that offset poverty and class discrimination. Include messaging that stresses that promoting equality should not imply that things will get worse off for Bamar, and that, given the reduction in animosity across ethnicities, could improve daily life.

- ○ <u>Address *myo-chits* (patriots) but recognize that some will not be convinced</u>: NUG leaders, especially Bamar ones, must (a) recognize the zero-sum nature of the politics in which many Bamar may not want to relinquish it; (b) NUG leaders must attempt to convince those constituents to give up the tainted "gift" of racial superiority, arguing that just as Bamar hated British colonization, many *taingyintha* see Bamar rule in similar terms.

Recommendations for activists and grassroots civil society

- **Apply pressure:** Recognize that civil society has an important role to play in terms of pushing forward discourse and applying pressure on leadership. It must balance the desire to support elite narratives with the opportunity to challenge those narratives with their own experiences. For instance, they can clarify and sharpen understanding of **where, when, for whom**, and **with what effects** does something like "Burmanization" (or related terms) operate.

- **Mediate and shape discussions:** Recognize the important role that civil society plays in this process as potential mediators of discussions. They are the aggregators and analyzers of community perspectives and potential channels of this local information to other groups. Civil society will be particularly powerful in shaping the environment in which discussions and debate are had, as they can be seen as more impartial. It can condemn ad-hominin attacks and promote civility.

- **Address moral divisions by addressing consequences:** critics should recognize that morals and ethics do not exist in a vacuum – that it is easy to condemn from afar without having faced the vulnerability and assessed the situation on the ground. That said, while recognizing their own limitations, they can outline the risks to the movement of being seen as using the same tactics as the immoral and brutal SAC.

Recommendations for international development partners

- **Consider how they might creatively support locally driven dialogue and discussion.** Partners can entertain different modalities for working through these issues. This can go beyond working directly with CSOs. Partners can, for example, solicit locally-driven culture and arts projects, essay competitions, online discussions and debates, and video and film.

- **Listen to non-elites.** When international actors seek input, from Bamar or *taingyintha*, they too often listen to elites. These elites often speak implicitly for their entire ethnic, racial, or religious group, giving necessarily partial perspectives. This does not mean these interlocutors are acting in bad faith, it is just a reality of politics and different lived experiences: they are motivated to describe affairs in ways that buttress their own worldviews and institutional positions. International actors must balance this partiality by speaking to those who would otherwise be represented. They should then pay attention to differences in the way that the variety of actors describe reality.

- **Alter representational practices:** reports and policy statements cannot describe an individual simply as "a Bamar" or "a Kachin" or "a Rohingya," for instance. They must include information about class, gender, language, and location as well – as these may be more predictive of patterns of discrimination and oppression than the ethnic label.

- **Be patient:** Recognize that working through these perspectives will take time and will not follow a linear "clean" process. Expectations to the contrary

run counter to the historical experiences of nation building in development practitioners' own countries.

We can conclude by reiterating the importance of recognizing the diversity of opinions and perspectives that exist on issues pertaining to Myanmar's multi-ethnic/religious polity, and to continue to ask questions, especially of lower-class Burmese of all ethnicities and religions, as they are too often represented rather than allowed to represent themselves. This will permit a broader conversation about Myanmar's future and may support the ongoing struggle for an inclusive national identity.

Annex (1) - Icons and social media analysis methods

Most of these large figures will have hundreds of posts over the last 13 months, and so it is unrealistic to go through every one of them with a close read. So how can we choose which ones to look at? We suggest a "skim, select, and scrutinize" method

1. **Skim:** What are the main posts about? What are the central messages? What are the main arguments? Who is the Icon distinguishing him/herself from? Are their engagements from followers?

   - How many followers?

   - How many average likes / shares per post?

2. **Select:** Are there particular posts that went (relatively) "viral"? Meaning: (1) does the figure have a baseline mean of X number of likes, shares, comments on a given post, but certain posts will have some multiple (3x or 4x) and (2) did they become an object that many commentators from other sub-groups come to discuss? It also involves identifying how certain positions either circulate from one place to another or are generated independently.

3. **Scrutinize:** Pick out five to ten representative posts, and then quotations or paragraphs from those posts, in which the Icon makes arguments that distinguish him/her from others. Be sure to attempt to capture comments that both agree and contest the main message. [These are not necessarily the 'viral' ones (as with "select" above), but rather then ones where they are making their points in particularly distinctive / noteworthy ways.]

Analytical questions to address when looking through the data

What are the dominant arguments, stances, positions?

1. How would you characterize the discourse: unity, federalism, gender, ethnicity, discrimination/marginalization, unearned privilege, and any other intersectionality elements?

2. Who are their main targets / antagonists?

3. Is there message marginal or hegemonic?

Does the person qualify as an Icon and why? To what extent does it conform to our hypothesis of an icon combining several critical elements:

1. willingness of the CDM leader to do something (typically leading protest, armed actions, etc);

2. in which his/her image is circulated, and people begin to identity the person as a bona fide struggler (at this point we observe that they often get turned into cartoons or rendered in paintings); then

3. the person then uses social media platform to begin articulating particular approaches (done in a charismatic vernacular that connects with a broad range of people) that are in mild distinction with other perspectives

4. such that: those perspectives / stances start to get associated with those figures;

5. such that those figures can be seen leading not just revolutionary action but discourse on revolutionary consciousness.

[Do your Icons have different experiences that would make us refine our definition just above?]

Assess the hypothesis that the social influencers actually do not really say much of anything in their posts. Has the social media space become occupied by banality, and the people who want to say something interesting are crowded out, and so those who want to learn are left with nothing?

Is it possible to assess whether they have changed over time? Assess the hypothesis that there's a double edge in becoming an icon: both able to convey a perspective but having it watered down to the point where it no longer marks a contrast / conflict with others. Assess the related hypothesis that they get less conflictual as they get more popular: (example: when ETZM wore the sign that said "UN ignore us" that could be seen as a pretty powerful moment. But maybe what she has done since then has been pretty boring as she has become more famous / or for another reason such as becoming co-opted by the NUG bureaucratic system?

Annex (2) - Works consulted but not cited

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