

**International
Institute of
Social Studies**

Erasmus

In Search of *Home*
**Exploring Myanmarese Diasporas Dynamics through
Transnational Engagement in Dutch and Danish Contexts**

A Research Paper presented by:

Seng Bu
(Myanmar)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Human Rights, Gender and Conflict Studies in Social Justice
Perspectives**
(SJP)

Specialization:

Conflict and Peace Studies

Members of the Examining Committee:

Shyamika Jayasundara-Smits
Roy Huijsmans

The Hague, The Netherlands
December 2022

Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the International Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

Inquiries:

International Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460
e: info@iss.nl
w: www.iss.nl
fb: <http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl>
twitter: [@issnl](https://twitter.com/issnl)

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

Contents

Acknowledgement	vi
Abstract	vii
Relevance to Development Studies	ix
Chapter 1	1
1.1 Facing the Fear, A War Within	1
1.2 Research Problem Statement	2
1.3 Research Questions	3
1.4 Organization of the Study	3
Chapter 2 A Methodology Tragedy	4
2.1 Ethnographic Approach: Qualitative Methodology	4
2.1.1 Sharing Meal as A Method	4
2.1.2 Introducing Participants	5
2.1.3 Individual Interviews	5
2.1.4 Visual Ethnography	6
2.1.5 Research Sites Selection	6
2.2 Positionality and Critical Reflexivity	7
2.3 Dilemmas and Ethics	8
2.4 Limitations	9
Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework	10
3.1 Diasporas	10
3.2 Transnational Engagement	10
3.3 Understanding Chosen Trauma, Identity and Belonging	11
Chapter 4 Identities and Chosen Trauma	13
4.1 Sunrise, Frog Drum and Water Buffalo Horn	13
4.2 "I am a Naga and I live as a Naga"	15
4.3 Conclusion	17
Chapter 5 Belonging	18
5.1 Homemaking with Arts, Rice and Citizenship	18
5.2 Homemaking with <i>Mabkaw ban</i>	20
5.3 Homemaking with Kachin Flag	22
5.4 Conclusion	24
Chapter 6 Living the Coup From Thousand Miles Away	25
6.1 No Change in Engagement	25
6.2 The Coup, New Abnormal	27
6.3 The Coup, A Big Change	29
6.4 The Pressure Cooker	30
6.5 Conclusion	31
Chapter 7 Cross-cutting Boundaries	32

7.1 Belief and Belonging	32
7.2 Situating Intergeneration and Culture	35
7.3 Division and Unity	38
7.4 Conclusion	40
Chapter 8 Conclusion	42
References	47

List of Photographs

Photograph 1- taken by the author, sharing meal with Moe Moe and Tun Kyaw’s family in Woerden, the Netherlands	5
Photograph 2- taken by the author: home space of Moe Moe, and Tun Kyaw, Woerden, the Netherlands	13
Photograph 3- taken by Aung Aung, making home with Shin-Pyu Ceremony art, Bramming, Denmark	18
Photograph 4-taken by the author: Tsa Ba plucking herbs in his backyard garden to give me as a gift, Amsterdam	20
Photograph 5- taken by the author: home space of Tsa and Naung Yan in Holsted, Denmark	22
Photograph 6- taken by the author: the receipt book for ‘Kachin Refugee Endowment’ shared by Tsa	23
Photograph 7-shared by Numri to show why she is engaging back to the conflict in Myanmar. This hut is made by mud, built by the youths in the Je Yang IDP camp, Laiza	27
Photograph 8-taken by the author during the Children’s Day celebration in KBC, the Netherlands	33
Photograph 9-taken by the author at the kitchen of Tsa Ba, the Netherlands	34
Photograph 10-shared by Tsa Ba to show how he has been engaging back to home, Myanmar	36
Photograph 11-taken by the author at Thaw Hlan Thingyan, first event in Hoofddorp, the Netherlands, organized by the Myanmar diasporas on 23 April 2022	36
Photograph 12-shared by Gue Nge to show his transnational engagement on the street of the Netherlands to the conflict in Myanmar	38
Photograph 13- taken by the author at <i>Thaw Hlawn Thingyan</i> first event in Hoofddorp, the Netherlands, organized by the Myanmar diasporas on 23 April 2022	40

List of Figures

Figure 1 The author's illustration: Role of Religion in Myanmar diasporas transnational engagement	32
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 Demographic of participants	44
Appendix 2 Flyer for the research participants in Burmese and Jinghpaw	45
Appendix 3 Semi-structured Interview Questions	46

List of Acronyms

CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
CDM-ers	People who are involved in Civil Disobedience Movement
E.U	European Union
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ISS	International Institute of Social Studies
KBC	Kachin Baptist Convention
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KNO	Kachin National Organization
KNU	Karen National Union
KWAT	Kachin Women's Association Thailand
NLD	National League Democracy
NUG	National Unity Government
PDF	People Defence Force
UN	United Nations
U.K	United Kingdom
U.S	United States

Acknowledgement

This research journey has been a long walk, with a lot of hesitation, doubts, and fear throughout. I am glad that I did not give up on halfway and took this path as a turning point in my life. Finishing this research paper, reaching to the end, however, is not the end for me. I believe it is the beginning of another journey in the pursuit of ‘peace’ if I may humbly say. I am grateful for each of the participants who welcome me with a warm smile, a kind heart and not less to say, delicious meals. Your dearness, friendship and trust make me feel home whenever and wherever I am with you. I tried to right the wrongs by conveying your voice representing the living reality for the justice. At least, I hope I didn’t let you down.

My supervisor, Shyamika, no words will fill my gratitude for your tireless support to me by accepting who I am. I am so much relieved that my “stubbornness” does not stop you. My second reader, Roy, you help me to be persistent and stay focus. Your critical feedback has been invaluable from the scratch to the final paper in augmenting “less is more”. Thanks to the dear friends from near and far, scholars from ISS and my colleagues from VR who tried to listen during my breakdowns and cheer me up.

Respectful *Thay* (Thicht Nhat Hanh), the brothers and sisters from Plum Village community, although you may not know, you shed light in my way. I am forever grateful for your dharma talks which guides me to smile at my anxiety, stay healthy, connect, and engage every moment in life so that ‘peace’ starts with me.

To my dear siblings, *Nuji*, *Anu*, and *Awa*, you hold the hands tight in many difficult situations and raise me up to be who I am today. Your love and support make me believe to have faith in life. Last but not least, dear Jan and Noah, thanks for always having my back and let me live my wildest dreams. Because of you, I learn to stay grounded through up-s and down-s of slides in the parks and find joy in the corners of hike and seek play. *Tsam ra ai*.

Without each of you (yes you!), the journey would not have been the same!

Grai chyeju kaba sai. ❤️🕊️

Ahbu/Seng

Abstract

This research aims to explore the Myanmar diasporas dynamics living in the Netherlands and Denmark with various forms of their engagement in the conflict back home, Myanmar. To do so, I looked at the interrelation of chosen trauma, identities, and belonging of Myanmar diasporas manifested in their transnational engagement through ethnographic fieldwork. I argue that contextualizing the decades-long conflict intensified with the 2021 military coup is a key to uncovering identity construction and belongingness that are not mutually exclusive. As well it is crucial to comprehend how 14 Myanmar diasporas make sense of themselves and *home*. This encompassed comprehension is unfolded from the nuances that I connected through the participants' stories over sharing meals, semi-structured individual interviews, visual ethnography, participatory observation and paying attention to the social surrogates embedded in everyday micro-practices. And beyond, the heterogeneity of Myanmar diasporas dynamics is unpacked by the extensive observation of cross-cutting boundaries particularly, religious, and spiritual belief, intergeneration, and culturalization of transnational engagement. Hence, this study sought to bridge the gap in understanding the Myanmar diasporas dynamic residing in Dutch and Danish contexts through transnational engagement.

Ga Hpaw – Ga Lat (Abstract in Jinghpaw)

Ndai tangshawn laika gaw sin-na maga de na Europe mungdan ni rai ai Netherlands hte Denmark gaw shanu nga ai Myen Mung na du wa ai Myit-su ni a mahkrum madup hpe, Myit-su ni hku na Myen Mung gaw byin taw nga ai majan sinyam gaw shang lawm taw ai lam ni hpe hka ja let chye na lu na matu yaw shada da ai. Myusha hte htunghking lailen hte sen ai ningmu (Ethnography) hpe lang sa n na hka ja da ai ndai laika gaw, majan hpe myit machyi ma sin ai lam ni, shinggyim masha the myu sha langai hpang a manu shadan ai bung pre lam ni, ti nang hte sen ai ngu hkam la da ai shara, nga sat nga bra lam, htunghking lai len ni gaw Myit-su ni Myen Mung na majan sinyam hpe shanglawm taw ai lam hta ga ra hku makit hkun din nga ai kun ngu san lang na re.

Dai majaw shaning law law byin lai wa sai majan gaw lai wa sai 2021 ning gaw Myen hpyen dap hkru na bai gumshen ai a maran e grau n na sawn wa ai lam gaw shinggyim masha the myu sha langai hpang a manu shadan ai bung pre lam ni, ti nang hte sen ai ngu hkam la da ai shara, nga sat nga bra lam, htunghking lai len ni byin wa ai hte grai matut mahkai nga taw ai hpe a tsawm chyena na a hkyak la ai ngu na ngai shayi hku na ga saw da n ngai. Ndai hku chyena ai lam gaw, ndai tangshawn laika na matu ngai hte ga gahti galai shaga da ai Myen Mung de na du wa ai Myit-su marai (14) hkru n na tinang a myusha, htunghking bung pre ai lam ni hte “nta” ngu ai hpe ga ra hku myit hkamsha tsum ru da ai hpe hka ja chyena na matu manu mana a hkyak la ai.

Ndai zawn matut manoi taw nga ai ningmu ni gaw, Myit-su ni hte rau lu rau sha, tsun shaga chyahta, tsumla ni hpe yu hkaja la na, Myit-su ni shanglawm ai poi hkan ngai shayi hku na sa shanglawm na hka ja la ai re ga ai. Dai hta n ga, makam masham lam, asak prak shai hkat ai lam, htunghking lai len lam ni hpe ma hkaja ti Myit-su ni a ningmu shai hkat ai lam ni hpe ma chyena lu ga ai. Dai majaw, Netherlands hte Denmark mungdan ni de du shanu nga ai Myen Mung na Myit-su ni a lam hpe Mungkan hpaji hparat hkaja ai lam hta machye machyan ning ra taw ai hpe hpaji jat ai hkru na ma yaw shada let, n dai tangshawn laika hpe ka dat n ngai.

မိတ်ဆက် (Abstract in Burmese)

ယခုစာတမ်းက နယ်သာလန်နဲ့ ဒိန်းမတ်နိုင်ငံတွေမှာ အခြေချနေထိုင်ကြတဲ့ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံမှရောက်လာတဲ့သူတွေရဲ့ ပြောင်းလဲနေတဲ့လူ့သဘောတရားတွေကို မြန်မာပြည်မှာဖြစ်ပေါ်နေတဲ့ ပဋိပက္ခတွေမှာ သူတို့ရဲ့ပါဝင်မှုတွေကိုလေ့လာရင်း နားလည်ဖို့ရည်ရွယ်ပါတယ်။ လူမျိုးနှင့်ယဉ်ကျေးမှုသရုပ်ခွဲခြင်းပညာရပ် (Ethnography) အခြေပြုပြီး လေ့လာထားတဲ့ဒီစာတမ်းမှာ ဥပမာအခြေချ မြန်မာလူမျိုးတွေအနေနဲ့ ပဋိပက္ခကြောင့်ဖြစ်ပေါ်နေတဲ့စိတ်ဒဏ်ရာတွေ၊ သူတို့ရဲ့ကိုယ်ပိုင်လက္ခဏာတွေနဲ့ သူတို့နဲ့သက်ဆိုင်တယ်လို့ခံယူထားတဲ့ နေရာ၊ လူမျိုး၊ ယဉ်ကျေးမှုမလေ့ထုံးတမ်းနဲ့ ကိုးကွယ်သက်ဝင်မှုတွေက မြန်မာပြည်မှာဖြစ်ပေါ်နေတဲ့ ပဋိပက္ခတွေမှာ သူတို့ရဲ့ပါဝင်ပတ်သက်မှုတွေနဲ့ ဘယ်လိုဆက်စပ်မှုရှိတယ်ဆိုတာကို စူးစမ်းလေ့လာထားပါတယ်။

ဆယ်စုနှစ်များစွာကြာပြီဖြစ်တဲ့ ပဋိပက္ခဟာ ၂၀၂၁ခုနှစ်စစ်အာဏာသိမ်းပြီးနောက်ပိုင်းမှာတော့ ပိုပြီးပြင်းထန်လာတာကြောင့် မြန်မာလူမျိုးတွေရဲ့ ကိုယ်ပိုင်လက္ခဏာထိန်းသိမ်းသတ်မှတ်မှု၊ သူတို့နဲ့သက်ဆိုင်တယ်လို့ခံယူထားတဲ့ နေရာ၊ လူမျိုး၊ ယဉ်ကျေးမှုမလေ့ထုံးတမ်းတွေကိုနားလည်ဖို့ဆိုရင် ဒီပဋိပက္ခဖြစ်တည်မှုနဲ့ ခွဲခြားဆန်းစစ်လို့မရဖူးဆိုတာကို ကျမကအဆိုတင်သွင်းထားပါတယ်။ ပြီးတော့ ဒီလိုလုံးစေ့ပတ်စေ့နားလည်ဖို့ကြိုးစားခြင်းကသာ ကျမစာတမ်းပြုစုထားတဲ့ မြန်မာလူမျိုး (၁၄) ဦးအနေနဲ့ သူတို့ရှင်သန်နေထိုင်တဲ့နယ်မြေအသိုင်းအဝိုင်း နေ့တစုလူမှုဘဝတွေမှာ သူတို့ရဲ့ရပ်တည်မှု၊ ဖြစ်တည်မှုနဲ့ “အိမ်”ကို အဓိပ္ပာယ်ပုံဖော်ဆောင်ရင်း မြန်မာပြည်တွင်းက ပဋိပက္ခရေးရာမှာပါဝင်ပတ်သက်မှုနေတာတွေကို နားလည်သဘောပေါက်ဖို့ အခရာကြပါတယ်။

ဒီသဘောတရားတွေသုံးသပ်ရမည်ဆိုတာကိုလည်း သုတေသနပြုစုတဲ့အထဲပါဝင်ပေးကြတဲ့သူတွေနဲ့အတူ သူတို့ရဲ့ဘဝဇာတ်ကြောင်းတွေကို မိတ်ဆုံစားရင်း၊ အင်တာဗျူးလုပ်ရင်း၊ ဓာတ်ပုံတွေကနေတဆင့်လေ့လာရင်း၊ အခမ်းအနားတွေမှာပါဝင်ရင်းနဲ့ ဇာတ်ရည်လည်သိနားလည်လာတာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ဒါတင်မကသေးပဲ မြန်မာပြည်တွင်းက ပဋိပက္ခရေးရာမှာ သူတို့ရဲ့ပါဝင်ပတ်သက်မှုတွေကလည်း မတူကွဲပြားမှုရှိနေတယ်ဆိုတာကို တွဲဖက်စဉ်းစားရမယ့် လူမှုရေးရာအချက်အချာဆုံမှတ်တွေဖြစ်တဲ့ ဘာသာရေးနဲ့ဝိညာဉ်ရေးရာကိုးကွယ်ယုံကြည်မှုတွေ၊ မျိုးဆက်ကြားနားလည်မှုကွာဟခြင်းနဲ့ မလေ့ထုံးတမ်းစဉ်လာတွေကို နက်နက်ရှိုင်းရှိုင်းစူးစမ်းလေ့လာရင်းသိရှိခဲ့ရပါတယ်။ ဒါမို့လို့ ဒီစာတမ်းက ပညာရပ်သင်ကြားမှုအသိုင်းအဝိုင်းမှာ နယ်သာလန်နဲ့ဒိန်းမတ်နိုင်ငံတွေမှာ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံမှအခြေချနေထိုင်တဲ့သူတွေရဲ့အကြောင်းနဲ့ဆိုင်တဲ့ သုတေသနဆန်းစစ်မှုလိုအပ်ချက်ရှိနေတာကို အသိပညာပေါင်းကူးပေးဖို့လည်းရည်ရွယ်ထားပါတယ်။

Relevance to Development Studies

This research paper contributes to the scholarly debates on the diasporas' engagement in which Myanmar diasporas' dynamics unfolded with the embodiment of chosen trauma, identity politics and belongingness passage through ordinary day-to-day lives in Dutch and Danish contexts to decades-long civil war back home, Myanmar. I try to bring a bottom-up understanding of the diasporas dynamics from the perspectives of Myanmar diasporas by collecting their chain of stories based on their everyday aspirations. During my social interaction with them in the ethnographic approach, Myanmar diasporas showed how understanding the meaning of everyday micro-practices can build a counter-hegemonic narrative to unlearn the deadlock of diaspora-development shaped by the taming Eurocentric discourse. This alternative way of knowing is critical to envisage the development that respects and dignifies all individuals, therefore, contributing to knowledge production with a social justice perspective. To walk the talk of *leaving no one behind*, trying to apprehend the Myanmar diasporas in the Netherlands and Denmark indeed must be one of the agenda in achieving *the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030*, particularly SDG 16, to *give peace a chance* and sustain.

Keywords

belonging, chosen trauma, diaspora, transnational engagement, ethnography, identity, Myanmar, sharing meals.

Chapter 2

1.1 Facing the Fear, A War Within

My passion for doing this research originated from the 2021 military coup in Myanmar. The first coup occurred before I was born in 1962, and when the following one happened in 2021 (International Crisis Group, 2021), I was not in Myanmar; thus, I do not claim to know how much distressing, chaotic, and hopelessness overwhelmed at the exact moment of the coup. However, living under the military regime as *normalcy* has created a *cognitive-conscious lag* for understanding the conflict impact throughout my life. Because on the one hand, people from ethnic regions are cut off from the global media and news of poverty and geography while the military regime controls the local and international news streaming as they want (Phan cited in Jolliffe, 2016, p.147). On the other hand, I realized that the regime had successfully planted fear inside me. I was living with fear without me knowingly to openly express my political opinion and speak out for the sufferings that many have endured from the ongoing conflict(s) in Myanmar. I was afraid. I was afraid of losing my adulthood and spending the rest of my life in prison (or worst, getting killed), I was afraid of losing my career, and I was afraid of losing my future. Being swamped with all the mixed emotions in post-coup, I decided to come out from my fear, a war within. Facing fear is political. I am not hiding it. I said goodbye to my apolitical amnesia, fogged with the illusion of hegemonic *normalcy*, which led me to do this research.

Taking a nosedive to the academic literature, I learned conflict and security studies under the umbrella of Development studies are heavily skewed with “the selectivity bias” (Brenner and Han, 2021), hence, leaving “the Burma Gap” (Mathieson, 2018) to understand the decades-long civil war and its impact on the people. Brenner and Han have highlighted disproportionate scholarly interests by studying the period between 1990-2018, which illustrates the mismatch between the article count and conflict count in different regions of the world (2021, p.6). Underpinning the conflict(s) in Myanmar, Uppsala Conflict Data Program demonstrated that 22,313 people¹ died of battle-related deaths between 1989 and 2021 (UCDP, 2022). Despite the massive scale of violence and massacre, Myanmar's chronic conflict(s) has been paid little attention to instigate and understand their impact on Myanmar people. This forgotten conflict mirrors Myanmar's forgotten people, including Myanmar² diasporas.

Therefore, I want to have a deeper comprehension of the conflict's impact on the people, particularly by studying diasporas' intertwinement with the conflict. As Alexievich has illuminated, “I write not about war, but about human beings in war. I write not the history of a war, but the history of feelings.” (Alexievich, 2017, p. xxi). Whilst the polarization of politics and power struggles have resuscitated the conflict(s) in Myanmar, approximately 3.7 million of Myanmar² people, i.e. 6.8% of the total population (EUDiF, 2021) are pushed out of the country territory for fear of persecution and aspire to better socio-economic opportunities abroad (Egreteau, 2012, p.116).

-
1. The estimate of UCDP for battle-related deaths was not clarified for civilians or combatants.
 2. I perceive ‘Myanmar²’ is a politically corrected term for Myanmar people not to be generalized Burmese and to reflect the voice of many ethnic people who do not want to be called Burmese. Because Burmese could represent *only* the ethnic Bamar.

The shadow of suffering and fear from living with the conflict unfold the dynamics of Myanmar diasporas by making sense of themselves and *home* in host societies because the narratives cultivated through the emotions could be “not merely as individual psychological reactions but within the wider political and social contexts of their lives” (Niner et al., 2014, p.363). Even when the diasporas are able to reside and perhaps integrate into the host society, how the chosen trauma, identities and belongings evoke the participants, transform them into the motions, and engage back with the actions to home.

1.2 Research Problem Statement

Demmers contends that understanding the contemporary conflict without paying attention to diasporic dynamics is impossible (2007, p.7). In an attempt to understand the diaspora dynamic, I problematize the ontology should not be locked on extreme juxtaposition, resulting in the conundrum of essentialization and victimization (Cohen cited in Hintjens, 2008), whether they contribute to positive or negative transformation (Van Hear and Cohen, 2017, p.171-172). Consequently, diasporas engagements are mostly theorized as bridging the societies and states (Jones, 1998; Kapur, 2003; Ratha, 2003 cited in de Haas, 2010, p.228; International Organization for Migration, 2013; Takenaka, 2020) cherry-picking on the economic development as a result in a country of origin. This institutionalized perspective and perhaps as the products of Eurocentrism and modernity, diasporas’ narratives are often stereotyped as if only two extreme versions exist; either being glorified as the changemakers for the development story or being demonized as terrorists for their transnationalism engagement (Brinkerhoff, 2008; Brouwer and van Wijk, 2013; Cheran, 2006; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Collier, Hoeffler and World Bank, 1999; Demmers, 2007; Horst, 2008; Jayasundara-Smits, 2020; OECD, ILO, IOM and UNHCR, 2021; Orjuela, 2008, Pirkkalainen and Abdile, 2009). Hence, this epistemic limit demands the reconceptualization of diasporas’ narratives for them to be recognized and to comprehend why they do what they do.

While it seems easy to romanticize the better lives that the diasporas pursue, the other sides of the story, i.e., how and if the experience of living with the conflict impacts their integration, vis-à-vis, the way of living in the host society dovetail the engagement back home, therefore, to the conflicts, appears to be a little known fact. With this in mind, I attest that exploring the diasporas dynamics demands contextualizing the decades-long conflict impact on the people who needed to leave home and paying attention to changes in conflict nature to get a bigger picture. Because “the impact of contributions made by diasporas may vary according to the conflict phase, i.e. whether the conflict is emerging, escalating or terminating.” (Pirkkalainen and Abdile, 2009, p.14). Consequently, conflict-generated trauma plays “a central role in development of their identity” (ibid., 2009, p.8) and their substantial embodiment in “*multiple* and *simultaneous* ways of belonging and multiple ways of incorporation in the ‘home’ and ‘host’ countries” (Cheran, 2006, p.4) as “everyday micro-practices” (Crawford and Hutchinson, 2016, p.1186). Because the “micro-practices are themselves often the site of political struggle” (ibid.), therefore, this research is concerned with multi-layers constructed Myanmar diaspora identities and the feelings of belonging derive from the “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 1997, p.48) of the conflict, shaping their transnational engagement at the niche of homeland and hostlands.

1.3 Research Questions

Pivoting on my main research question, *'How and why do Myanmarese diasporas dynamics unfold in Dutch and Danish contexts through transnational engagement?'*, the three sub-questions follow.

- How do different diaspora identities impact the way they engage, and what could these engagements tell us about the diasporas' embodiment of chosen trauma from the conflict?
- How do Myanmarese diasporas belonging to home perform and attain through everyday micro-practices in the Netherlands and Denmark?
- How does the evolution of conflict in Myanmar with the 2021 military coup affect their engagement, and why?

1.4 Organization of the Study

Besides the introductory chapter, this study has seven more chapters. Chapter 2 discusses the methodology and methods that inspired this research. The adopted theoretical concepts and analysis are followed in the subsequent chapters, which seek to answer the proposed research questions and draw a conclusion.

Chapter 3 A Methodology Trajectory

This chapter details the methodological approach, the methods, and limitations of the research.

2.1 Ethnographic Approach: Qualitative Methodology

This research “orientation is an exploratory one” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3) by trying to understand the subjectivity of diasporas dynamics through the sensitive and intimate personal experience of their engagement to the conflict. To the path of *following* and trying to do justice for my research participants who opened their hearts to me essentially requires understanding with “a focus on the ‘everyday’; making strange what is common/taken-for-granted” (ibid.). As well, my research demands “to investigate some aspects of the lives of the people who are being studied, and this includes finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves” (ibid.). Therefore, I found the ethnographic approach as a qualitative methodology is the most suitable for this research.

2.1.1 Sharing Meal as A Method

“Let’s meet at my home, let’s eat together and talk,” said Moe Moe (July 2022) during our phone conversation, who later became a participant. I met Moe Moe two times before our interview during the *Thaw Hlan* (Revolution) *Thingyan*³ events. When we introduced each other, I explained to her my research plan and exchanged phone numbers so that I could reach out to her again when my research design is finalized. The first time I connected with Tun Kyaw, Moe Moe’s husband, he said, “Come home and let’s talk.” after I explained briefly to him about my research. I learned sharing meals and informal chat is incorporated into the Karen’s indigenous research methodology, known as “*tapotaethakot*” (Cho, 2011, p.197-198) and sharing food as a ritual in Karen’s culture (Ashin Moonieinda, 2010 cited in Hill, 2022, p.162). Thus, I felt liberated to apply the ‘sharing meal’ method they were proposing, not to mention myself being a Kachin, food is always in my “loving tradition” (Dean, 2007, p. 138).

When I asked about the interview, where and when to do it, ‘sharing meal’ was the most popular proposal between my participants and me. Participating in the events organized by Myanmar diasporas in the Netherlands, I observed that commensality is a suitable reservoir of “we-ness” (Volkan, 1997, p.93) as one way to share the feeling of belonging to Myanmar. Not to lose sight of how we try to relate life in our ways (Tomaselli et al., 2008, p.2-3) through embedded culture practices, I stay-tune to the sharing meal encounters as a way of sharing stories for data collection in conducting this research. Except for Tsawm, Aung Aung and Wa Doi, I had met all other 11 participants, known them and shared meals before the recorded interviews.

3. Thingyan, the water festival is a once-a-year celebration for the people following Buddhism to enter the Myanmar New Year in April. In Myanmar, the water festival is heavily linked with Buddhist religious practices and rituals in which people following different religions and spirituality may not feel they belong to, although they also enjoy the parties and water throwing to each other from time to time.

This approach perhaps is “the reciprocal relationship of telling and hearing” (ibid, 1990, P.143) which leads to the mutual learning process. Since one of the impetuses of doing this study for me is attempting to do epistemic justice to the ones who own the voice, the co-creation of knowledge becomes the key throughout my research journey.



Photograph 1 taken by the author, sharing meal with Moe Moe and Tun Kyam’s family in Woerden, the Netherlands.

2.1.2 Introducing Participants

Participants in this study are purposefully selected from a wide range of demographics to understand the nuances in diverse social markers of Myanmar diasporas. I gained contacts with the research participants through snowballing strategy, informal communications, and introducing myself to the people coming to the *Thaw Hlan Thingyan* events in the Netherlands in April and May 2022. The 14 participants I socialized with and interviewed are first-generation diasporas born in Myanmar. Their age varies from the youngest being 28 years, to the oldest, 70 years. They belong to four nationalities and seven diverse ethnicities, and three participants in the Netherlands are still in the process of obtaining citizenship. In Appendix 1, I illustrated the demographic details.

2.1.3 Individual Interviews

I have applied semi-structured individual in-depth interviews as “it offers flexibility in asking in-depth questions” (Fontana and Frey 2005, cited in Guo, 2014, p.157). It also provides an intimate space where the participants fully express their lived experiences as they make sense of the world in their everyday life without feeling insecure about other participants’ presence with different beliefs and cultural endorsement. The paired interviews for the couples were also an important moment to observe the conversation dynamics. Each interview session

lasted from one and a half to two hours, and audio recording was done for all sessions with the respondents' permission. The reasoning for audio recording is two-fold. Firstly, I give all my senses to the respondents while talking so that I am not occupied with writing all the time. The second reason is to listen again for a meaningful interpretation, not just with what is left in memory. I transcribed the verbatim in either Burmese or Jinghpaw and translated into English. In need of clarity, I followed up with the participants through different communication channels and in person.

2.1.4 Visual Ethnography

I couple the visual ethnography as a method to collect “whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3). I choose photographs to represent the visual data to “allow us to produce knowledge unavailable through verbal interviewing” (Harper, cited in Pink, 2007, p. 84). I collected photographs from the participants that could relate to their engagement with the conflict in Myanmar and feel comfortable sharing for this research. Hence, I seek to understand the meaning beyond images, i.e., what the participants tell me about their engagement by sharing the selective photographs, and why these narratives are important to the participants. I also took pictures during the visit to participants' homes and participatory observation in the events. Thus, the photographs not only bridge the different understanding of reality (Pink, 2007, p.84) between my participants and me but also reveal the ethnographic characteristics of everyday life. I incorporate the photographs in chapters 4-7 for the readers to have an elaborative understanding of why the participants do what they do, regarding their engagement from host-lands, Western Europe, to the conflict in the homeland, Myanmar.

2.1.5 Research Sites Selection

I have selected the Netherlands and Denmark as the sites to study for three reasons. The first rationale derives from the several similarities in immigration and integration policies, such as gaining permanent residence status, the requirement of language skills and social and cultural understanding to obtain nationality, which can lead to economic sanctions for non-attendance in the introductory course (Denmark Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs and The Think Tank on Integration in Denmark, 2004). These similarities provide to assess the inter-relationship of dynamic diasporas engagement with the influencing factors in the host societies.

The second reason is pondered from Myanmar diasporas being new communities in E.U. member states despite of longstanding emigration history to U.K since before Brexit. According to EUDiF (2021), 25,607 Myanmar diasporas reside in European Union out of the 54 million population in Myanmar (UNData, 2021). One Netherland-based organization working for solidarity among Myanmar diasporas estimates that there are approximately 2500 Myanmar diasporas in the Netherlands⁴ and around 1800 in Denmark (Joshua Project, n.d.) compared to 8543 in the U.K in 2011 (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014).

4. This data is gathered during the author conversation with the board members of the organization.

The last conceptualization is based on the vital importance of conducting the research, which is accessibility in terms of finance and logistics. Since I reside in the Netherlands, the existing connection in both Dutch and Danish contexts has given me so much flexibility to expand the network and look out for the people who want to engage. Although I defined the primary research sites, I was connected to one participant from the U.K through Tsa for the interview.

2.2 Positionality and Critical Reflexivity

“Our respective journeys positioned us as both insiders and outsiders and as purchasers (of information, crafts, and skills). We are givers (of donated goods) and sometimes accused of being exploiters (of knowledge). We are also seen as heroes and villains, and as reporters, we evaluate the said in terms of the more usually unsaid.” (Tomaselli et al., 2008, p.5)

Trying to reflect critically on my positionality is like drawing in the water. I am constantly reminded that “*Differences* between researcher and researched are imagined as distances in this landscape of power” (Rose, 1997, p.312) by the unspoken body’s expression, the sighs, the silences, the meta-data (Fujii, 2010) during my interactions with the participants. Even though I tried to be fully immersed (O’Leary, 2017, p.148) and connected, the constant changing of different layers of identities I, as a researcher and the researched participants, possess in a given time and place creates a distance between us.

Situatedness happens both ways. I thought I was ready till I felt knighted. Yes, knighted. Being perceived as an insider not only facilitates the approachable circumstance. But also, being a Kachin has strengthened the rapport and trust and created extraordinary bonding among Kachin participants and me. Tsa situated me in such a remarkable socially-knit way out of all participants through his gift. On my third day morning in his home at Holsted, Denmark, I was persuading my son to eat breakfast while Tsa walked out of his room and brought me a nicely folded piece of cloth. Then, he said,

“I want to give you this as a gift as you’re doing the work. This is also a gift to me by *Shang Lawt* (the Kachin freedom fighters). When I was visiting them, they took it down from the pole on the top of the mountain and gave it to me on the morning I needed to leave. I believe you will continue what we need to do. In Jinghpaw, you (*as plural*) are the representatives. There is no one else. I trust in you.” August 2022.

When he shook and unfolded the cloth, seeing the unfurling Kachin flag, so brightly red and jaded green with two purely white swords crossing in the middle, I got goosebumps and an overwhelming feeling rushing through my body. My heart pounded harder I could barely hear more words coming from Tsa. Not only he shows his token of eternal friendship by adorning me with the Kachin flag, but also, he passes the responsibility to me, in a way that I could never imagine as a Kachin-female-mother in the gender-sanitized culture I grew up with “natural sexual divisions of labour” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p.15). My assumption that I would be perceived as a cisgender mother who, perhaps, mirrors a soft, feminine image was evaporated. It was only my own prejudice that kept me under the glass ceiling. Breaking the gender norm, I realized I could be seen as anyone, even like someone in the front-line fighting. Perhaps because of my privileges of having access to institutionalized education, being able to research one aspect of the decades-long conflict in Myanmar create certain social image, status and class and is perceived as the one who will amplify the voices of injustices.

It was not the only moment I felt all the cells in my body turned on. At the beginning of our conversation, Tun Kyaw asked me questions regarding my study program, how my study is funded and whether I received monthly financial support from the Dutch government. After I answered all his questions, Tun Kyaw talked about his journey from Myanmar, border-crossing on foot to Thailand in 1988. Eager to hear what he was continuing to say, I stayed concentrated, holding the pen to jot some notes on my opened notebook in addition to the recorder switched on. Tun Kyaw broke the silence, giving a chortle and said, “Well, this is like answering to U.N”. Moe Moe and I laughed together with him (*I laughed because I did not know what to say on how he was making sense of me*). He continued, “well, don’t get me wrong. I applied for refugee registration in Bangkok with U.N. I got 3000 baths per month because of that.” Then, Moe Moe joined the conversation, “Yeah, we had to answer them how did we arrive, how did we enter to Thailand, why we did not dare to stay in Myanmar anymore, why do we want to come here in the interview. This is also the interview, so it reminds us about that process.”

Of course, it was a red flag to me. I situate myself as an insider for speaking the Burmese language, one coming from Myanmar and living in the Netherlands. Hence, I was assumed to comprehend the challenges that Myanmar diasporas face in integrating into a completely new society. However, I am an outsider, too; on many occasions, I met with the participants. Whether or not I liked it, I realized the irony of being an insider and outsider simultaneously. I reflect this as the opportunity to acknowledge the embodied institutionalization within me, the way I talk, and the body gestures I pose; the attention I bring to them is observed and studied back. It seems accepting who I am, all my good(s) and bad(s), is the only way to be critically reflexive as a researcher.

2.3 Dilemmas and Ethics

Concerning the research ethics and participants’ voluntary informed consent, I addressed them in seven ways.

- 1) I created a flyer in Burmese and Jinghpaw (see Appendix 2) which explains my research and assures that the research process was well-informed to the participants.
- 2) The interviews were done only in the voluntary willingness and comfort of the participants.
- 3) The names of participants are anonymized and pseudonyms were chosen by the participants apart from *Tsawm*, *Wa Doi* and *Tsa’*.
- 4) Anything that the participants did not want to put on the record is not taken.
- 5) Throughout the research journey, the way/channel of communication was adapted to the participants’ preferences at ease, and the interview was conducted in the language that the participant feel no limitation.
- 6) The collected data are archived in a secured place.
- 7) Public access to the research paper is available as agreed by the participants.

5. *Tsawm* means the beauty, *Wa Doi* means the third Uncle from the father side and *Tsa* is the uncle from the mother side in Jinghpaw *mayu-dama* kinship. *Mayu-dama* is a respected way of addressing to each other according to the family and clan despite of its complexity in forming alliance with the marriage lineage system among the siblings and cousins. More explanations about *Mayu-dama* are noted in the studies of (Dean, 2007, p.134-147; Leach and Firth, 1964, p. 73-85).

Nevertheless, I had a series of dilemmas during the writing phase, especially regarding what I consider super-sensitive data. While I do have permission from the researched participants, I feel the urge to write down everything I learned and unlearned. Yet on the other side, I am concerned of any possibility that these data will be used against them. To *Do-No-Harm*, which I have (seriously) considered from the ethical standpoint, I take action 'not to' mention them, and I hope I do justice in conveying my participants' stories.

2.4 Limitations

I want to emphasize three main limitations of this study. The first limitation is my *Kachinness*, which may have impacted the sampling strategies because the representation of Kachin participants, who mostly follow the Christian religion, is the highest in this study compared to other diverse ethnicities with various spiritual beliefs. However, my emphasis on diversity is not to confuse the meaning and nature of diversity as just the tick-box orientation of demographic and social categories (Essed, 2002, p.8-9), as well, I am not synonymizing the ontology and epistemology in this study with the statistical representation of the participants, instead acknowledge the voice that may not have been included because of the limitation.

Another invaluable resource is *time*, the second limitation. Doing ethnographic fieldwork for producing an MA research paper within four months is possible, yet with lots of inevitable challenges, particularly considering the yardstick for the ethnographic fieldwork "usually required living with a group of people for extended periods, often over the course of a year or more, in order to document and interpret their distinctive way of life and the beliefs and values integral to it" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.1).

Lastly, growing up with many Bamar friends and had to study in Burmese throughout my education journey in Myanmar, I felt more comfortable speaking in Burmese than my native tongue, Jinghpaw, despite it "carries the scent of oppression" (bell hooks, 1990, p. 146). English is my third language which I needed to learn as a survival skill for advancing my education and career, and now writing my research paper. Reflecting on my own personal receptivity to language as a place of struggle (bell hooks, 1990, p. 146), I pay extra attention to the language I use during the communication with the participants. I have adapted the languages to the participants' preferences so that they do not feel limited and uncomfortable in expressing what they want to say. Hence, I can only say I tried to minimize the potential impact of the language as a limitation. Nonetheless, acknowledging these limitations has taught me to be contented with who I am and what I have garnered by collecting "selective bits and pieces, ethnographic epiphanies" (Tomaselli et al., 2008, p.7) and harnessing what truly matters.

Chapter 4 : Conceptual Framework

This chapter entails the gestation of the notions of chosen trauma, identity and belonging as possible analytical tools to explore the Myanmar diasporas dynamics display in their transnational engagement.

3.1 Diasporas

Before deep-diving into the conceptual framework, I must clarify how I regard the notion of diasporas in this study. Because it could be disorienting to explore the inconsistency of the term “diasporas” among academic literature (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007, p.497; Brouwer and van Wijk, 2013, p.835; Cheran, 2006, p.4-5; Demmers, 2007, p.9; Egreteau, 2012, p.116, Waldron et al., 2020, p.3-4) and institutional categorizations (EUDiF, 2021; IOM, 2013). While labelling could be problematized in many ways on how it reconstructs the narratives and identities of people who needed to leave home, in this paper I define *the Myanmar diaspora as someone who is originated from Myanmar and left Myanmar for direct and indirect impact of the conflict(s), is living, integrating in the Netherlands and Denmark either temporarily or permanent basis as well as who still maintain belonging with Myanmar*. This definition hopefully guides the readers and myself for the clarification of whom I engage as the researched participants. In this approach, I wish not to undermine the complex struggles that diasporas face during their integration into the host societies.

3.2 Transnational Engagement

Horst defined diasporas transnational engagement as “direct strategies involve giving economic, political or even military support to political counterparts in the homeland, while indirect strategies include lobbying or bringing pressure to bear on the international community” (2008, p. 320). As well, Basch et al. argued transnationalism “as a process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement (cited in Demmers, 2002, p.89). Transnational engagement is not a new phenomenon when the bonding of diasporas to their homelands transnationalize the so-called internal conflicts or wars. The global trend of transnational diasporas’ political engagement back to the conflicts in countries of origin is recorded extensively in the literature. Eritrea Peoples’ Liberation Front (EPLF) by the Eritrean diaspora (Al-Ali, Black and Koser, 2001b cited in Pirkkalainen and Abdile, 2009, p.36), overseas Chinese transformation of ‘home’ in the 1911 revolution, Jewish diaspora in the creation of Isreal, Irish-American diaspora involvement in the Northern Ireland revolution, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) formed in Jordan as government-in-exile, Rwandan Patriotic Front by Rwandan Tutsi refugees in Uganda (Horst, 2008, p.318-319), worldwide Tamil diaspora political engagement to the civil war in Sri Lanka (Jayasundara-Smits, 2022).

Reflecting on these examples of transnational engagement, I felt struck with the term ‘revolution’. Because during my interaction and observation on how Myanmar diasporas feel, sense, and mean for transnational engagement and why to comprehend the ensnared reality, ‘revolution’ also appears as part of their everyday practice for transnational engagement and in their constant search for *home*. Revolution is “a forcible overthrow of a government or social order in favour of a new system” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2002). In the

decades-long conflict context of Myanmar, revolution is uprooting the discriminatory system of Burmanized dictatorship with socio-economic-political marginalization by the military junta that Myanmar people endure in everyday lives.

3.3 Understanding Chosen Trauma, Identity and Belonging

Volkan defined chosen trauma as “a shared mental representation of the event, which includes realistic information, fantasized expectations, intense feelings, and defenses against unacceptable thoughts.” (1997, p.48). Beyond, he argued that chosen trauma shapes the identity unconsciously “by the transgenerational transmission of injured selves infused with the memory of ancestors’ trauma”. To epitomize this multiplex inter-connection of identities and chosen trauma, I adopt temporality, time as not a linear movement forward; rather, the infinite expansiveness of time makes possible for “the different ways that the past lives in the present” (Tonkin, 1992, p.2).

To have a holistic understanding of the current action, i.e., how it shapes the present transnational engagement to imagine a desired future collectively, we need to recognize and give attention to what has happened in the past (Lederach, 2005, p.140). The lived history that passes through generations is not just the stories told. They are the feelings, emotions, and experiences “that have flesh and blood attached to them” (ibid, 2005, p.142). Especially in the context of protracted conflict, the affected group remembers a certain moment in history which demands “a level of heightened recognition” and is kept alive as a social memory (ibid, 2005, p.142). When the bodies experience war and violence, the spatial and temporal boundaries cross and entangle (Väyrynen, 2018, p.49). Because war causes not only physical wounds but also mental trauma as a human, “body and mind are inseparable” (ibid, 2018, p.50).

Moreover, many psychosocial studies have suggested that the transmission of trauma is epigenetic (Grand and Salberg, 2021, p.211-213; Maté, 2012) and “affects not only those who are directly exposed to it, but also those around them” (Van der Kolk, 2015, p.1). At least the bright side here is that trans-generational transmission of trauma can enforce strength, resourcefulness, and resilience (Grand and Salberg, 2021, p. 213), which I will thread in my analysis besides the disintegrative effect that trauma cause. Discussing the menacing traumatic events to society, it is also important to view trauma from the socio-political-cultural perspective, as each context is different (Eltayeb, 2021, p. 245). Hence, I attest that transnational engagement Myanmar diasporas is the transformation of the chosen trauma about the conflict overlapped with “a lifelong process” (Hicks, 2002, p.131) of identity construction and feelings of belonging.

In search of belonging, Antonsich argued that “belonging should be analyzed both as a personal, intimate, feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)” (2010, p.644), not to be entrapped in “either a socially de-contextualized individualism or an all-encompassing social(izing) discourse” (ibid.). To expand the understanding of belonging, I implied spatiality dimension to articulate “the spatial logics” (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007, p.489) of Myanmar diasporas relating with their identities. Bearing in mind the multiple dimensions of belonging (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005, p.526), I additionally follow “social surrogates” (Troisi et al., 2015, p.59) such as food, traditional dresses and symbols which may reflect the meaning beyond the sight and symbols. Although Troisi (2012) enlightened the three

primary categories of social surrogates, I zoom in on the first category in which the objects that are the direct reminders of others and “comfort food” (ibid., 2012, p.2) ability to stimulate the belongingness with closed ones. In doing so, I wish to illuminate better the objects/artefacts’ relationship with the feeling of belonging to *home* as a safe space manifests in everyday practices of Myanmar diasporas’ transnational engagement.

Chapter 4. Identities and Chosen Trauma

This chapter informs to answer sub-question one by understanding how the identities construction and chosen trauma intertwined and constantly shaped the Myanmar diasporas in Western Europe's transnational engagement with the conflict back home in Myanmar.

4.1 Sunrise, Frog Drum and Water Buffalo Horn



Photograph 2 taken by the author: home space of Moe Moe, and Tun Kyaw, Woerden, the Netherlands.

The google map says I reached the destination. I was standing at the bricked-layered path in the middle of the front yard, which is well cultivated, so green and one small apple tree bearing hundreds of fruits, the branches kneeling to the ground. Trusting the google map, I rang the bell, and a young man in his sport-shorts came open the door; he smiled, shook my hand, and brought me inside the house. Once I entered the house following the narrow walkway entrance, I heard the music flowing in the room. There I met a middle-aged man with an oval-shaped face and prominent jaws, wearing a broad smile stood from the chair in the middle of the living room and told me to come inside. In front of him was the desktop where the music was coming from, playing the song of one of the famous singers from Myanmar, Sung Tin Par⁶.

“ဒီကမ္ဘာမြေကြီးကကျဉ်းတယ်...ဒီလိုလူတွေကပြောတော့လေ...တချိန်ချိန်ပြန်တွေ့ခွင့်ရနိုင်မယ်...ကိုယ်စိတ်အားတင်းကာနေ
ကိုယ်မျှော်လင့်မိတယ်လေ”

“People say this world is small...so I take courage to meet you some time again...and I dare to hope”

6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMAKM7CSFYk> In this link, you can tune in the song.

On the right-side of the living room, I noticed that approximately 4 x 2.5 feet sized Karen flag is hanging. With the rising sun and the frog-drum symbols in the flag, I cannot miss it. On the other side, a water buffalo horn imprinted with the sunrise and frog drum was string up with the ribbons of red, white, and blue which represents the colors in the Karen flag. He shook my hand and introduced himself, as Tun Kyaw. He was on long white sleeves shirt folded just under the elbow joints. Under the folded sleeves shirt, I could see the squiggly veins running on the triceps to the hands like the river bifurcation. A blue pen stabbed in the shirt's pocket on his left chest. Then, I heard and saw, Moe Moe, ran to me from the kitchen by shouting "oh, you have arrived". She had *Thanaka*⁷ on her cheeks. Not only a warm smile she threw at me by saying "we have been waiting for you" made me feel at ease, but also my sense of familiarity to *Thanaka* on her face calmed my nerve and felt no more a stranger-researcher.

Then, he paused the music, and we started introducing each other. Moe Moe was busy bringing snacks and food she prepared from the kitchen to the dining table in the living room where me and Tun Kyaw kept chatting. However, she time to time engage in our conversation and shared her opinions and feelings. Both Moe Moe, 47 years old, and Tun Kyaw, 53 years old, Karen couple arrived to the Netherlands in 2006 July as refugees together with their eldest son. Half of their lives, they have been on the move as refugees first in Thailand and then to the Netherlands. Despite they have been living in the Netherlands for 16 years, they said they are not Dutch citizens yet. It was shocking to hear their stories that they are still living in a state of limbo. Apart from sharing my empathy with them, I could say nothing out of ordinary till the moment, Tun Kyaw was looking at me with the glaring eyes, and said,

"I left Myanmar when I was 18 years old and 8888 uprising⁸ happened. I was just a child and I still wanted to live with my parents. But because of the circumstance, I had to flee. I was so upset that I thought either I die or you (Burmese soldiers) die (*his voice tone raised, the eyes look became intense*). Because my three elder brothers were killed by Burmese military just before 88 uprising. It was like in the movie." July 2022.

Nor the extremely unbearable experience of the conflict explains how Tun Kyaw became a combatant of KNU (now ex-combatant), but also holding this memory as the chosen trauma (Volkan, 1997, p.48) mirrors the personal and social construction of identities (Tokin, 1992, p.10), and its interface with time. The sunrise, frog drum and water buffalo horn in the living room exhibit the everyday expression of Karen identity by carrying the chosen trauma "in an expansive, not a narrow view of time" (Lederach, 2005, p.22). Hence, "what goes on now is interpreted from previous knowledge, from memory" (Tokin, 1992, p.9) and beyond, how Tun Kyaw and Moe Moe make sense of themselves and home.

7. *Thanaka* (ထန်ခဲး) is the paste produced by grinding the wood bark on the stone slab, called *Kyauk-Pyin*.

8. Following 8888 uprising movement, the Myanmar military, also known as Tatmadaw launched a series of armed offensives especially at the ethnic minorities regions which has forced thousands to flee to the neighboring countries (Beehner, 2018; Brouwer and Van Wijk, 2013; Egretreau, 2012, Gilbert and Cho, 2014)

Moe Moe, juggling between the kitchen and to the table sat down and she said with a grimace,

“When I was still in Myanmar, it was also very difficult. We had to run and hide all the time because of porter. I attended till the fourth grade (end of the primary Education in Myanmar) because I had a lot of family members, and we were poor farmers. In 1994, I visited to my uncle who was in Mae-La then I stayed there because there was nothing much to do in Myanmar apart from running and hiding from being a porter. We always had to be scared for the soldiers.

Some people risk their lives in the front line. We are here sitting. I cannot bear that thought. So, I will contribute as much as I can. I donate the money. I go for the protests here. It does not matter if we get what we ask or not. Some people said the protest will not make any different. For me, I do it because I want to do it. I can't bear it anymore. *He* (referring to General Min Aung Hlaing) is doing that to our people. So, when I cannot go back, I am doing it here.” July, 2022

As she kept going on, her face turned to blank expressions and she said,

“Sometimes, if I think about my life, I cry (*a pause*). Now, I am talking to you about this is also like healing to me.” July, 2022

While the traumatic suffering of Moe Moe explains “a renewal of unfinished grieving” (Volkan, 1997, p.38) from the past experience of conflict-induced collective trauma, acknowledging it helps to endure the “survivor syndrome” (Hamburger, 2021, p.7). Moreover, her decisive engagement to the conflict back home regardless of the outcome shows the transformation of trauma into agency with the resilience in making a difference (Van der Kolk, 2015, p.357). Svašek argued that re-experienced emotions are partially influenced by present-day predicaments (Milton and Svašek, 2005, p. 200), in this circumstance is 2021 military coup. The coup has “evoked emotions” (ibid.) of their chosen trauma in which “large-group identity issues automatically become inflamed” (Volkan, 2008, p.105). Because “Human cannot accept change without mourning what has been lost” (Volkan, 1997, p.36), the unhealed selves memorialize, carry the open wound, i.e., the chosen trauma (ibid., 1997, p.48) about the conflict and transform into their engagement back to homeland.

4.2 “I am a Naga and I live as a Naga”

It was not only Moe Moe and Tun Kyaw who courageously shared their intimate stories with me, Naung Yan, 33 years old, she/her, who has been living in Denmark since 2013, said sympathy and empathy drive her to help in a way she can in the community. When the 2011 resumed war happened in Kachin State, Myanmar, she collaborated with her friends working as teachers in the camps where displaced people live and donated educational materials to IDP. She said,

“I am doing this engagement not because I married to my husband (who is a Kachin), I have been doing this since before I met my husband. I had personal experience in how the soldiers bullied with the guns, tortured the relatives and neighbours in the village, Shing Bwi Yang where I grew up. So I know how it means to be tortured and I have sympathy and empathy on those who have to go through the same path as us (Naga people).” August 2022

It was almost midnight, Naung Yan and I were still chatting in the living room at her home in Holsted, Denmark. Naung Yan and Tsa (her husband) hosted my son and me in their home during my research field trip there. I have known Naung Yan since high school. She was a childhood friend of my cousin. I became friends with her through my cousin during my 2016 trip to Denmark. When Naung Yan said this to me, I thought I got the answer for why she engaged (with a yes! a shout in my mind). Nonetheless, as our conversation carried on about how she has been engaging in the conflict back home by doing a project and internship linked with the ‘conflict and peace’ situation in Myanmar during her undergraduate study in Denmark, we started to talk off the road from the research topic to her parents’ business. Then, she shared that she still remembers her father being detained for almost two weeks for interrogation by Burmese soldiers at the checkpoint on returning from a business trip from Myitkyina to Shing Bwi Yang. Nobody knew where he was. She continued,

“I don’t remember details as I was just five years old. But I remember my mother was very worried, the relatives came ask and consoled her. As I grew up, I learned that my father got kidnapped by the Burmese soldiers to guide them in the forest to show the base of Naga armed resistance group. This is not the only time my father got kidnapped. It happened often and my father said sometimes, he had to pretend that he got lost in the forest so he would not need to find the Naga armed resistance base for Burmese soldiers. I also remembered my male cousins have to hide everytime the Burmese military troop entered to the village because they were afraid of being a porter for the soldiers and got tortured when they could not carry the stuff anymore on the way. Since then, I got the idea of soldiers are to be scared and the soldiers will kill us if we do not fulfil for what they ask.” August, 2022

Naung Yan’s sympathy and empathy are apparently seeded from the “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 1997, p.48) of how she remembers and memorializes the conflict experience. I nodded in agreement with Naung Yan as she provoked my own fear and confusion about the soldiers. Also, for Naung Yan, being a Naga is heartily important; as she said,

“I value Naga identity. I do not want to be a Naga who does not know what’s going on with Naga community. I am a Naga and I live as a Naga. When I say I am from Myanmar, people automatically consider me as a Burmese here in Denmark. I have to tell them, I am not a Burmese, I am a Naga (*as she said she touched and tapped to her chest with the right hand*).” August 2022

Then, she continued.

“We lived in our sovereignty. So, our Naga people’s goal is to have a sovereign nation back. I do not have feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood to the people in Myanmar. Myanmar identity is not important for me.” August, 2022

Naung Yan has shed light on the intersection of “history, memory, emotions and politics” (Milton and Svašek, 2005, p. 198) through her chosen trauma and memorialization of the conflict. Not to synonymize the identity with the belonging, which I will explore in the following chapters, here I want to highlight that Naung Yan’s chosen trauma is inherently connected with being a Naga; how Naga people have been suffering from the generational oppression and marginalization in Myanmar to have equal rights.

In addition to the Naga nationalism and freedom struggles for Nagaland straddling India and Myanmar (Baruah, 2020; Dunford, 2019, p.61-62)⁹. Not only has Naung Yan shored up to break the dichotomy theory of “self/others distinctions” (Milton and Svašek, 2005, p. 201), but also it elucidates on the complex identification process of overlapping “individual selves to the canvas of a large-group-tent” (Volkan, 1997, p.91). Naung Yan, being a Naga is “a shared way of feeling” (Volkan, 1997, p.91) to we-ness of Naga in both India and Myanmar, which has contaminated the passive emotional feelings of Naga people’s pain and suffering to active politicization of the chosen trauma.

4.3 Conclusion

The participants illuminated the “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 1997, p.48) as memories, emotions, and the driving force for their engagement from host-lands to the conflict(s) in Myanmar. Through transnational engagement, they do not only deny the perplexing assertion that traumatized victims are “possessed by the past” (Caruth, 1995 cited in Milton and Svašek, 2005, p. 200) but also foster the empowerment of “political agency” (ibid.) as Svašek examined the politics of trauma in the case of Sudeten Germans (ibid., 2005, p. 208). Their traumatic experience embodies their identity, which is similarly mentioned in Gilbert and Cho’s study about the exiles from Myanmar (2014, p.225). Also, their chosen trauma transformation into the political agency is forged through the “articulation of identity” (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007, p.502) with spatial manifestation in host societies where the perceived ‘safe’ environment allows them to do so. Therefore, the chosen trauma and identity construction are not mutually exclusive, particularly when the Myanmar-diasporas explore their political agency through transnationalism engagement.

9. Please also refer to Muivah (2016) as another research paper example about the Naga freedom struggle.

Chapter 5. Belonging

In this chapter, I attempt to answer the second sub-question by unpacking belonging in Myanmar diasporas' everyday micro-practices.

5.1. Homemaking with Arts, Rice, and Citizenship

Aung Aung, wearing the inky black, short-sleeved t-shirt, was sitting on his hands and leaning forward to the screen towards me. He seemed still very attentive to what we were discussing. I felt a bit tired after listening and talking for more than an hour on zoom. His silver hair glittering on the screen brought my attention to the beautiful art hanging behind his head on the wall. I thought it was the art illustrating the *Thingyan* Festival, but eventually, it portrays *Shin-Pyu* Ceremony¹⁰.

I did not know Aung Aung before, and I got in contact with him through Mama (my other participant) from the Netherlands. He is 44 years old, a Bamar from Yangon, Myanmar. He has been living in Denmark for 16 years and is now a Danish citizen. He has been very welcoming since I started sending the message through 'signal'¹¹. I got my first call from him when I was on the train to Denmark from the Netherlands. We managed to do a zoom call for the interview. As the art quite struck me, I asked Aung Aung whether he could show it to me. He made a surprised smile, then looked back to the wall and took the phone closer to the art so I could see more clearly. Then, he started walking around his home and showed me all the art and handicrafts hanging in his home. Among them was a portrait of Aung San Suu Kyi, which gave me the sense of a virtual visit back to Myanmar. He told me that all these arts *make home* for him and his wife.



Photograph 3 taken by Aung Aung, making home with *Shin-Pyu* Ceremony art, Bramming, Denmark.

10. Shin-Pyu Ceremony is a Burmese term for a religious-cultural ritual getting into the novice hood ceremony or novitiation for the boys in Buddhist societies (Kyu, 2019) also known as *śrāmaṇera* in Sanskrit. It is one of the twelve auspicious rites in Burmese, Buddhist tradition.
11. Signal is a communication application that can be installed in the electronic devices and get connected with others.

And he continued,

“How are you doing with the food? I don’t know about you. But for me, bread is not ok for me, so I eat rice every day, at home, and at work” August 2022.

Aung Aung’s engagement and why he is engaging in the conflict back home is much more sense in the end. For Aung Aung, eating rice daily goes beyond fulfilling “mere satiety” (Troisi et al., 2015, p.59), yet it shows the embodiment of sociocultural identity as a daily physical need. Walmsley argues, “Taste, in particular, is an emotionally charged marker of either familiarity and belonging, or strangeness and alienation.” (2005, p.43). Rice is a social surrogate for the “emotional feeling of being at home” (Antonsich, 2010, p.647) for Aung Aung in an estranged host society with “threats to belongingness” (Troisi et al., 2015, p.59). Nevertheless, Aung Aung also articulated the need to belong to a place by attaining Danish citizenship. Aung Aung told me,

“I applied for this (Danish)citizenship because I have been living here for a long time, and there are some matters that make life easier, especially for travelling. We (he and his wife) left Myanmar a long time, so we are not Myanmar citizens anymore. Yet, we were also not other citizens. So, it’s not right. A person should have citizenship. This country allows double citizenship status. So, when and if we pull down the *sit-tat*¹² and our country becomes a federal democratic country, we are born in Myanmar, so we have the legal right to be citizens”.

Citizenship is “a formal membership in nation-state” (Pakulski and Tranter, cited in Clark, 2009, p.30). However, for Aung Aung, while it seems Danish citizenship is for an administrative reason, the desire to retrieve Myanmar citizenship involves a sense of belonging to be still part of Myanmar society. Not to conflate this politics of belonging with citizenship, one must connect with the “spatial logics of the contemporary states system” (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007, p.514), which constructs the national identity. The belonging of Aung Aung to Myanmar’s national identity embeds in his “transnational practices and political activities” (ibid., 2007, p.515) as he explained how he has been engaging back to home to envision a democratic Myanmar through Facebook, doing political activism, political entrepreneurship, and lobbying, preparing himself by learning the discourse of politics in Denmark. He recalls the three strategies in Williams’s study of political activism among the Burmese¹³ diaspora (2012, p.133). The need to belong to both homeland and host-land as dual belongings is also emphasized in the Lebanese diasporas living in the Western metropolitan cities (Abdelhady, 2008, p.65). Aung Aung’s belonging to Myanmar is sustained through the everyday micro-practices of home-making with arts, the need to eat rice both in private and public spaces in the host society and the aspiration to gain Myanmar citizenship as a national identity. Therefore, his sense of belonging to home, Myanmar, as a developed and peaceful homeland, let him search for the imagined home, a safe space through his transnational engagement. Later that day, he reached out to me through ‘signal’ and invited me to have a meal together at his home.

12. Sit-tat (စစ်တပ်) means the military in Burmese.

13. I keep the term ‘Burmese diaspora’ here as applied by William, D. (2012), although it does not refer only for the Bamar ethnic people as the author explained in pp.128-133.

5.2. Homemaking with *Mahkaw ban*



Photograph 4 taken by the author: Tsa Ba plucking herbs in his backyard garden to give me as a gift, Amsterdam.

“I have a little bit of *Mahkaw ban*¹⁴ in my garden. Please take some, so you can make Jinghpaw food and also plant.”, said Tsa Ba, July 2022.

When we finished talking for an almost two hours long interview about why and how he has been engaging back to the conflict, Tsa Ba offered me the herbs from his garden to take home to cook Jinghpaw traditional food and plant it. Tsa Ba is 38 years old, Jinghpaw, pronouns identified as he/him working for a pharmaceutical company and residing in the Netherlands for 13 years. He arrived in the Netherlands as a refugee and obtained Dutch citizenship. We first met at the *Thaw Hlan Thingyan* event in Hoofddorp on 23 April 2022. We exchanged phone numbers and stayed connected through WhatsApp. Despite my overwhelming joy to receive the indigenous herbs as a gift which can rarely find in the groceries stores in the Netherlands exported from ‘Asia’, I reflect that his generosity is cultivated from “the need to maintain ‘roots’” (Lyons, 2007, p.532) for Jinghpaw identity. Hence, cooking Jinghpaw food and growing the herb can *make home* to those thousands of miles away from home. Food “as everyday life rituals contributing to the negotiation of a national identity” is also observed among the Polish migrants in London (Rabikowska, 2010, p.380). Moreover, Wamsley attests that “a culturally embedded, socially shared and physically embodied phenomenon, sensory experience provides a visceral dimension to identity that impinges directly on our daily lives without necessarily entering into dialogue.” (2005, p.43).

14. *Persicaria odorata*, also known as Vietnamese coriander.

A mundane practice of eating and planting herbs becomes significant as Tsa Ba reestablishes our common identity of Jingshpaw, “reinforce belonging” (D’Sylva and Beagan, 2011, p.281), and “creates bonds” (Fischler, 2011 cited in Bailey, 2017, p.57) as kin by sharing it. Moreover, this simple practice of passing traditional knowledge subtly claims everyday epistemic justice by producing and reproducing the chosen trauma about diasporas’ homeland and group identity. Although the private sphere, such as home, can hold together the family and kin with the enticing fragrance of food, “theorisations on the sense of home should also recognize the power relations that underpin the spheres/domains” (Bailey, 2017, p.58) which produce othering in the public sphere. Tsa Ba mentioned how food as a way for transnational engagement are undermined by the Dutch people he had worked with.

“Since 2011 resumed war in Kachin State, we did fund fair, traditional dance performance. We did not know much about the Dutch custom, then. Some Dutch complained that we were not serious and making fun. They did not see us as we were fund raising for the internally displaced people in Kachin. In their culture, they do the physical activities such as walking to raise fund for the refugee. We did not know their ways of fund raising. All of our lives, we did fund raising by selling food, and dance performance in Myanmar. This is the cultural barrier we faced in integration and also engagement back home. Because of this difference, it is sometimes difficult to work together with Dutch people.” July 2022.

Tsa Ba clarifies how Myanmar diasporas “promote agency and community” (Van der Kolk, 2015, p.357) through dance performances and make sense of home through commensality for fund-raising in the Dutch context. While the sensory experiences, particularly everyday practices of cooking and eating, “produce a sense of emplacement and belonging” to the place for Myanmar diasporas, it also reproduces the racial othering in the Dutch context. An example given by Tsa Ba has recollected my personal conversation in May 2022 with a board member of a Dutch-based non-governmental organization supporting the people of Myanmar. She told me disappointedly that “Myanmar people only want to come to the meetings when there are food and drink. If not, they do not come; they have excuses.” This sensorial experience of othering in the Dutch context is also elucidated in Bailey’s study of the migrant suitcase among Indian migrants (2017), which signals how the food embedded in one’s making sense of home could be a way of othering by reproducing the hegemonic racial discourse, in a less tangible form of exclusion.

5.3. Homemaking with Kachin Flag



Photograph 5 taken by the author: home space of Tsa and Naung Yan in Holsted, Denmark.

“ I feel like I arrived to Denmark only yesterday”, said Tsa, when I asked him about when he arrived in Denmark in one of our late-night conversations, under the dim yellow light, I looked at Tsa, who was walking back and forth in the spacious living room, with the Kachin flag boldly taking the space on the empty wall. Tsa tilted his head quizzically as if he was confused when he said that. Naung Yan, sitting in front of me at the other side of the table, smiled gently as if she agreed too.

Tsa arrived in Denmark in 2005 after spending a rough couple of years in Malaysia as a refugee. Tsa, together with his friend and a hundred people, walked through the forest in southern part of the Myanmar-Thailand border in 2003 on their journey to Malaysia. Tsa is in his early 40s, has been living in Denmark for 17 years, and attains Danish citizenship. He recently graduated as a chef and is a current member of the Kachin National Organization (KNO), which is a U.K.-based diasporas organization engaging back to the conflict situation in Myanmar with the vision of “*Anmdawm Shanglawi*, free Kachin Land, toward new free state, free from Burman occupation”¹⁵. His transnational engagement to Myanmar seeded since he was in Malaysia. Without a document, the given unsafe situation in Malaysia did not stop Tsa’s engagement. He went the protest against the Burmese military regime in Malaysia in 2005.

15. Later the community was named as Kachin Refugee Committee, facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/Kachin-Refugee-committee-1667817786801177/>
KNO’s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KachinNationalOrganization>

When I asked him why he is engaging back to what has been happening in Myanmar, he said,

“to save our *Jinghpaw mung* (Kachin Land) and to save our Kachin people from the ongoing oppression by the Burmese military, I together with friends initiated the refugee community in Malaysia. Because, all of us are refugee back in our own homeland. We are not economic migrants.” August 2022.



Photograph 6 taken by the author: the receipt book for 'Kachin Refugee Endowment' shared by Tsa.

The Kachin flag ties on the wall seem to embellish the politics of belonging to Kachin as a national identity and illuminate Tsa's multifaceted belonging to *home*, the imagined Kachin Land as a safe space. It's unveiling to learn the belonging co-existence with the perception of the constant threat to the identity (Esman cited in Brinkerhoff, 2008, p.73), affirmed in the case of the Armenian diaspora also (Demmers, 2007, p.16). Consequently, Tsa's ceaseless everyday transnational engagement practices such as fundraising (for example, 'Kachin Refugee Endowment' in photograph 6 is one way), political activism, protest and the list goes on as the revolution in search of *home*.

Furthermore, although Tsa feels estranged in Denmark, his belongingness to the imagined homeland with peace and security appears to be modelling the host society. With the increased voice tone and clenched jaw, he said,

“We need separation policy. We are in this deep trouble because of the hope of federal union. ... We are doing the revolution because we cannot stay together. Myanmar Union should be like European Union combined with different countries which each state has its own authority and governance” August, 2022.

The paradox of a counter-nationalistic vision of the homeland based on the nationalistic approach of the host-land shed light on Demmer's argument that “contemporary nationalist struggles are largely counter-nationalistic” (2002, p.92). However, Tsa's vision of Kachin Land as a developed modern western country appears not just rooted in politics. Instead, I observed Tsa's true desire to imagine the homeland as a safe space during our visit

to the Riplay¹⁶ playground in Børnernes, Ribe. On our last evening at Holsted, Tsa insisted that we visit the playground in Ribe, which is recently opened and the largest playground in Denmark, free of charge. Pointing here and there at the vast playground with the pillars, Viking houses, and castles attached with long, twisted slides, Tsa explained to me how the playground was funded and built with the endowment of the individual community members, the municipality and companies' sponsorship. Tsa seemed so proud as a Danish, stating how Danish people care for the well-being of the children and compared it with the Kachin Land he wishes to see in the future. Tsa's contradictory feelings and belongings "for the homeland and satisfaction with their new place of residence" (Milton, K. and Svašek, 2005, p.202) through transnational living experience highlights the positive transformation of trans-generational trauma by envisioning the healthy and resilient younger generations of Kachin Land.

5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated how the Myanmarese diasporas belonging to home perform and attain through everyday micro-practices as transnational engagement both in the Danish and Dutch contexts. The place-belongingness motivates *homemaking* as "a sense of the meaning and vitality of geographical place." (bell hooks, 2009, p.23). The trivial practices of eating and cooking food and planting and hanging a flag in everyday intersect identity and belonging, thus, providing a rite to embody the transnational engagement through the social surrogates, regardless of the othering challenge faced in the host societies. Through their politics of belonging, they constantly negotiate identities of here and there, bridging the new identities (Brinkerhoff, 2008, p.73) with the expectation, and vision of *home*, as a safe space based on host society politics which manifests in their diverse transnational engagement. Therefore, their multiple territorial belongings (Diener, 2007) transcend the push and pull of homeland and host-lands.

16. Riplay playground website: <https://riplay.dk/>

Chapter 6. Living the Coup from Thousand Miles Away

In this chapter, I examine sub-question 3: how does the evolution of conflict in Myanmar with the 2021 military coup affect Myanmar diasporas engagement and why?

6.1. No Change in Engagement

Sitting in the backyard full of varieties of greenish vegetable plants was soothing me amid sad and anguish discussion. Lu Mai is sitting tight and tense on the stool, her black hair tightly tied back in a ponytail revealing her earrings with the petals hanging in them, shaking, and sparkling like the miniature wind chimes under the sun as she speaks and moves her head.

“2 July 2010, I arrived at the Netherlands with my two kids. Not even one year after I arrived here, the war broke again. When the war happened, the civilians are the ones who suffered. If they talk about *Taingyinthaar* (တိုင်းရင်းသား), we are the ones who are at the top list.

Since long time ago, they want to do genocide to us, *Jinghpaw*. We cannot give our own name, no education, they oppressed us in these ways. We can clearly see that again since 2011. My mother, and my three siblings are displaced people because of war. My father was also a freedom fighter (KIA soldier) for the revolution. He died when I was just one and half years old. He died from the complications of the injuries from fighting in the war. He did not go to hospital, as he would get detain from war injuries if he went to hospital. He sacrificed his life for *Jinghpaw myusha* (kin).” July 2022.

Thirty-seven years old, Lu Mai, a widow and the mother of two teens, spoke in short and brisk sentences in *Jinghpaw*. It seemed she needed to catch her breath; she was in anguish as she told me about her family back home in Myanmar. I asked her whether to take a break, and she said no and continued. I still remember the first time I met her at *the Thaw Hlan Thingyan* festival; she wore a full *Manmaw*¹⁷ costume. Since then, we have been keeping in touch through WhatsApp. We call each other *ning*¹⁸. Lu Mai elucidated the myth of *Taingyinthaar*. There are 135 *Taingyinthaar* officially recognized by the State as indigenous (or) native races and ethnicities in Myanmar (Gravers, 2007, p.4). This categorization is presumed “to exclude certain minorities – most prominently the Rohingya” (Dunford, 2019, p.51) to gain citizenship right. Bamar, despite being one *Taingyinthaar*, because of Burmanization (Holmes, 1967) to non-Bamar, *Taingyinthaar* is often used as the equivalence to non-Bamar. Throughout this research, other participants also synonymize *Taingyinthaar* as non-Bamar. This politicization of *Taingyinthaar* by non-Bamar is explained by the chosen trauma of generational marginalization, while for Bamar is the hegemonic racialized process.

17. *Manmaw* is one of the tribes under the umbrella term of Kachin.

18. *Ning* means sister-in-law in *Jinghpaw*, applying *mayu-dama* kinship.

When I asked about if there has been changes in her engagement before and after the 2021 military coup, she said,

“Well, for me there is not much change in how I contribute and engage. Also I did not see differences during Aung San Suu Kyi’s government period in our *myusha* land. There, perhaps, could be differences in big cities during her time, because of building new roads. But in our *myusha* land, nothing was done, nothing came. It might be that some of our *myusha* leaders mistaken to put trust in her to make a change. But in my opinion, there is nothing change. She is just a Bamar among Bamar (*myen bta na myen sha re*). She was just a State Counsellor, how much can she do. She did not have power so she could not do much.” July 2022

Lu Mai’s sentiment on Aung San Suu Kyi mirrors homeland politics. Brenner studied the losing faith and feeling of betrayal by the ethnic minorities because of the intensifying armed conflicts in borderlands during Aung San Suu Kyi’s Government administration (2017, p.2). Her feeling of living in the continuous violence and conflict from a thousand miles away is also echoed by Tsa. He is always ready to discuss Myanmar’s politics and situation, as introduced in the previous chapter, 5.3. One afternoon, we were having dinner together, and the endless conversation continued about revolution, war, and peace in Myanmar. When I asked Tsa if his engagement was changed after the coup last year in 2021, his voice tone changed from an active high-pitched to a flat tone. His face turned expressionless, and he answered me without looking and continued eating; he said,

“the military coup to us has been since after signing the Pang Long agreement¹⁹. The Burmese betrayed us since that time. I have never stopped my engagement. I am continuously involving in this revolution in the ways I can. Well, if it will have impact or not, that will be God’s plan.” August 2022.

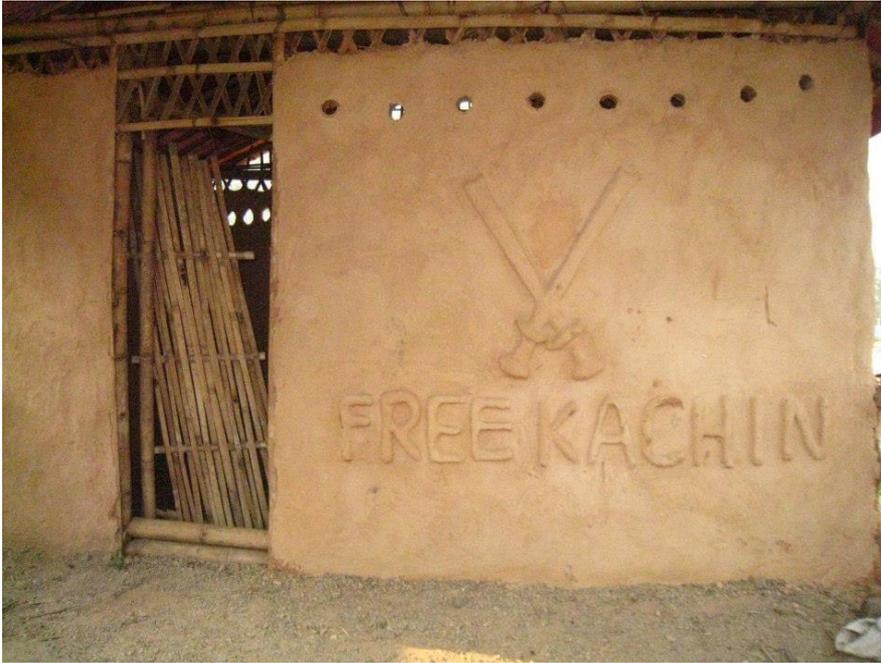
I realized that it was an unexpected question for him. I also felt that he wanted to tell me why I would refer to the 2021 military coup as a coup for being a Jinghpaw living under the Burmese military oppression since the failure of the Pang Long agreement enacted in 1947 (Simpson, 2017; Walton, 2008; Weiss, 2017). The empty promises and living with the feeling of betrayal since post-colonial time has not only led to a path to revolution (Sadan, 2013, p.322-324) by envisioning Kachin Land, *myusha* land, as *home*. But also, the revolution becomes not a choice yet an everyday practice for them as their grief and grievances never had a chance to be resolute and reconciled. Hence, the generational chosen trauma from the conflict embodied as Kachin identity and belonging shows a stronger tie than the citizenship and residence in Dutch and Danish societies for more than a decade, which answers why the non-ceasing engagement for Lu Mai and Tsa.

19. Pang Long agreement was signed on 12 February 1947 by the ethnic leaders from Bama, Kachin, Shan and Chin States, for forming a new constitution to the federal union of Burma (former name of Myanmar) while paving the way to independence from British colony. More details about Pang Long agreement can be explored in the studies here : <https://www.newmandala.org/conference-conflict-myanmar/>; https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/MM_470212_Panglong%20Agreement.pdf; <https://www.kachinland-news.com/?p=26787>.

6.2. The Coup, New Abnormal

One fine Dutch summer sunny day, Numri and I shared the meal together at the corner front table of the cozy “Little Saigon”, an authentic Vietnamese restaurant in Chinatown, Amsterdam. There, she told me,

“But you know, when I am in Laiza, I always feel very comfortable and fulfilment of being a Jinghpaw. I feel Laiza is ‘*nye a mungdan, Jinghpaw mung*’ (my homeland, Jinghpaw land)”.



Photograph 7 shared by Numri to show why she is engaging back to the conflict in Myanmar. This hut is made by mud, and located in the Je Yang IDP camp, Laiza.

Then, she combed her hair back with her hand and said,

“my father is Palaung (also known as Ta’ang) and Buddhist. But as my mother is Jinghpaw and Christian, I grew up with my mother side. I also have Palaung’s name, but I do not remember” (she chuckles), July 2022.

Numri is 32 years old, residing in the Netherlands for more than five years and working as a data center manager in a multi-national technology corporation. I have known her since 2021 through my cousin. Before the interview, we have met three times in person and shared meals together. We addressed to each other as *ning*. Her engagement to the conflict back home has been there since before with the evolution after 2021 post-coup. Her feeling of comfort contrary to the continuous armed conflict between the KIA and Burmese military around Laiza resembles Laiza as “liberated area” (Hedström, 2019, p.666), and Numri place-belongingness to Laiza as a space and politics of belongingness to Kachin. Despite coming from mixed family of Palaung-Kachin, her pure belongingness to Kachin uproots how the notion of identity and belongingness is socially constructed. She said,

“Before the coup, my tempo of engagement was as usual, I donated money for the IDPs, I speak out on social media Facebook. I shared the Facebook posts related with the conflict and politics. Since my engagement to the resumed war is more than a decade, it became like

a *normalcy*. When the coup happened, I reached to the acute phase of engagement again and I deeply miss the kids in the camps that I stayed together. I would like to ask them if the camp is their home now and how are they doing. Post-coup situation is a double politics for me. Now, I have to concern and worry for both *Jinghpaw mung* (Kachin Land) and *Myen mung* (Bamar Land). There are also changes in ways of my contribution. I not only do the financial support but also physically participated in the protests organized in the Netherlands. My activities, and posts shared on social media are also dramatically increased. Of course, most of the shared posts on my Facebook are about the conflict in Kachin. I also shared about the killings and arson in Myaing village recently, well, *we* (referring to Kachin) have faced this situation already longtime though.” July, 2022.

Along with Numri’s experience, Tsawm from Denmark shared how the 2021 post-coup has stimulated her to engage more. Tsawm is 33 years, *Jinghpaw*, and a graduate student. Tsawm is a Danish citizen and has been living in Denmark for 15 years. Her engagement back to home, Myanmar, was seeded when the Saffron revolution²⁰ happened in 2007. She said this had opened her eyes to see about the oppression of the Burmese military to its citizens. However,

“The conflict was like on-going thing, so apart from supporting financially to the IDPs, I detached myself from the Kachin and Burmese communities. But I pay more attention to what is happening in Myanmar after the coup. I volunteered in the Kachin Community Denmark as a treasurer. We did fund raising by selling the rice bags and donated back to Myanmar.” August 2022.

When the conflict is everyday life, it gives a sense of normalcy and their revolutionary spirit is routinised in transnational engagement. However, with the escalating violence after the 2021 coup, it is essential to highlight the intensifying engagement. While their engagement back home is very much recalled on being and belonging to Kachin, they both states their concern about what is happening to the other people in Myanmar. This *‘not-othering the other’* and multilayered belonging aptly pointed why the evolution of engagement after the 2021 military coup for them.

20. The pro-democracy, non-violent demonstrations involved by thousands of students, activists, and Buddhist monks in September 2007 were brutally cracked down by the Burmese military (HRW, 2007). Dubbing Saffron revolution (ရွှေဝါရောင်တော်လှန်ရေး) relates to the Buddhist monks’ engagement in the uprising (Selth, 2008), who wear the saffron color robes.

6.3. The Coup, A Big Change

Mama who was chatting with her children about the dinner during our zoom call returned to the screen facing towards me and said,

“I thought KIA is ‘just’ a rebel group. I was not interested in the politics. My family do not have someone who is working for politics. I ignored the situations that have been happening in Kachin and Karen States. I did not have feelings on what have been happening to them. So, I did not engage to the conflicts before. I was so happy to see changes in the Myanmar politics when I first arrived at the Netherlands. I hope for the better development and education for the young people in Myanmar. I got more expectations during *Amay*²¹ Suu government administration. I had too many expectations and when the 2021 coup happened, I knew it was all gone.... the future is gone. I felt so lost since then. But there was a glimpse of hope flashed into my mind. Maybe if all of us work together, the situation will change the sooner. So, I started to meet with Myanmar people in the Netherlands. We also connected with people from other European countries. Then, we founded the Global Myanmar Volunteers group in March 2021 with around 40-50 Myanmar people from Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, and United Kingdom. We do financial contribution as donation to the CDM-ers, PDF and IDPs across Myanmar.” July 2022

Mama was talking to me as if she was confessing. Mama is 50 years old, a clinical researcher and a mother of two teens. She arrived in the Netherlands 9 years ago and is a Myanmar citizen. The coup has seemingly broken the ethno-nationalistic attachment and has given the opportunity to embrace the change for the better of Myanmar. Along with Mama, Thar Hla, 28 years old, a descendant of a Bamar-Chinese mixed family, shared the sentiment on the resumed war in Kachin State over dinner at my home in late August 2022. I have known Thar Hla since 2021 through a common, dear friend. Since then, we have often met to share meals and chat about our common homeland, Myanmar. Thar Hla arrived in Europe to study in August 2019 and currently starting the PhD for the joint program among the Universities in Indonesia and the Netherlands. Thar Hla has left Myanmar since *he*²² was a teen to pursue education in the U.S, and now he has been living across Europe for three years. We met at Amsterdam Sloterdijk station for the individual interview on 15th August 2022. Sitting on the bench in Orlyplein, which is three minute’s walk passed by the station, he said,

“I do not know much about the conflict in Myanmar as I was born and raised in Yangon, and I am from Bamar majority. Displaced people from the conflict are not my matter at that time.....Of course, I can tell that there is always the sense of fear for the military regime as a Bamar, homosexual, but I am sure my degree of fear is not the same as *Taingyinthar*.”

Then, he continued,

“Before the coup, my engagement back to Myanmar was mostly for my career advancement and for my achievements. After the coup, there is a dramatic change in how I engage back home. I focus more on the community than myself. I want to help in all ways I can. I did a number of formal engagement by doing projects and I am involved in underground movement. The projects I have done are mostly for education, and information sharing about what is happening in Myanmar” August, 2022.

21. *Amay* means mother in Burmese and *Amay* Suu as referring to Aung San Su Kyi.

22. he/him is Thar Hla’s chosen pronouns. Despite of his sexual orientation, Thar Hla prefers his gender identity as male.

The geo-politicized decades-long conflict and their immense trust in Aung San Suu Kyi's led NLD Government have led Mama and Thar Hla to see the partially bright side of Myanmar before the 2021 coup. However, after the 2021 post-coup with intensifying conflict and violence all over Myanmar, their transnational engagement was born with their belongingness, feeling of loss and hope to rebuild the homeland as an imagined safe space.

6.4. The Pressure Cooker

Nhkum Joseph is 28 years old, Zaiwa (Kachin)²³, who identified as bisexual and pronouns they/them told me that they decided to disengage from all the activities they have been involving regarding the conflict(s) in Myanmar at 2021. They said,

“Well, I feel my activism is not impactful since I still have to build my life here (the Netherlands).” July 2022.

However, in August 2022, during our conversation through WhatsApp, they told me that they are involved in the documentary project called “*Doh Pyay Doh Myay*”²⁴ (Our Country, Our Land) is a program produced by the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB). Then I remembered what they told me that how they felt so frightened hearing about the military coup news and how their activist spirit reappeared at this time. Even though they do not realize it, their engagement is always there. Joseph's will to disengage from the conflict in Myanmar seems inherently connected with the traumatized integration experiences and challenges they faced in the Netherlands.

My first-time meeting with Joseph was at the first event of *the Thaw Hlan Thingyan* Festival. We were there sharing meals (food were sold in the event for fundraising to send back to Myanmar) at one table with my other friends and their friend. Since then, we have kept in touch regularly. For our interview, we agreed to meet at Amsterdam central station. Since we could not find a solace place to sit around the Amsterdam central station, we crossed *Ij* river by ferry. Joseph led me to a lovely park spot with big trees and shade on the riverbank. There, they told me,

“I have been engaging to the conflict situation since I was in Myanmar by donation to IDPs and doing media awareness campaign in which some of my friends got detained. I was also almost getting caught, but I escaped. At that time, the Bamar people were having full democracy for themselves and how much troubles we had as Kachin. When I talked to my Bamar friends, they did not understand. You know, they did not have sympathy on us. Even when I did fund raising and asking for donation, some donated, not because they knew the conflict situation in Kachin but because they knew me. Now, they are also facing the same situation. So this (the military coup) knocks them to be awake.....My father was a freedom-fighter from KIA, he was all the time in the forest and did not get any salary. I grew up close to my mom who raised three of our siblings and took the responsibility as both father and mother. So, I always had this idea of working for the development of own community. I wanted to be educated in abroad and worked back for my community.” July 2022.

23. Zaiwa is an ethnic group under the umbrella term of Kachin.

24. According to DVB Doh Pyay Doh Myay (DPDM) Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/dvb.dpdm/>), it's “a Myanmar's no. 1 roadshow, exploring ethnic, cultural and natural diversity worldwide to anyone who has a connection to Myanmar”. DPDM also claims that their aim is “to give diaspora in all regions of the world a voice.”

By stating how the generational suffering of Kachin induced by the ongoing war and the feeling of being left out from apparent democracy during NLD led pro-democracy government period, they affirm Mama and Thar Hla's sentiments on how belonging to Bamar identity could give the feeling of not-related to the civil war at home. And they continued the integration journey,

“When I arrived at Amsterdam in 2018, I did not know what to do. When I had first interview with IND, they said I was not in their criteria. I was an activist and IDP, but they rejected my application. That decision came after 8 months and almost a year stay in the Netherlands. So, I was so so depressed. In the refugee camp, I could not do anything, no right to education. I got paid 57 euro a week, every week just wait for that money and depending on it was a waste of time. I was also doing online study at that time for Business administration from U.S University. But the internet connection was not good in the refugee camp. There were thousands of people in the camp. We are all the people coming from war zones, so the place is like a pressure cooker, and I did not have any concentration for my study. So, I failed for the exams, and I was expelled from the study program. Since then, I lost faith in the Netherlands. Even though they talk about human rights, human rights, in the refugee camp, you're not a human, just a mere individual number. You don't matter. They did not accept that I am a refugee and they sent me to the deportation camp. They did not believe that if they deport me, that I will be imprisoned back in Myanmar. It was extremely difficult time in my life. Since then, my depression was going worse and worse. I also lost faith in humanity and democracy.” July, 2022.

I started to feel my chest so tighten. Even though I was sitting on the riverbank of *Ij* in the middle of the Oeverpark, gentle, fresh breezes could not drive away the heaviness sensation from me. I needed a break. I look at them. They slowed down, stretched their feet and leaned back by touching the green grass—a lady with a puppy on a leash passed by us. The puppy was running towards me, trying to unleash himself. I touched and embraced the puppy needing the same urge to release all my feelings at that moment to regain my courage to continue listening to what Joseph might continue to say. Then, they said, “when I have a home, I will have a puppy. I love the dog (with a bright, shining smile).” I felt a bit relieved after our conversation about the dog, and I believed so did Joseph. Joseph is the only participant who shared the will to disengage from the conflict situation in Myanmar, despite his continuous engagement in different ways. The trauma they have from “distinctive challenges owing to the experience of dispersion and acculturation” (Brinkerhoff, 2008, p. 72) as “a turning point” (Abdelhady, 2008, p.59) seems to display the key motive on why they decided to disengage.

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I brought a few examples of the participants whose transnational engagement back to the conflict can be categorized into four groups depending on their chosen trauma, identities, belongings, *not-othering the others* and the traumatized integration into the host society. While for some, the 2021 military coup d'état is not even a question because of intergenerational suffering manifested in their day-to-day transnational engagement for decades, the escalation of violence, intensifying humanitarian crisis and state collapse in Myanmar made birth of transnational engagement for a few, augmented the intensity and ways of engagement for other participants.

Chapter 7. Cross-cutting Boundaries

Now, I will accompany you, the readers, to the events and gatherings in Dutch and Danish societies to show how the cross-cutting boundaries of religious and spiritual belief, inter-generation, and cultures intersect with the chosen trauma, contested identities and belongings in their transnational engagement. Thus, this chapter complements answering all sub-questions.

7.1. Belief and Belonging

During my interactions with the participants, the church, monastery, and prayers frequently appear together with how and where they organize the engagement back home. Not to take for granted religion as a tangible way of transnational engagement, I took a closer look into the symbolic churches and monasteries as the site of engagement.

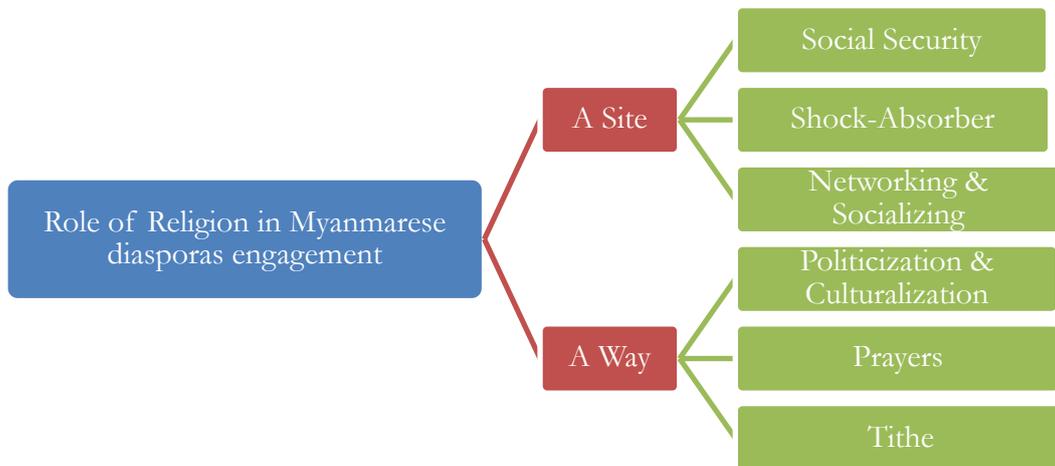


Figure 1: The author's illustration.

During our follow up zoom call in late August 2022, Naung Yan told me,

“The church is a social security for us, it has a strong community. That’s why I depend on the church.”

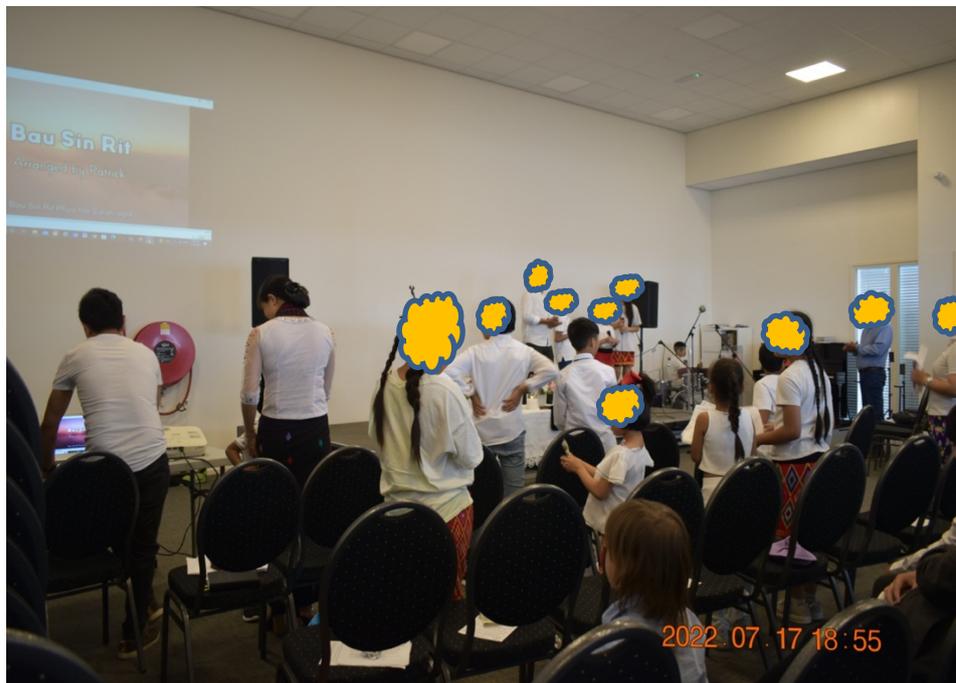
She explained to me how the fundraising was done in the church community in Denmark for sending back to IDP affected by the armed conflict in Kachin State, Myanmar.

Following her, Numri, on her black crop top and jogger, said she had much more time before the full-time job started and could do a lot of voluntary jobs at the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) community which enlightens the church “as one type of voluntary organization” (Davie, 2008, p.139). Then, she continued,

“I still go to the church often as the church is shock-absorber for me” July, 2022.

Both of them pinpoint the church as a social space and a site of engagement, providing safety and comfort for “existential security” (Mastagar, 2015, p.1361). But also, the church “reinforces the endorsed identity” (Brinkerhoff, 2008, p.75) and belonging through their transnational engagement back to Myanmar. The utilization of the church as a site for transnational engagement is also noted as “the traditional *faith-nurturing* institution and its

space have evolved into the most socially important institution” (Mastagar, 2015, p.1361) among Bulgarians immigrants in Toronto.



Photograph 8 taken by the author during the Children’s Day celebration in KBC, the Netherlands.

During my participation on the KBC celebration of Children’s Day, Nhkum Joseph who was running back and forth to the stage and the seat next to me said,

“I come to KBC because of the Kachin community, doing activities together, for networking and socializing. If I want to feel the spiritual touch, I go to the other church in Amsterdam” July, 2022.

For Joseph, belonging is vital in his transnational engagement through the church. The church service was going on; kids sang the worship songs in Dutch and Jinghpaw. The prayers were sent to the children back in Myanmar who have to run from the armed conflicts. I noticed all girls wore the red *Manmam* skirts and some ladies wore Kachin *longyi*²⁵ as in photograph 8. It is essential to inform that the traditional costumes are used as “a form of documentation of identity” (Sadan, 2007, p.63-64) to reproduce the ethnic marker. The remarkable role of KBC moulding ethnonationalism and Christian belief is also studied by Sadan (2013, p.361). Participating in this ritual and prayers, as simple as asking God to protect the children in the conflict back home, enfolded me with the chosen trauma of the Kachin people, our collective suffering and belonging to it. There, I realized that it would be so flawed to understand chosen trauma, identity and belonging separately, given the endemic war at home.

25. *Longyi*, an extended form of skirt that is wrapped around the lower body and has very similar function like sarong.

On my way on the metro from church to Amstelstation, I wondered why Tsa was not in the church. I know he is in the KBC WhatsApp group from time to time; he shared the meeting invitations regarding NUG²⁶ representatives' discussion on democratic reform for Myanmar. But it became clear later in our conversation at his home about a thin line between religion and politics.



Photograph 9 taken by the author at the kitchen of Tsa Ba, the Netherlands.

“As I am the leader of the Jinghpaw community, the responsibility is heavier for me. At the beginning, the church and community were combined. But because of the mixed marriage and some Jinghpaw people’ partners have different beliefs than Christian, we took the community work out of the church. So that, they will be comfortable in participating in Jinghpaw community and it will not be mixed with the mission of the church. In the community, all Jinghpaw and their related personnels can participate regardless of their religions and beliefs. Our community mission is for the Kachin culture and politics. It has begun since before the coup, it does not relate with the coup.” Tsa Ba, July, 2022

Nevertheless, the church(KBC) separated from the Kachin community in governance and organizational structures; Tsa Ba said that the financial contribution sent back to Myanmar were sometimes from the tithes. The mug sitting in Tsa Ba’s kitchen with the two logos of KBC and Kachin’s flag well explains the politicization of the church with the ethnic marker, Kachin-ness, in photograph 9. However, this constructivism of ‘us’ seems to agree with “we define ourselves according to what we are not” (Cahoone, 1996 cited in Brinkerhoff, 2008, p.73). While the church is a site of politicization of chosen trauma, identity, and belonging through transnational engagement, for Lu Mai, the religious practice with transcendental faith is a way of her transnational engagement. She said,

“We don’t know how long this conflict will be. So, for me number one priority is to pray and to live in faith. God can do everything. When the time comes, it(peace) will happen.” August, 2022

26. NUG is the exile government formed after the 2021 military coup: <https://gov.nugmyanmar.org/about-nug/>

For the Myanmar diasporas community belonging to Buddhism in the Netherlands, Gue Nge expressed that distrust has increased after the 2021 military coup because of their political identities, which consequently impacts on how they engage.

“After post-coup, one monk left from the monastery because of different political opinions among them. The other monk has lots of awards and degrees as a monk, but he was silent throughout the post-coup period and started writing about *building peace* like the Burmese military recently on Facebook. He was the strong supporter of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi yet when she got detained last year, he did not express a single word. My father made the analysis of this monk’s Facebook posts and I shared my father analysis on Facebook. We stopped communicating with him since we do not want to be seen as *da-lan* (the imposters).” July, 2022

It is apparent that while the religion holds a communal space where people “gain a sense of belonging, ethnic rootedness, and nurtures identity” (Mastagar, 2015, p.1361), the different political ideologies have caused the cleavage among the participants who belong to the same religion despite of their belief in religion and spirituality.

7.2. Situating Intergeneration and Culture

Tsa Ba shared his engagement in one of the protests organized by the Myanmar diasporas in the Netherlands in front of ICJ in February 2022. In photograph 10, he is in the far-left position holding a three-finger salute borrowed from “The Hunger Games” movie to demonstrate an uprising against tyranny in Myanmar. I do not pretend to engage here in the social movement of the three-finger salute. Instead, I deep dive into the ethnographic data speaking through the photographs. Contextualizing photograph 10, looking at the children brought by the adults, I recall Mama accompanying her teens in the two *Thaw Hlan Thingyan* events. During our interview, she said,

“This is (the military coup) the injustice. This is a sad and depressed situation. We all must involve and work together. We’ll have to win sooner. We are not dutiful to the ones who are risking their lives especially the youths who are in the front lines if we are not participating in the ways we can. I even dragged my daughter to participate in the dance performance during the second *Thaw Hlan Thingyan* Festival. I know there is no insurance to win but we will have to continue with hope for the future of young people.” July 2022



Photograph 10 shared by Tsa Ba to show how he has been engaging back to home, Myanmar.



Photograph 11 taken by the author at Thaw Hlan Thingyan, first event organized in Hoofddorp, the Netherlands by the Myanmar diasporas on 23 April 2022.

I reflect here on diaspora parents' intergenerational, transnational engagement as encouraging the younger generation to engage with the politics in the homeland, perhaps to continue to see themselves as belonging to the homeland, thus, resembles how Greek-Cypriots abroad maintain the discourse of ancestral homeland and their offspring to be an integral part of Cyprus. (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007, p.507). Moreover, the instrumentalization of cultural events to integrate the younger generation is also studied in the Ethiopian diaspora in North America (Lyons, 2007, p.533). While acknowledging the enforced engagement by the parents, there is a confronting observation of *missing youths* in the conversations and gatherings.

We were all sitting on the ground in a circle between the *Muziekkoepel*²⁷ and the lake at Oosterpark, Amsterdam. We put the different sizes and shapes of food trays, pots, and drinks inside the circle. The sun is getting so high, bright, and hot, doing its best to produce heat in the afternoon for the beginning of summer in early June 2022. I listened and looked at all the people sitting around me, talking about themselves, and realized that there were only two young students who would fit the category of *youth* out of almost 30 people. Since this gathering was meant for the youths, I asked Mama, who sat next to me, "where are the youths?". Mama told me that young people are like this; they do not want to come to participate. She also mentioned that her daughter did not want to come, and maybe she told the other young people not to come. They have their own WhatsApp group and contact each other there. This riddle of 'missing youths' was partially answered by Gue Nge during the interview. Gue Nge's face looked red, eating the spicy noodle soup made by Numri, sitting face to face with me on an approximately two meters long wood table, discussing the challenge in frustration.

"Also, I feel we are used for their benefits. For example, I volunteered for the Dutch people led platform working to support the situation in Myanmar after post-coup since last year. One time, I was asked to wait for the meeting. But when the meeting happens, they said *they just need adults, not youths*. In Myanmar culture, young people are asked to follow what adults say and this platform culture is like Myanmar culture." July, 2022

According to Gue Nge, youth agency is there to engage but disengage by the adults. The missing youths in the meetings and gatherings, how they bring their agency, if and why they (dis)engage, and shaping the diversified Myanmarese diasporic dynamics in Western societies are worth exploring as the next research.

Moreover, Myanmarese diasporas, as "transnational transporters of cultures" (Ogden, 2008, p.7), stand out in photographs 10, 11, and 12. In photograph 10, the person next to Tsa Ba wore the Kachin flag symbolized scarf. In photographs 11 and 12, the individuals who wore the traditional costumes, partially or fully dressed, belong to the diverse ethnic groups from Myanmar. These photographs explain how transnational diaspora engagement is culturalized by embodying belongingness and identities. Therefore, it refutes the conventional spatial-cultural definition centred on the dichotomy of "First World/Third World, as well as East versus West and North and South" (ibid., p.8).

27. *Muziekkoepel* music dome in Dutch, is the dome with a stage where people do performance for music and dance.



Photograph 12 shared by Gue Nge to show his transnational engagement on the street of the Netherlands to the conflict in Myanmar.

7.3. Division and Unity

Discussing the challenges with the participants, the division occurring within the Myanmar diaspora community is displayed as the central theme. For example, Moe Moe told me that when she went for the protests early this year, Myanmar diasporas divided into two or three groups, and they could not agree on what they wanted to say anymore, which was a sad situation, she added. Congruent with Moe Moe, Tun Kyaw said,

“I joined the protest in front of ICJ in Feb 2022 when Min Aung Hlaing’s six staff came here to Den Haag. During the protest, some people shouted ‘Min Aung Hlaing...ma-ae-lo (mother fxxker in Burmese)’. I do not like this shouting and swear words. It is meaningless and not effective. Other country’s people cannot understand. What can we do with such kind of swear words? Once I heard that, I stepped back from the crowd. This is not effective.” July 2022.

It seems that belonging to a shared nation does not necessarily equate with a shared culture, as Demmers elaborated (2002, p.92) for Myanmar diasporas. Instead, it highlights the multiplicity of identities that Myanmar diasporas possess. This incompatible view of diasporas envisioning the imagined homeland is also noted in the

study of Sri Lanka's Sinhalese and Tamil diasporas in the U.K (Orjuela, 2008, p.444). Moreover, Mama highlighted the othering among the Myanmar diasporas community,

“The diaspora community in the Netherlands has been divided into two groups since before the coup. One group (group 1) has lesser people and formed with 88 students (exiles from the 8888-democracy movement), ones who followed NLD politics, and the leader said he is the secretariat of the NLD. They do not want to collaborate when others are organizing events. They only want and ask others to collaborate with what they are doing. The leader even said, ‘who are you guys! (Mama seemed upset and raised her voice). I am the secretariat.’ They do not accept the change, and they follow the old path like dictators. The other group (group 2) is more flexible, and more people are there; some of the 88 students are also there. *Thaw Hlan Thingyan*'s second event had fewer people because it was led and organized by group 1”.

That was ‘Aha moment’ for me. My assumption was perhaps wrong that there were lesser people at the second *Thaw Hlan Thingyan* event because they sold the tickets as entrance fees. Instead, it appears that the political supremacy that repeats the same manners as the authoritarianism and dictatorship they want to erase once and for all has ironically caused the divide among Myanmar diasporas. While chasing the rights and wrongs of all my assumptions, the conversation with Mama further evoked me to think about what resistance is really if the resistance is practised and engaged in the way the oppressors do. It seems clear that for Mama, “resisting oppression means more than just reacting against one's oppressors, it means envisioning new habits of being, different ways to live in the world.” (bell hooks, 1990, p.218).

Another clashing opinion among the Myanmar diasporas is regarding Aung San Suu Kyi, the de-facto leader of the NLD government. Tsa Ba said,

“Before the coup, we worked only for Jinghpaw Mung (Kachin Land), for IDP, because of the resumed war. We collected the donations and sent to them. Also, when *Daw*²⁸ Suu came here to defend at ICJ²⁹ in 2019, Jinghpaw, Rakhine and Rohingya people were one group. Bamar and other ethnic groups were one group.” July 2022.

Numri also mentioned,

“*Daw* Aung San Suu Kyi is just like the stick for the military dogs. She cannot go against the military founded by her father. She did not do much for *Taingyinthar*. There was always a distance between mainland and hilly regions.” July 2022

Both reflect on the representation of homeland political division and stress the de-territorialize nature of the conflict (Demmers, 2002, p.85) for them. However, for some Myanmar diasporas, Aung San Suu Kyi is still at heart in their engagement to their homeland. Her two portraits with the NLD party logo were positioned on the backside of the hall in the first *Thaw Hlan Tingyan* event, as shown in photograph 13.

28. *Daw* literally means Aunt in Burmese. However, it is also applied as prefix in front of the name to address middle-aged and/or married women. *Daw* Suu here refers to Aung San Suu Kyi.

29. The details on the case *The Gambia v. Myanmar* regarding with Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide can be viewed on ICJ website: <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/178>

Regardless of the division among the community, the unity is also expressed by a few participants. Numri said in one of our gatherings for lunch,

“After the coup, I see the union of mainland and hilly regions people. This is a big change.” July, 2022.

Tsa Ba also mentioned,

“But after the coup, we all are united..... we connect with all other ethnic people here, Buddhist, Muslim, Rohingya to help the refugee and displaced people in the needed place in Myanmar, not only *Jinghpaw Mung* anymore.” July 2022



Photograph 13 taken by the author in Thaw Hlawn Thingyan first event in Hoofddorp, the Netherlands, 23 April 2022.

For Lu Mai,

“Well, because of the military coup, we became more united regardless of religions and ethnic groups. I even want to thank to the military coup for that.” July 2022.

The bright side is the attempt to understand each other in need of unity for the revolution against the military dictatorship has risen after the 2021 post-coup. Despite the nuances in how the different ethnic groups culturalize and symbolize their identities and belongingness in their transnational engagement, the “cross-ethnic mobilization of peace” (Orjuela, 2008, p.450) transforms their conflicting identities into a collective identity and belongingness to the homeland, Myanmar.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter recapitulates the multiple dimensions of transnational engagement through cross-cutting boundaries. While the progressive understanding of the thin line between spiritual and political identities enhances their engagement to the conflict in homeland,

culturalization of transnational engagement reveals Myanmar diasporas living the coup from thousand miles away because of their chosen trauma, identities, and belongings. What is significant is a sense of unity concurring after the 2021 post-coup among the Myanmar diasporas regardless of their heterogenic political ideologies and vision of homeland.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I am coming to terms with my doubts, questions, and the meanings the participants show me. Through the ethnographic lens, I examined *How and why do Myanmarese diasporas dynamics unfold in Dutch and Danish contexts through transnational engagement?*. By exploring the everyday lives of the Myanmarese diasporas living in Dutch and Danish contexts, this study supports the argument of the interconnectedness of the chosen trauma, identities, and belongings manifested in transnational engagement. Contextualizing the decades-long conflict in Myanmar and its impact on the Myanmarese diasporas was a key connecting dot to develop this complex conceptual and analytical framework. As empirically evident in my observations, the participants endure passive suffering to articulate their political agency in transnational engagement through the everyday meaning construction of ongoing suffering. Because trans-generational chosen trauma not only passes the open wound but also transforms into extraordinary strength and resilience in which they envisage a better future for the younger generation and imagined homeland.

The multi-layered constructed identities, chosen trauma, and belongingness with the epochal conflicts in Myanmar navigate how to engage, where and when. Notably, the 2021 military coup as a compass to understand the evolution of transnational engagement has revealed interesting findings categorized into four groups. The first group is the ones who have never changed their engagement. The urgency and the dire need to engage back home are heavily linked with the chosen trauma and belongingness to Jinghpaw's identity, which functions in tandem with the inclusion and exclusion of *Taingyinthar*. As Brinkerhoff illuminated, "Identity cannot exist without an 'other'" (2008, p.73); the inevitable truth is the othering of one side reproduces the cycle of othering. In this context, the othering of the Burmanized State (Holmes, 1967) to its ethnic minorities and vis-a-vis. In this circumstance, the revolution does not become a choice but is embedded in the everyday practice of transnational spaces. However, it would be clearly flawed that politicization and essentialization of identities are the only motives yet, the pure desire to imagine the homeland exemplars on the host-lands as observed.

Another significant finding is 'not-othering the others' in the second group. While decades-long conflict became normalcy, the intensifying conflict and violence in the post-coup period has broken the ethno-nationalistic barrier as the revolution becomes the common goal. The third group engagement is only seeded with the 2021 military coup as their solid trust in the NLD government's development progress. Despite experiencing the same temporality during Aung San Suu Kyi's led NLD government, belongingness to where they come from, spatiality, and ethnic identities mark their conflicting opinions of the NLD administration. Furthermore, the integration challenges and unsettled legal status in host societies do not limit the transnational engagement of the 14 Myanmarese diasporas I have interviewed. Despite they endured the traumatized experience, which caused an adverse impact on their well-being, it led one participant to wish to disengage in the fourth group.

While the cross-cutting boundaries of religious and spiritual beliefs, intergeneration, and cultures reproduce the division, the silver-lining of the unity is worth noting. I argue religious and spiritual beliefs are not the cause of the divisive political ideologies among the 14 Myanmarese diasporas, regardless of religion as a site and a way of transnational engagement. Also, being mindful of how we make sense of who we are through the trivial everyday

practice of eating explains the compelling method of ‘sharing meals’ in this research. On the one hand, I learned that sharing meals and inviting people to home is a form of showing social intimacy “as an essential part of feeling a sense of community” (Bailey, 2017, p.53) in the relationship with the participants and vis-a-vis. On the other hand, sharing meals is “the means that we all use in everyday life to make sense of our surroundings, of other people’s actions and perhaps even of what we do ourselves” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.4). It was also one way to minimize the power hierarchy of the researcher and researched participants. Nevertheless, this research has taught me that critical reflexivity is to embrace the worldview I carry and accept the impossibility of being in sameness with the researched participants (Rose, 1997, p.313). Respecting how the participants perceived me, tried to connect, and dissociate from me; I unlearned the stereotypical gender expectation (KWAT, 2013, p.8; Seng Lawn and Naujoks, 2018, p.2) could not be conventional depending on social status and class.

None of the insight would have gained without trying to understand the diasporas from their perspectives. Acknowledging their struggles and dignifying their agency *hold a space* to share their joy and pain, keep and break the silence, rather than naming, judging, and capitalizing them as the objects of the development discourse. Thus, it has opened the way to make sense of the complex social phenomena of the 14 Myanmar diasporas’ everyday realities in Dutch and Danish societies, which I propose as a fundamental first step to envisage ‘the change we want to see’ in development. Now, returning to what Thar Hla said to me, “home is not the place you live but where you feel you belong”. Home means beyond the boundary of physical presence. In making sense of *home*, this study shows that for some, neither home is a mere physical entity, “a site of warmth and safety or violence and exploitation” (Jung, 2012, p. 205). Belonging to home signals “not only an expression of subjective feelings but also a way to negotiate political and ethnic belonging.” (Jolliffe, 2016, p.113) deeply connected with existing, hybrid and emergent identities embodied in the chosen trauma for Myanmar diasporas through their transnational experiences. Therefore, this paper provides the link between Myanmar diasporas dynamics and their transnational engagements in search of *home*, safe space as they expect to be.

Appendices

Appendix 1: *Demographic of participants*

Pseudoname	Age (yrs)	Pronouns (Identified by participant)	Ethnicity	Occupation	Years of living in host country	Citizenship
Host country: The Netherlands						
Gu Nge	28	She/They	Shan + Bamar	Data Center Technician	12	Dutch
Lu Mai	37	She/Her	Kachin	not available	12	Dutch
Mama	50	She/Her	Chinese+ Bamar	Clinical Research	9	Myanmar
Moe Moe	47	She/Her	Karen	not available	16	In the process
Nhkum Joseph	28	They/Them	Zaiwa (Kachin)	Freelancer	4	In the process
Numri	32	She/Her	Kachin	Data Center Engineer	5	Myanmar
Thar Hla	28	He/Him	Chinese+ Bamar	Student	3	Myanmar
Tsa Ba	38	He/Him	Kachin	Pharmaceutical company	13	Dutch
Tun Kyaw	53	He/Him	Karen	Aluminum Export Company	16	In the process
Host country: Denmark						
Aung Aung	44	He/Him	Bamar	not available	16	Danish
Naung Yan	33	She/Her	Naga	Student	9	Myanmar
Tsa	43	He/Him	Kachin	Chef & Board member of KNO	17	Danish
Tsawm	33	She/Her	Kachin	not available	15	Danish
Host country: The United Kingdom						
Wa Doi	70	He/Him	Kachin+ Bamar	President of KNO	12	British

I want to inform the readers that this table is not to mention the participants as mere numbers. But for the readers to have an overview of the demographic of the participants who have contributed to this research.

Appendix 2: Flyer for the research participants in Burmese and Jinghpaw



မင်္ဂလာပါ။

ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ နာမည်ကတော့ ဆိုင်းဘူပါ။ မိသားစုနာမည်ကတော့အင်ဂျိုင်း ဖြစ်ပြီး အမျိုးနွယ်ကတော့ မရန် ပါ။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ မိတ်ဆွေတို့ အဆင်ပြေ သင့်တော်သလို ခေါ်ဆိုနိုင်ပါတယ်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ ချက်မြုပ်ဇာတိကတော့ မြစ်ကြီးနားမြို့၊ ကချင်ပြည်နယ်ပါ။ လောလောဆယ်နယ်သာလန်နိုင်ငံ၊ သည့်ဟော့မြို့မှာရှိတဲ့ 'International Institute of Social Studies' ကျောင်းမှာ မဟာဘွဲ့အတွက် လက်နက်ကိုင်ပဋိပက္ခနဲ့ ပြီးချမ်းရေး ဘာသာရပ်နဲ့ပတ်သက်ပြီး သုတေသနစာတမ်းပြုစုနေတဲ့ ကျောင်းသူ ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ စာတမ်းကတော့ နယ်သာလန်နဲ့ဒိန်းမတ်နိုင်ငံတွေ မှာ အခြေချနေထိုင်တဲ့ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံမှရောက်လာတဲ့သူတွေ မြန်မာ ပြည်တွင်းဆက်တိုက်ဖြစ်ပေါ်နေတဲ့ ပဋိပက္ခတွေအပေါ်ဘယ်လိုမြင် သလဲ။ ဘယ်လိုပိုင်နေကြသလဲ။ ဘာအတွက်ပိုင်နေကြသလဲဆို တာကို နားလည်ဖို့အတွက် ရည်ရွယ်ပါတယ်။

ဒီစာတမ်းပြုစုဖို့အတွက် ပါဝင်ပေးကြတဲ့ သွေးချင်းများကို ပြောမပြ တတ်အောင် အထူးပုံကျေးဇူးတင်ပါတယ်။ ဒီစာတမ်းကိုပြုစုတဲ့အခါ မှာလည်း စိတ်ရင်းစေတနာနဲ့ မိမိသဘောဆန္ဒနဲ့ ပါဝင်ပေးကြတဲ့ သွေး ချင်းများရဲ့ ကိုယ်စိတ်အဆင်ပြေမယ့်အခြေအနေအချိန်အခါမျိုးမှာ လုပ်ဆောင်သွားမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ပါဝင်ပေးတဲ့သွေးချင်းတို့ရဲ့ နာမည်ရင်းများကိုလည်း ပါဝင်သူတို့ရဲ့ ပရိုဗဲဗီ (privacy)နဲ့ လုံခြုံ စိတ်ချရမှုအတွက် (confidentiality) အတွက် နာမည်ပြောင်းပြီးဖော်ပြ မှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ စာတမ်းပြုစုထားတဲ့ ဒေတာများ၊ စကားပြောထားတဲ့ မှတ်တမ်းအချက်အလက်များကိုလည်း သေချာစွာသိမ်းဆည်းထားမှာ ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ စာတမ်းပြုစုသည့်ကာလအတွင်း ပါဝင်ပေးတဲ့သူတစ် ယောက်ချင်းစီက စိတ်သက်တောင့်သက်သာမဖြစ်ပါက၊ မဆွေးနွေးလို ပါက၊ စာတမ်းထဲမဖော်ပြလိုတဲ့အချက်အလက်များရှိပါကလည်း အချိန်မရွေး တောင်းဆိုနိုင်ပါတယ်။ စာတမ်းပြုစုနေသည့် အတောအတွင်း မိမိရဲ့ ပါဝင်မှုကို နှုတ်ထွက်လိုပါကလည်း အချိန်မ ရွေးနှုတ်ထွက်နိုင်ပါတယ်။ ဒီလက်ကမ်းစာစောင်ထဲ ရေးသားထားတဲ့ အကြောင်းအရာနဲ့ စာတမ်းနဲ့ ပတ်သက်ပြီး ပိုမိုရှင်းလင်းသိလိုတဲ့အခါ မျိုးနဲ့ မေးခွန်းများရှိပါကလည်း ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ အချိန်မရွေး မေးမြန်းနိုင်ပါ တယ်။ ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါတယ်ရှင်။

Ngwi pyaw ai n htoi rai u ga.

Ngai na shaga mying gaw Seng Bu re. Htinggaw mying gaw Njai rai nna, Amyu Rusai gaw Maran rai nngai. (Daw) ang ai hku shachyen shaga la marit. Daidaw buga gaw Myitkyina Mare kaba, Jinghpaw Mung kaw na rai nngai. Ya gaw Netherlands mungdan, Den Haag buga gaw shanu nga n na, 'majan hte simsa lam' hte seng n na 'International Institute of Social Studies' Dakkasu gaw Hpung Jat (Master tsang) hpe hpaji hkaja taw nga nngai. Ya hkaja tang shawn na laika hpe gaw Netherlands hte Denmark gaw shanu nga ai Myeng Mung gaw na du wa ai Myit-su ni hku na, Myen Mung gaw byin lai wa sai, byin taw nga ai majan hpe gara hkru mu mada ai kun? Ga ra hkru shanglawm taw ai kun? Hpa majaw shanglaw taw ai kun? nga ai ningmu ni hpe chyena na matu yaw shada da nga ai.

Dai majaw n dai hpaji shajat ai lam hta shang lawm ya ai Myit-su ni yawng hpe n dang tsung hkra chyeju dum nngai. Ndai hpaji tang shawn lam gaw anhte shada madi shadaw ai hku, madu myit hte shang lawm ai re majaw, Myit-su ni manu ai hta hkan nna galaw sa wa na re. Shing lam hpe makawp (privacy & confidentiality) na matu mung myit sawn da ga ai. Dai majaw, Myit-su ni na mying majing ni hpe mung n ka bang na nngai. N dai tang shawn laika hte seng ai ga tsun shaga da ai jahpan ni hpe mung, a tsawm sha (shim ai hku) mahkawn da na re ga ai. Ga tsun shaga ai, hkru shaga hkat ai lam ni hta mung Myit-su ni n manu ai, myit n pyaw ai, n kam tsun sang lang ai lam ni nga wa yang mung, galoi rai tim hkring la mai ai. Matut shang lawm lam hpe jahkring na nga yang mung, hkring mai ai hku re. Ndai laika hta ka da ai hpe grau n na sang lang mayu ai nga yang, ngai hpe galoi rai tim mai san la, matut mahkai la mai ga ai. Grai chyeju kaba saga ai.

The image in the flyer is the photo I took at one of the refugee camps in Iraq in 2018. The artist's name was not mentioned in the art. However, the camp manager told me that the artist was a displaced person living in the camp. I implied this image as it resonates (at least to me) with how the war-affected displaced people emancipate with flamboyant dreams and actions in search of *home* as a safe space.

What's written and mentioned in the flyer (in English)

Wish you a good day! I am Seng Bu. My family name is *Njai* and I'm from *Maran* clan. Please call me as you can relate to my clan name and as you feel comfortable (*Jinghpaw* ethnic people introduce and address to each other in a kinship relation depending on the different tribes, clans and family names). My hometown is Myitkyina in Kachin State. Currently, I am studying a Master program in the International Institute of Social Studies in Den Haag, the Netherlands. I am doing research on the conflict and peace studies and my focus is on the Myanmarese diasporas living in the Netherlands and Denmark, their opinion and engagement to the on-going conflict(s) in Myanmar. I wish to understand '*How do Myanmarese diasporas in the E.U. member states influence the conflict dynamics in Myanmar?*'

I thank you very much for each of you collaboration and voluntary participation in my research. Throughout the research process, we will work in the situation, time, and place where each of you feel most comfortable. Concerning the privacy and confidentiality, I will anonymize your names, store the data and information collected in a secured place. Furthermore, you can stop anytime if feel uncomfortable, openly mention if there are the information that you want to put off the record and withdraw from participation throughout the research process. If you want to clarify more about my research and have questions, you can reach out to me anytime. Thank you very much!

Appendix 3: Semi-structured Interview questions

- 1) Introduction: *Informal chat on getting to know each other.* This is extremely important in a sense that the research will conduct in the culturally appropriate way which will build trust among me and the research participants. In addition, sharing my story and about my family will situate my proximity and reciprocity to them and will potentially minimize the power hierarchy between me and the research participants.
- 2) When do you arrive to the Netherlands/Denmark? Could you please tell me how was the journey? How is the settling in the Netherlands/Denmark going on?
- 3) What are your opinions about the on-going conflict(s) in Myanmar and how do you feel? Are there any changes in the emotions and feelings before and after the 1st Feb 2021 coup happened in Myanmar?
- 4) How do you (dis)engage to the conflicts back home? Could you please tell me more about that? Are there any changes in (dis)engagement before and after the 1st Feb 2021 coup happened in Myanmar?
- 5) Why are you (dis)engaging? Could you please share to me what are the motives behind?
- 6) What are the barriers/challenges you face to (dis)engage?
- 7) To what extent, do you think your (dis)engagement impacted on the conflicts' dynamics in Myanmar?

References

- Abdelhady, D. (2008) "Representing the Homeland : Lebanese Diasporic Notions of Home and Return in a Global Context," *Cultural Dynamics*, 20(1), pp. 53–72. doi: 10.1177/0921374007088055.
- Adamson, F. and Demetriou, M. (2007) "Remapping the Boundaries of 'state' and 'national Identity': Incorporating Diasporas into Ir Theorizing," *European Journal of International Relations*, 13(4), pp. 489–526.
- Bailey, A. (2017) "The Migrant Suitcase: Food, Belonging and Commensality among Indian Migrants in the Netherlands," *Appetite*, 110, pp. 51–60.
- Baruah, S. (2020) *In the name of the nation : india and its northeast*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (South Asia in Motion). doi: 10.1515/9781503611290.
- Beehner, L. (2018) "State-Building, Military Modernization and Cross-Border Ethnic Violence in Myanmar," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 5(1), pp. 1–30.
- bell hooks, pseud.van Gloria Watkins (1990) *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston, Mass: South End Press.
- bell hooks, pseud.van Gloria Watkins (2009) *Belonging : a culture of place*. New York: Routledge. Available at: INSERT-MISSING-URL (Accessed: October 7, 2022).
- Brenner, D. (2017) 'Myanmar's ethnic minorities: Losing faith in federalism and peace', *T.Note (RISE Series)*, 34(2), pp. 1-2. Available at URL: <https://www.twai.it/articles/la-guerra-nello-stato-kachin-perche-le-minoranze-etniche-hanno-perso-fiducia-nelle-promesse-di-aung-san-suu-kyi/> (Accessed: 10 October 2022).
- Brenner, D. and Han, E. (2021) "Forgotten Conflicts: Producing Knowledge and Ignorance in Security Studies," *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 7(1). doi: 10.1093/jogss/ogab022.
- Brinkerhoff, J. (2008) Diaspora Identity and the Potential for Violence: Toward an Identity-Mobilization Framework, *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 8:1, 67-88, doi: 10.1080/15283480701787376.
- Brouwer, J. & Van Wijk, J. (2013) Helping hands: external support for the KNU insurgency in Burma, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 24:5, 835-856, doi: 10.1080/09592318.2013.866422.
- Cheran, R. (2006) "Multiple Homes and Parallel Civil Societies: Refugee Diasporas and Transnationalism," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 23(1), pp. 4–8.
- Cho, V. (2011) "Searching for Home: Explorations in New Media and the Burmese Diaspora in New Zealand," *Pacific Journalism Review*, 17(1). doi: 10.24135/pjr.v17i1.379.
- Clark, J. (2009) "Nation-State Belonging among Asian Australians and the Question of Transnationalism," *Current Sociology*, 57(1), pp. 27–46.
- Collier, P. and Hoeffler, A. (2004) "Greed and grievance in civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56(4) pp.563-595. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpf064>> [Accessed 13 July 2022].
- Collier, P., Hoeffler, A. and World Bank (1999) *Greed and grievance in civil war*. Place of publication not identified: publisher not identified. Available at: INSERT-MISSING-URL (Accessed: July 13, 2022).
- Crawford, A. and Hutchinson, S. (2016) "Mapping the Contours of 'everyday Security': Time, Space and Emotion," *The British Journal of Criminology*, 56(6), pp. 1184–1202.
- Davie, G. (2008) *The sociology of religion*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt.
- Dean, K. (2007) 'Mapping the Kachin Political Landscape: Constructing, Contesting and Crossing borders' in Mikael Gravers (eds.) *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, Copenhagen Denmark, NIAS Nordic Institute of Social Studies, pp. 123- 148.

- Demmers, J. (2002) Diaspora and Conflict: Locality, Long-Distance Nationalism, and Delocalisation of Conflict Dynamics. *Javnost - The Public*, 9(1), pp.85-96. doi: 10.1080/13183222.2002.11008795.
- Demmers, J. (2007) *New wars and diasporas: suggestions for research and policy*. [online] www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk. Available at: <<http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>> [Accessed 1 May 2022].
- Denmark Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs and The Think Tank on Integration in Denmark (2004) *Immigration and Integration Policies in Denmark and Selected Countries*. Abridged edn. Copenhagen. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/immigration-and-integration-policies-denmark-and-selected-countries_en (Accessed: 18 October 2022).
- Diener, A. (2007) Negotiating Territorial Belonging: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Mongolia's Kazakhs, *Geopolitics*, 12:3, 459-487, DOI: 10.1080/14650040701305658
- D'Sylva, A. and Beagan, B. (2011) "food Is Culture, but It's Also Power': The Role of Food in Ethnic and Gender Identity Construction among Goan Canadian Women," *Journal of Gender Studies*, 20(3), pp. 279–289.
- Dunford, M. R. (2019) "Indigeneity, Ethnopolitics, and Taingyintha: Myanmar and the Global Indigenous Peoples' Movement," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 50(1), pp. 51–67. doi: 10.1017/S0022463419000043.
- Egreteau, R. (2012) Burma in Diaspora: A Preliminary Research Note on the Politics of Burmese Diasporic Communities in Asia, in: *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 31, 2, pp. 115-147.
- Eltayeb, S. (2021) 'Understanding Social Trauma in Low-Resource Settings' in Hamburger, A., Hancheva, C. and Volkan, V. (eds.) *Social trauma - an interdisciplinary textbook*. Springer Nature Switzerland AG. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-47817-9, pp. 243-252.
- Essed, P. (2002) "Cloning Cultural Homogeneity While Talking Diversity: Old Wine in New Bottles in Dutch Work Organizations?," *Transforming Anthropology*, 11(1), pp. 2–12.
- EUDiF, (2021) *Interactive map – EUDiF*. Diasporafordevelopment.eu. Available at: <https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/interactive-map/> (Accessed: 18 October 2022).
- EUDiF, (2021) *What we do – EUDiF*. Diasporafordevelopment.eu. Available at: <https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/what-we-do/> (Accessed: 11 July 2022).
- Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014. *Assets.publishing.service.gov.uk*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-south-east-asia-diaspora-in-the-uk> (Accessed 28 June 2022).
- Fujii, L. (2010) "Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence," *Journal of Peace Research*, 47(2), pp. 231–241.
- Gilbert, D., and Cho, V., (2014) 'Burma', in Barker, J., Harms, E., Lindquist, J. (eds.), *Figures of Southeast Asian Modernity*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, pp. 214-239.
- Grand, S., and Salberg, J. (2021) 'Trans-generational Transmission of Trauma' in Hamburger, A., Hancheva, C. and Volkan, V. (eds.) *Social trauma - an interdisciplinary textbook*. Springer Nature Switzerland AG. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-47817-9, pp. 209-215.
- Gravers, M. (2007) 'Introduction: Ethnicity Against State – State Against Ethnic Diversity?' in Mikael Gravers (eds.) *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, Copenhagen Denmark, NIAS Nordic Institute of Social Studies, pp. 1- 33.
- Guo, S. (2016) "From International Migration to Transnational Diaspora: Theorizing 'double Diaspora' from the Experience of Chinese Canadians in Beijing," *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 17(1), pp. 153–171. doi: 10.1007/s12134-014-0383-z.

- Hamburger, A. (2021) 'Social Trauma: A Bridging Concept' in Hamburger, A., Hancheva, C. and Volkan, V. (eds.) *Social trauma - an interdisciplinary textbook*. Springer Nature Switzerland AG. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-47817-9, pp. 3-15.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2007) What is Ethnography? In *Ethnography : principles in practice*. (pp. 1-19) 3rd edn. London: Routledge. Available at: INSERT-MISSING-URL (Accessed: May 29, 2022).
- Hedström, J. (2019) "Confusion, Seduction, Failure: Emotions As Reflexive Knowledge in Conflict Settings," *International Studies Review*, 21(4), pp. 662–677. doi: 10.1093/isr/viy063.
- Hicks, D. (2002) 'The Role of Identity Reconstruction in Promoting Reconciliation' in Helmick, R. G. and Petersen, R. L. (eds.) *Forgiveness and reconciliation : religion, public policy & conflict transformation*. First paperback edn. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, pp. 129-149.
- Hill, C. (2021) *Mediating Encamped Identities and Belongings: An Ethnography of Everyday Karen Life in Mae La Refugee Camp*, (PhD Thesis). Goldsmiths, University of London, The Department of Media and Communications, London. Available at:

https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/31475/1/MCCS_thesis_HillC_2022.pdf (Accessed: 12 May 2022)
- Hintjens, H. (2008) "Post-Genocide Identity Politics in Rwanda," *Ethnicities*, 8(1), pp. 5–41.
- Holmes, R. A. (1967) "Burmese Domestic Policy: The Politics of Burmanization," *Asian Survey*, 7(3), pp. 188–197.
- HRW (2007) *Crackdown: repression of the 2007 popular protests in Burma*. New York: Human Rights Watch. Available at URL: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/12/06/crackdown/repression-2007-popular-protests-burma> (Accessed date: 5 October 2022).
- International Crisis Group (2021) *Responding to the myanmar coup*. Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group (Crisis Group Asia briefing, No 166). Available at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b166-responding-to-the-myanmar-coup.pdf> (Accessed: May 10, 2022).
- International Organization for Migration, (2013). *Diasporas and Development: Bridging Between Societies and States 2013*. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/migrated_files/What-We-Do/idm/workshops/IDM-2013-Diaspora-Ministerial-Conference/Background-Paper-2013-Diaspora-Ministerial-Conference-EN.pdf (Accessed 11 July 2022).
- Jayasundara-Smits, S. (2022) "Tamil Diaspora Activism in the Post-Liberal International Order: Navigating Politics and Norms," *Globalizations*, 19(1), pp. 81–101. doi: 10.1080/14747731.2020.1850403.
- Jolliffe, P. (2016) *Learning, migration and intergenerational relations : the karen and the gift of education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan (Palgrave studies on children and development).
- Joshua Project, (n.d.) *Burmese in Denmark*. JoshuaProject.net. Available at: <https://joshuaproject.net/people> (Accessed: 13 July 2022)
- Jung, H. (2012) "Constructing Scales and Renegotiating Identities: Women Marriage Migrants in South Korea," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 21(2), pp. 193–215. doi: 10.1177/011719681202100204.
- KWAT, (2013) "Pushed to the Brink: Conflict and human trafficking on the Kachin-China border," *Women's Knowledge Digital Library*. Available at: <https://womensdigitallibrary.org/items/show/1113>. (Accessed: 23 September 2022)
- Kyu, K. (2019) 'A Rite for a boy: Buddhist Identity on Novitiation Ceremony in Pa-O land', the *2019 International Conference of ISEAS-BUFS*, Busan, Korea, (23-25 May), pp. 1-23. Available

- at: https://www.academia.edu/41447623/A_Rite_for_a_boy_Buddhist_Identity_on_Novitiation_Ceremony_in_Pa_O_land (Accessed: 14 September 2022).
- Leach, E. R. and Firth, R. W. (1964) *Political system of highland burma : a study of kachin social structure*. Repr. with a new introductory note by the Author edn. London: London school of economics and political Science.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005) *The moral imagination : the art and soul of building peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lyons, T. (2007) Conflict-generated diasporas and transnational politics in Ethiopia, *Conflict, Security & Development*, 7:4, 529-549, DOI: 10.1080/1467880070169295.
- Mastagar, M. (2015) 'The Narration of Space: Diaspora Church as a Comfort Zone in the Resettlement Process for Post-communist Bulgarians in Toronto' in Brunn, S. D. and Gilbreath, D. A. (eds.), *The changing world religion map : sacred places, identities, practices and politics*, Dordrecht Netherlands: Springer, doi: 10.1007/978-94-017-9376-6, pp. 1345-1362.
- Maté, G., (2012) 'The Power of Addiction and The Addiction of Power', *TEDxRio+20*, 9 October. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66cYcSak6nE> (Accessed 29 March 2022).
- Mathieson, D. (2018) *Bridging the 'Burma Gap' in Conflict Studies*. Tea Circle. Available at: <https://teacircleoxford.com/essay/bridging-the-burma-gap-in-conflict-studies/> (Accessed: 4 March 2022).
- Milton, K. and Svašek, M. (2005) *Mixed emotions: anthropological studies of feeling*. Oxford, UK: Berg.
- Muivah, W. (2016) 'European NGOs and the Naga Freedom Struggle: Transnational Engagements', (ISS Master Thesis). Erasmus University Rotterdam, International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. Available at: <https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/37352> (Accessed: 10 September 2021).
- Niner, S. et al. (2014) "'here Nobody Holds Your Heart': Metaphoric and Embodied Emotions of Birth and Displacement among Karen Women in Australia," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 28(3), pp. 362–380. doi: 10.1111/maq.12070.
- OECD-ILO-IOM-UNHCR (2021) *2021 Annual International Migration and Forced Displacement Trends and Policies Report to the G20*. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/multilateral-system/g20/reports/WCMS_829943/lang-en/index.htm (Accessed: 3 May 2022).
- Ogden, C. (2008) "Diaspora Meets Ir's Constructivism: An Appraisal," *Politics*, 28(1), pp. 1–10. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9256.2007.00304.x.
- O'Leary, Z. (2017) *The essential guide to doing your research project*. Third edn. London: Sage Publications.
- Orjuela, C. (2008) "Distant Warriors, Distant Peace Workers? Multiple Diaspora Roles in Sri Lanka's Violent Conflict," *Global Networks*, 8(4), pp. 436–452. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-0374.2008.00233.x.
- Oxford Dictionaries (2002) *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Oxford Dictionaries).
- Pink, S. (2007) 'Photography in Ethnographic Research' in *Doing visual ethnography: images, media, and representation in research*. 2nd edn. London: Sage Publications, pp.65-95.
- Pirkkalainen Päivi and Abdile, M. (2009) *The diaspora - conflict - peace - nexus: a literature review*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä (DIASPEACE working paper, 1).
- Rabikowska, M. (2010) "The Ritualisation of Food, Home and National Identity among Polish Migrants in London," *Social Identities*, 16(3), pp. 377–398.
- Rose, G. (1997) "Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics," *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3), pp. 305–320.

- Sadan, M. (2007) 'Constructing and Contesting the Category 'Kachin' in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Burmese State in Mikael Gravers (eds.) *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*, Copenhagen Denmark, NIAS Nordic Institute of Social Studies, pp. 34- 76.
- Sadan, M. (2013) *Being & Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Selth, A. (2008) "Burma's 'saffron Revolution' and the Limits of International Influence," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 62(3), pp. 281–297. doi: 10.1080/10357710802286742.
- Seng Lawn, D. and Naujoks, J. (2018), *Conflict Impacts on Gender and Masculinities Expectations on People with Disabilities in Kachin State: A Rapid Assessment*, Yangon: Kachinland Research Center & International Alert Joint Publication.
- Simpson, A. (2017) *Routledge handbook of contemporary myanmar*. London: Taylor and Francis. Available at: <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/books/edit/10.4324/9781315743677/routledge-handbook-contemporary-myanmar-adam-simpson-nicholas-farrelly-ian-holliday> (Accessed: October 4, 2022).
- Tomaselli, K. (2008) 'Self and Other: Auto-Reflexive and Indigenous Ethnography' in Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S. and Smith, L. T. (eds.), *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, SAGE Publications, Inc., pp. 1-24. doi: 10.4135/9781483385686.n17.
- Tonkin, E. (1992) *Narrating our pasts : the social construction of oral history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge studies in oral and literate culture, 22).
- Troisi, J. D. (2012) *The pros and cons of social surrogate use: implications for functioning in new and existing relationships*, (PhD dissertation). The State University of New York, the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University at Buffalo, New York.
- Troisi, J. D. et al. (2015) "Threatened Belonging and Preference for Comfort Food among the Securely Attached," *Appetite*, 90, pp. 58–64. doi: 10.1016/j.appet.2015.02.029.
- UNData (2021): *Myanmar-Country Profile 2021*. Available at: <http://data.un.org/en/iso/mm.html> (Accessed: 18 October 2022).
- Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2022) *Uppsala Conflict Data Program*. Available at: <https://ucdp.uu.se/country/775> (Accessed: 18 October 2022).
- Van der Kolk, B. A. (2015) *The body keeps the score: brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. New York, New York: Penguin Books.
- Van Hear, N. and Cohen, R. (2017) "Diasporas and Conflict: Distance, Contiguity and Spheres of Engagement," *Oxford Development Studies*, 45(2), pp. 171–184. doi: 10.1080/13600818.2016.1160043.
- Väyrynen, T. (2018) *Corporeal peacebuilding : mundane bodies and temporal transitions*. Cham: Palgrave Pivot. Available at: <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/lib/eur/reader.action?docID=5517575> (Accessed: March 21, 2022).
- Volkan, V. (1997) *Bloodlines: from ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism*. 1st edn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Volkan, V. (2008) "Trauma, Identity and Search for a Solution in Cyprus," *Insight Turkey*, 10(4), pp. 95–110.
- Walmsley, E. (2005) "Race, Place and Taste: Making Identities through Sensory Experience in Ecuador," *Etnofoor*, 18(1), pp. 43–60.
- Walton, M. J. (2008) "Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma," *Asian Survey*, 48(6), p. 889.
- Weiss, S. A. (2017) "Did Aung San Lead at Panglong – or Follow?," *The Diplomat*, (jul 21, 2017).
- Williams, D. C. (2012) "Changing Burma from Without: Political Activism among the Burmese Diaspora," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 19(1), pp. 121–142.

Yuval-Davis, N. (1997) *Gender & nation*. London: Sage Publications (Politics and culture).

Yuval-Davis, N., Anthias, F. and Kofman, E. (2005) "Secure Borders and Safe Haven and the Gendered Politics of Belonging: Beyond Social Cohesion," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(3), pp. 513–535.