



Myanmar: One Year After the Coup



International
Conference

18-19 Feb. 2022



On 1 February 2021, Myanmar's armed forces (Tatmadaw) took power in a coup d'état. Security forces arrested members of the elected government, while many other activists were forced into hiding, or compelled to seek sanctuary abroad. By re-instating military dominance, Myanmar's generals ended a short period when they shared some power with the National League for Democracy (NLD). For now, Myanmar's post-coup trajectory remains uncertain. What we know for sure is that following the coup, human rights violations have been widespread, and violence has increased around the country, both in the areas traditionally controlled by the central government and in the peripheries, ruled by ethnic organisations, many of which control their own significant armed forces.

In this context, different forms of protest have emerged and some elected Members of Parliament – forcibly deprived of their representative function – have established a National Unity Government (NUG). Ethnic armed organisations have assumed different and ever-changing positions, making political alliances and their duration difficult to determine.

One year after the coup, this conference will focus on the practicalities of understanding and engaging a deeply contested political reality. We want to know: What are the perspectives of a return to the polls in the short-medium period? Which international actors can influence the course of events? To what extent has the coup impacted on Myanmar's fragile economy?

To discuss these topics, Torino World Affairs Institute (T.wai) is hosting a hybrid international conference one year after the coup, in partnership with the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society of the University of Turin and with the support of the City of Turin (International cooperation & peace Department) and Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo. The conference will award organisations and young researchers presenting top quality papers.

Background

T.wai (www.twai.it) is a non-profit independent research institute, founded in 2009 by International Relations scholars from the University of Turin. Its main research work deals with contemporary China and Southeast Asia, and human security dynamics.

Since 2014, T.wai has been developing a research agenda on Myanmar – also involving fieldwork in the country – which has produced various contributions to the academic literature and the public debate.

In 2017, T.wai organized, in partnership with the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, an international workshop entitled *Building New Research Capacity*, attracting researchers from all over Europe and establishing the Myanmar Europe Research Network (MyERN, www.myern.it).

In Autumn 2019 a second international meeting, called *The Kaleidoscope of Myanmar Transformations*, was held, where European and Asian scholars discussed the challenges of Myanmar's (now failed) transition.

Co-convenors

Giuseppe **Gabusi** – University of Turin and T.wai

Stefano **Ruzza** – University of Turin and T.wai

Nicholas **Farrelly** – University of Tasmania and T.wai

Anja-Desirée **Senz** – Heidelberg University

Programme

EST

Friday February 18th

9.00 - 9.15

Welcome Remarks

Ms Michela **Favaro**, Vice-mayor of the City of Turin

Giuseppe **Gabusi**, University of Turin and T.wai

9.15 - 9.45

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Myanmar: One Year After the Coup vs. 10 years before: What can we learn?

Mandy **Sadan**, Warwick University

9.45 - 11.15

PANEL 1.1

Section 1. Politics in the centre

Chair: Nicholas **Farrelly**

11.15-11.45

Coffee break and book presentation

Adam **Simpson** and Nicholas **Farrelly**

Myanmar: Politics, Economy and Society, Routledge 2021

Programme

11.45 - 13.30 **PANEL 2.1** **Section 2. The international community**

Chair: Anja-Desirée Senz

13.30 - 14.30 LIGHT LUNCH

14.30 - 16.00 **PANEL 1.2** **Section 1. Politics in the centre**

Chair: Giuseppe Gabusi

16.00 - 20.00 FREE TIME IN TURIN

20.00 CONFERENCE DINNER

Saturday February 19th

9.00 - 9.30 **KEYNOTE SPEECH** **Understanding Federalism**

Roberto Toniatti, University of Trento

9.30 - 11.15 **PANEL 3.1** **Section 3: Politics in the borderlands**

Chair: Stefano Ruzza

11.15 - 11.45 **Coffee break and presentation of Medacross NGO**

11.45 - 13.15 **PANEL 4.1** **Section 4: A brittle economy**

Chair: Giuseppe Gabusi

13.15 - 13.45 **Best Papers Award ceremony**

In presence of a delegate of the City of Turin

List of Abstracts

Section 1: Politics in the centre

PANEL 1.1

The Women's Leading Role in the Spring Revolution: A New Innovative Perspective for the Future

Cecilia Brighi (Secretary General, Italia Birmania Insieme Association)

The paper, after a short illustration of the historical, cultural, and social constraints against Myanmar women's role in the political and social arena during the last 50 years military dictatorship, will highlight, also through photos, how women, prepared themselves for their primary role in organizing the social and political opposition to the new military coup. Their role in setting up the CRPC (the Committee representing the new elected Parliament members) and in the rallies of the first months defeated most of the misogynous social norms, by breaking down gender stereotypes and using them against the military. In the first months of the "spring revolution", the Yangon young women organized out-of-the-ordinary demonstrations: such as "the protest of the princesses" in which they presented themselves in ball gowns, as peasant women with fruit baskets, the winners of beauty contests with victory bands, transgender people with their provocative outfits, etc., breaking the stereotypes present even among young protesters. While working women in different sectors were in the front of the general strikes, while for the first time the National Unity Government had a wide women representation among ministers and deputy ministers. The women's new role in the spring revolution was targeted by the army who sent spies to threaten women living alone in towns, whose homes were easy targets for looting and harassment, or arrested them, often with their children to threaten their husbands or family members that were in hide and to convince them to surrender. Women's role in the spring revolution is definitely changing the cultural preconceptions against women's leadership in politics and social organizations.

PANEL 1.1

Impact of the Military Coup on Higher Education

Antonio Fiori (Associate Professor, Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna) and Licia Proserpio (PhD Candidate, Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna)

Following the military coup on February 1, 2021, Myanmar universities became the place of multiple and overlapping conflicts. At a macro level, the military is facing massive nationwide protests, with teachers and students at the forefront (Jordt, Tharaphi Than and Ye Lin Sue, 2021). This broad opposition has been met with highly repressive and violent systems of social control, including the mass firing of university staff, the jailing of student activists, and disruption of work on a higher education reform built over a decade (Lall, 2020). Within the different university institutions, teachers are divided by conflictual and unbridgeable frontlines. On the one side are those who stayed in their positions working in the new military educational framework for "the sake of their fields of study and their students". Across

List of Abstracts

the divide are the teachers who have left or were forced to leave their positions at great personal cost. In fact, at the micro-level, this latest military coup meant a still underestimated cost for higher education staff and students, who were so central in the interrupted Myanmar metamorphosis of the last decade. This assessment becomes even more relevant under a gender lens: in an education system where the great majority of university staff and students are women, the military coup is disproportionately affecting the livelihoods of women. Our article gives an insight into the impact of the coup in Myanmar, focusing on the higher education sector along these three lines of inquiry (the macro, meso and micro-level). In this time of crisis, it draws on a set of qualitative data gathered through online interviews with students and university staff, producing an analysis of this extremely challenging chapter in the history of the country and its education system.

PANEL 1.1

The Competing Hands behind Myanmar's 2021 Democratic Movement

Kaung Sett Wai (Current MA Student in International Relations, University of Yangon)

On 1st February 2021, the political power of Myanmar was seized by the Burmese Military before the formation of a new government by NLD party who won the 2020 election. After a week of confusion and uncertainty, the people in Myanmar showed their dissatisfaction over the military takeover by means of peaceful protests over the roads and nationwide non-violent Civil Disobedience Movement. The movement spread across the country, resulting in major suspension in every sector of the bureaucratic system of military government. But this non-violent movement began to shift towards armed struggle eventually as the people who hold the leading roles pursued different goals from the original struggle for 'democratic transition'. This paper argues that the complex nature of 2021 democratic struggle in Myanmar is not an invisible hand process as many claimed to be, rather it is driven by competing hands of various actors who tried to shape the aim and means of the movement. After a period of competition for the role of dominant actor, the current leadership took the movement in the path of armed struggle and thus other groups which held different opinions were forced out from the movement. This article treats the Civil Disobedience Movement as the central driving force of the 2021 democratic struggle of Myanmar and it proposes that there were three major shifts in the 2021 democratic movement of Myanmar. By analysing these major patterns of transformations, the paper explains why the non-violent path failed and what to expect for Myanmar democracy in future.

List of Abstracts

PANEL 1.1

Tentative Wins or Tectonic Shifts? The Gendered and Generational Dynamics of Post-Coup Politics

Henri Myrntinen (Visiting Research Fellow, KU Leuven)

Two of the many things – potentially – up-ended by the February 1, 2021, coup and its aftermath are the gendered and generational dynamics of politics in Myanmar. Politics in Myanmar at all levels has been shaped by patriarchal and gerontocratic assumptions, with men and older generations implicitly and explicitly seeing decision-making as being rightly their purview. The coup has, at least in the short run, possibly changed this. Not for the first time in Myanmar's history, it is the younger generations pushing for change, but arguably the role and visibility of especially young women is much greater than before, especially during the initial protests. LGBTIQ groups also played a visible role in protests even beyond Yangon and Mandalay, often to much support from other protesters. Generational fissures have also emerged in the responses of some of the Ethnic Armed Organizations to the coup. The crackdown on the protests and militarization of the opposition movement however led to a partial return to more 'traditional' gender roles, though women have also taken up arms. The paper explores to what extent these gendered and generational shifts may be more permanent, and what this may mean for politics in post-coup Myanmar, both at the national level and at the sub-national level.

PANEL 1.2

Myanmar Labour Movement's Economic and Political Challenges to the Military Junta Power

Cecilia Brighi (Secretary General, Italia Birmania Insieme Association) and Khaing Zar Aung (President of Industrial Workers Federation Myanmar, Treasurer of CTUM & Member of the Myanmar Labour Alliance)

After shortly describing the political reasons at the basis of the military coup of February 1st 2021, and the international dynamics that facilitated it, the paper will analyse the crucial role of women, youth and labour organizations in the construction of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDU), and the role of the general strikes of the first months; the role of public service, university school professors, teachers, doctors, railway and energy workers and other staff; the widespread internal boycotting campaign of products from factories linked to the junta with the aim of paralyzing the economy and strangling the junta's power; the role of trade, economic and political restrictive measures decided by some governments and the EU, and the obstacles behind similar decisions at the UN role; The elaboration of the labour movement strategies toward the definition of a new federal democratic Constitution; The reasons behind the Labour Alliance and other 183 organizations request for Comprehensive Economic Sanctions. That should include the financial, insurance and reinsurance sectors, the garment supply chain, and the impossible negotiations to save jobs and decent working conditions; the role of the CDM to support the NUG request for their recognition, and for the State Administration Council (SAC) credential

List of Abstracts

withdrawal, starting from the WHO, the ILO the FAO and finally at the UN, and the consequent refusal of the SAC and of its proposal for new elections in 2023.

PANEL 1.2

Unrest in Myanmar: After the Military Coup 2021

Min Thang (Lecturer, Shan State Baptist Theological Seminary)

Since the days of independence movement, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces) has played an important role in Myanmar politics. Before the country's independence, the military primary role was to free the country from under the control of foreigners, particularly the British and Japanese. Myanmar gained its independence from the British in 1948. After independence, Myanmar practiced parliament democracy and then the first military rule began in 1958 and direct military rule started when Ne Win seized power in 1962, Than Shwe in 1988 and Min Aung Hlaing in 2021. Military control of the government is nothing new for the people of Myanmar. The military coup seized power in Myanmar on 1 February 2021 under the accusation of electoral fraud in the 2020 General Election. The following days all over the country people have protested the military coup in various ways. Since 4 February hundreds of thousands of people have participated in non-violent demonstrations and the military and police have increasingly used armed force to crackdown violently on the protesters. After the military junta's crackdown on the peaceful protesters, youths are taking handmade guns (tu mae in Burmese) to resisting the military coup. The paper is an attempt to analyse the military rule in Myanmar from 1962-1988 in general and specifically in 2021. The youths (the so call Generation Z) are playing a key role in the anti-coup protest in Myanmar. This paper also studies the challenges faced by the young people and their resistance to the coup during the Covid-19 pandemic in Myanmar. The following piece will also examine the domestic and international response to the ongoing military dictatorship-taking place in Myanmar.

PANEL 1.2

Burma, Future Prospects from the Past. Case Studies: 1988, 1990, 2007, 2011, 2016

Mattia Paterlini, Valerio Ambriola, Federica Bellucci, Vincenzo Maria Binetti and Leonardo Bureca (Italia Birmania Insieme Association)

The striking sociopolitical events that marked last year in Myanmar put the international observer in front of a longstanding scenario. Nevertheless, a bunch of questions have arisen from many problems, which is necessary to investigate. In particular, the question is about the nature and the range of the coup's impact on Myanmar's fragile economy, and how this event is influencing the economic relations with the West. What are the prospects of returning to the polls in the short to medium term, and what are the international stakeholders who can play an important role in the unfolding of events? This research is aimed at answering to the questions above, in

List of Abstracts

relation to the years which historically had the greatest impact on the political and social fabric of Myanmar. The aforementioned years are 1988, 1990, 2007, 2011, and 2016.

PANEL 1.2

The Politics of Resistance and Underground Periodicals against Misinformation and Dictatorship in Myanmar

Thurein Naing Sar Sin (Graduate student, Central European University, Wien)

Approximately two weeks after the coup in Myanmar, the military took off its benevolent mask and started violent crackdowns on the protestors and made illegal arrests. It revoked the license and publishing rights of much of the country's media and started arresting journalists. The military controlled State media started flooding the country with misinformation campaign and trying to keep the people in the dark. It ranges from the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party being corrupt to peaceful protestors as the rioters. The internet access in the country was cut by shutting down the mobile internet and wireless broadband services.

In these situations, Myanmar people find indigenous solutions to fight against misinformation and information blackouts carried out by the military. Some started volunteering SMS sharing services to spread information. Others started publishing informal periodicals to keep their fellow citizen's resistance morale and informed. These periodicals were distributed among the community via social connections. The main messages and articles in these periodicals were on mainly mass mobilization and information censored by the military. This study would answer the question on the development of indigenous mechanism and people's resilience against the misinformation and information blackouts by the oppressive regime in Myanmar.

Thus, the study would explore the development of this informal and underground information regime in Myanmar, its political agency, and the impact on the people.

PANEL 1.2

Buddhist Organizations in Myanmar Second Military Government. A Way ahead to Democratization?

Francesco Valacchi (Teaching Assistant, University of Pisa)

Buddhist organizations have had a conspicuous influence in great part of main events of Myanmar politics. The article lists and describes the three main occasions of Buddhist influence trying to find a common trend using the Lefebvre theory of State formation, particularly the critical aspects contained in ethnic partition against the unifying element of Buddhism as a social factor. First apparition of Buddhist organizations influence was the post-independence period, when religious feelings of a formed socio-economic reality (the Myanmar population) were a really strong glue opposing ethnic tendencies to separation. After what is now the first, long period of military government (from 1962 to 2010), the Buddhist dharma and culture, along

List of Abstracts

with Buddhist movements political weight were, then, in a certain sense, effective in democratization. Finally, in the last years (from 2019 to 2020) in some cases the Buddhist religion took the characterization of a nationalist exclusive thought, operating against ethnic diversity and inclusion and, not directly but through nationalist movements like MaBaTha, had a role in the Rakhine clashes and Rohingya repression. Then the article will emphasize the positive identification in nowadays Buddhist society through Benedict Andersen's theory of groups identification. Based on the role of Buddhism in the Myanmar social identification and its great role on the past events the article will try to answer the question: "Could the feeling of belonging to Buddhist religious society be identified in nowadays Myanmar society as an opposing force to military government? Could Buddhism be a factor of civil empathy against military enforced politics?"

Section 2: The international community

PANEL 2.1

Looking for the Best Possible Options for ASEAN in Myanmar Military Coup. Comparative Study on the Role of ASEAN in Cambodian Conflict and 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar

Aung Kyaw Min (Current MA student, Chulalongkorn University)

When the military coup attempt happened in Myanmar on February 1st, it became one of the alarming situations for the region. Although ASEAN tried to resolve the issue of Myanmar, they still could not make significant result in it. This paper will try to analyse the best possible options for ASEAN with regards to the issue of Myanmar with a comparative study of the issue of Cambodia during the third Indo-China War. This paper will try to find out the role of ASEAN during the conflict of Cambodia and it will also try to investigate the progress of ASEAN initiated mechanism with regards to the current Myanmar issue. Another objective of this paper is to find out the best possible options for ASEAN with the lesson learnt from the Cambodian conflict. To fulfil the above objectives, the paper will try to answer the following questions: How did ASEAN involve in Cambodian conflict and what was its role? How is the current progress of ASEAN with regards to the issue of Myanmar? What lessons should be learnt from the Cambodian conflict and how ASEAN should reconsider its role with regards to the current Myanmar issue? Moving beyond the five-point consensus, not focusing only on the five-point consensus and working together with United Nations could be more effective for ASEAN in engaging with the Myanmar issue.

List of Abstracts

PANEL 2.1

[No tentative title]

Rebeca **Giaietto** (UN Consultant, Consultant at International Development Law Organization and Research Fellow at TNGO)

The paper will be focused mainly on how United Nations, International Organizations and the entire International Community reacted to human rights crises created by the coup d'état in Myanmar. It will be divided in three phases analysing first of all the violations that happened, such as the denial of Rohingya's citizenship, their freedom of movement and other fundamental rights; the fact that the health care has been undermined by the assault to the health system; and the various boycotts against the junta by imposing stronger coordinated economic pressure and arms embargo, etc. The second section will outline how the events in Myanmar made the International Community appear quite ineffective, in terms of international commitments on how to address specifically atrocity crimes. The International Community needs to make stronger efforts ensuring lifesaving aid reaches those in real need. Furthermore, the local civil society organizations who are saving lives deserve the support from outside. The third section would review the human rights tools that are at the disposal of the UN in order to understand what can be suitable or not to underline and engage innovative and effective solutions in these challenging situations. I would like to conclude the paper with a Call to Action for Human Rights launched by the UN Secretary General in 2020.

PANEL 2.1

The Pendulum of Non-Alignment: Charting Myanmar's Great Power Diplomacy (2011 –2021)

Andrea **Passeri** (Lecturer, University of Malaya) and Hunter **Marston** (PhD Candidate, Australia National University)

Since independence, Myanmar has shown a relentless commitment to a non-aligned foreign policy aimed at preserving the country's autonomy in the international arena. This ambitious purpose, however, has been pursued in different and sometimes opposite ways. In fact, the historical record of Myanmar's great power diplomacy has resembled the motion of a pendulum swinging back and forth between two ideal types of alignment policies, namely 'positive non-alignment' and 'negative neutralism'. The former can be portrayed as a vibrant and proactive blend of non-aligned behaviour that seeks to assert independence by achieving a diversified range of international partnerships, whereas the latter endeavours to accomplish the same goal through diplomatic disengagement and self-alooftness. Against this backdrop, the following article sheds light on Myanmar's shifting recourse to opposite archetypes of alignment strategy by looking at the country's foreign policy trajectory between 2011 and 2021. Building upon a comprehensive theoretical classification of different forms of non-alignment, the analysis contends that the evolving great power diplomacy exhibited by the Thein Sein (2011–2016) and Aung San Suu Kyi (2016–2021)

List of Abstracts

administrations is rooted in the oscillating degrees of political authority held by the two cabinets, which pushed them to alternatively tilt towards positive non-alignment or negative neutralism.

PANEL 2.1

One Year After the Coup: Overview, Politics in the Borderland and ASEAN

Chiara **Suprani** (Current MA student, University of Turin and Beijing Foreign Studies University)

Up to this point, international efforts failed to change the trajectory of the military junta's coup d'état, which took place in February 2021 in Myanmar. What can be perceived as a first attempt from an ASEAN country to restore the dialogue with the "troubled neighbour" is the visit to Naypyidaw of the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen scheduled for 2022. To date, ASEAN countries have been floundering with the inclusion of Myanmar since the coup d'état, but the situation, as depicted by the UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews to the UN Human Rights Council, calls for a new plan of action. Experts have recognised the apparently unachievable interethnic peace as one of the core problems of Myanmar's frailty. The paper will analyse the situation, one year after the coup, of politics and economy in the borderland. Here, ethnic groups and ethnic armed organisations, acting almost as if they were part of a federal state, some of them even aspiring to become one, are the first line of brutal clashes and the knot where civil society is defending itself through "citizen sanctions".

Then, the paper will portrait ASEAN as the actor that should patiently guide Myanmar out of the crisis, since latest news have reported China to have built a 600 km long wire fence at its borders with Myanmar. It is hard to say whether a return to the polls could be seen in a short-medium period, or rather, whether any sort of mentions to return to the polls could be better conceived as an expression of the military junta's prime goal for Myanmar: a "disciplined democracy".

PANEL 2.1

Myanmar's Local Research Capacity and the Role of Regional and International Organizations in the post-Coup Era

Zaw **Oo** (Centre for Economic and Social Development), Francesco **Obino** (Global Development Network) and Charlotte **Galloway** (ANU Myanmar Research Centre)

This paper looks at the general downturn in social science research in Myanmar in the wake of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup of 1 February 2021. For decades, Myanmar's research capacity in social sciences has been very limited. Research and data generation to inform the public and private sectors are primarily undertaken by foreign agencies who employ local and foreign researchers or local non-governmental

List of Abstracts

organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations. The capacity for Myanmar's government to generate its own research is limited, with the focus mainly placed on security and economic issues. As COVID-19 hit the country, public health capacity was ranked among the lowest in the ASEAN region. Following the military takeover in February 2021, Myanmar has been embroiled in the dual crisis of a devastating pandemic and disparaging politics. The coup further brought enormous disruption to the higher education system, with up to 30,000 staff being ousted from their jobs as key universities around the country took part in the civil resistance.

International actors who played an important role in seminal plans to strengthen local research system (enshrined in the National Education Policy Strategy 2, now dropped) withdrew from the country, leaving the present and future of research in a limbo. The paper questions the role international donors can play in supporting research capacities locally, including through the diaspora.

Section 3: Politics in the borderlands

PANEL 3.1

Misunderstanding Myanmar through the Lens of Democratisation

David Brenner (Lecturer in Global Insecurities, University of Sussex)

This article takes the military coup in Myanmar (Burma) and its violent aftermath as a starting point to scrutinise the dominant lens through which the country's contemporary politics are commonly narrated: as a struggle over democracy between an overarching military and a civilian pro-democracy movement. This lens is inextricably tied to the ways in which policy, advocacy and scholarly communities produced Myanmar as a normative object at the 'end of history'. Liberal historiography has subsequently inscribed two main events for interpreting the Southeast Asian country: the pro-democratic uprisings of 1988 and the initiations of political reforms in 2011. In this narration, constituent categories of liberal theory - e.g., democracy and civil-military relations - take analytic and causal precedence over others - e.g., ethnic identities and nationalism. This limited repertoire of analytic categories, however, fails to sufficiently explain processes of political transition and the nature of resistance in Myanmar. Nor can it offer solutions to persistent military rule, authoritarianism, and violence, which have tormented Myanmar throughout postcolonial state formation, including the past decade of 'democratisation'. Instead, this liberal heuristic sanitises Myanmar's politics of nationalism, ethnic conflict, and civil war, which underpins and arguably drives, much of the country's politics, including the transition of 2011, the coup of 2021, and the resistance to it.

List of Abstracts

PANEL 3.1

Houses Without Walls: Weapons Acquisition and “Blunt” Rebel Rule at the Edge of the State

Francesco **Buscemi** (Research Fellow Einaudi Foundation, Torino World Affairs Institute, and ERIS – Emerging Research in International Security)

After the 1st of February coup, Myanmar has witnessed a proliferation of armed formations, from Tatmadaw-affiliated village community militias to local self-defence forces or People’s Defence Force (PDF) units. Such proliferation has illuminated a key socio-spatial question, one that has been front and centre in the multiple histories of the country: how does control over/of armed formations at the edge of state authority shape territory? Predominant approaches in the literature on rebel governance and civil war have understood territory as a flat, bounded, and pre-determined container. Such an understanding of territory has proceeded hand in hand with a centralized conception of power as a property held by different forms of armed actors, and state/non-state institutions. Mobilizing the concepts of borderlands, frontiers, and margins, and borrowing from approaches to materiality developed in the ambit of critical security studies, I argue that the rebel governance literature has not fruitfully looked into rebel movements’ processes of border production. This paper focuses on the rationalities, techniques, practices, and technologies that characterize processes of border and borderlands re-production involving rebel movements in the borderlands of Myanmar. Drawing on fieldwork carried out in Ta’ang areas of northern Shan State, the article argues that intertwined rationalities of narcotics eradication, ethnonationality, and humanitarian arms control have circulated throughout militarized processes of border security across both state and rebel scales and have contributed to mould military processes of borderlines and borderlands production. Military techniques and technologies have also played a paramount role in processes of border security in the borderlands of Myanmar. In this sense the paper illustrates the networked and multi-scalar morphogenesis of certain military practices and technologies circulating among actors as disparate as the Myanmar, Yugoslav, Israeli, and Thai security forces; ethnonational pro-regime militias; and rebel movements. In particular, I touch upon the role of military camps and fortification through landmines and booby-traps; mobilisation and demobilisation of local defence militias; gunsmithing and refurbishing weapons.

PANEL 3.1

Climate Federalism for Myanmar, Challenges and Opportunities, and How to Make Local Action Works?

Lwin Maung Maung Swe (Programme Director, Trocaire)

When the world leaders publicly stated that limiting global warming is an emergency (Harvey 2021), countries around the world can no longer avoid to take a shared responsibility to deal with it. For Myanmar, climate federalism – a blueprint that defines how to share power, resources and responsibilities between the federal government & its sub-national units (SNU) in setting

List of Abstracts

national climate targets and how to seek & secure necessary coordination and cooperation among the focal ministries and among the different levels of governments in taking responsibilities – is an imperative not only to oblige with its international climate commitments but also for systematic consideration of climate change in policy making to cope with climate-induced impacts and conflicts. The study explored international approaches relevant for effective climate federalism in Myanmar and learned the appropriate vehicles to best finance and translate the associated climate actions. The study suggests whether or not the federal government should be conferred a supreme power over its SNU in the climate federalism framework. It also sheds light on the role of local climate actions (LCAs), which are increasingly considered more effective for the countries where the top down efforts have failed repeatedly in many sectoral policies, and the national goals are set reflecting the potential and effectiveness of LCAs (Bianco et. al, 2020). An enabling environment for LCA is required to best deal with the prevailing impacts of climate change in Myanmar as well as to effectively contribute to its international obligation. A decentralized fund model which authorizes SNU for climate financing works best to finance LCAs in many cases. However, how the LCAs should be best encouraged and mainstreamed in the framework, and how to source local and international funding to finance the LCAs for Myanmar, remain uncertain and need further studies.

PANEL 3.1

Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education: A Vehicle for Building Myanmar into Equal and Fair Federal Union

Yaw Bawm Mangshang (Cofounder and Chairperson, Naushawng Development Institute)

This paper reviews the education related reform initiated in 2011 by nominal civilian governments in Myanmar. It specifically analyses whether the reform has paved the way for implementing mother tongue based multi-lingual education for ethnic minorities. This paper argues that the reform of MTB-MLE has failed to achieve its stated objectives of 'ensuring children who speak nationalities' languages get the best possible start in education', and 'enabling the ethnic minority learners to gain a solid grounding in their local literature, culture, arts, customs, heritage and traditions'. The failure was due to half-hearted efforts of governments characterized by unwillingness to officialise the MTB-MLE for all children (not just for Bama children), continuation of Bama culture (and Buddhism) centric curriculum contents, continuation of Burmese as the language of instruction, and inadequate allocation of resources. The paper also argues that whoever forms the new government after the current political turmoil resulted from the military coup in February 2021, it is vital to address the causes of failure, then actively implement and maintain inclusive MTB-MLE for all ethnic nationalities. Doing so will contribute in building Myanmar into a just, equal and fair federal democratic union.

List of Abstracts

The information here draws from interviews with retired and in-service teachers, students of the 1970s, alumni of the University for the Development of the National Races of the Union, relevant laws and policy, and newspapers, reports, and studies. Interpretation and analysis are based on the premise that mother tongue based education has 'significant cognitive and academic benefits for students' (UNICEF, 2016; UNESCO, 2009) and 'strengthens cultural identity and heritage' (Jomtien Declaration, 1990).

PANEL 3.1

Transnational Activism: Cross-border Political Activities of the Burmese Refugees in Mae Sot, Thailand after the 2021 Coup

Zar Ti Nwe Nu Aung (Current MA student, Chiang Mai University)

Whenever there is the political unrest in Myanmar, Mae Sot, Thailand, has been the preferred spot for Burmese refugees, starting from political activists to the ordinary civilians who fled the conflict areas. As political activists, journalists, migrant workers, or refugees, they fled Myanmar amid the political unrest and relocated to Mae Sot. Upon their arrival at the borderland, some struggled for their livelihood in the new location. At the same time, some constructed their spheres in Mae Sot and attempted to contribute and connect with Myanmar's political movement, such as supporting the parallel government, National Unity Government (NUG) which was organized by the elected and exiled members of parliaments in the 2020 general election.

The study will investigate why they picked Mae Sot as their favourite location amid their homeland's political upheaval under the changing political situation of both home and host countries. Additionally, this study will explore transnational ties they keep with Myanmar and human agency of how they shape their political space at the borderland.

Section 4: A brittle economy

PANEL 4.1

Myanmar 2022: The Economic Impact of the Coup

Michele Boario (Agenzia italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, Hanoi) and **Luca Sartorelli** (Agenzia italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, Yangon)

With the coup of February 2021, the hands of Myanmar's economy and socio-political life reversed ten years to the time of the Than Shwe dictatorship. The country was projected into a future that we thought dystopian only a few months ago when the great popular support for the Lady was confirmed by the November 2020 election. The country's economy, praised by the IMF as one of the world's fastest with an average annual growth of 7% in the decade 2010-2020, has collapsed to minus 10%. Horrible violence and violation of

List of Abstracts

basic human rights perpetrated by the army, compounded with the spread of communal riots, ethnic clashes, targeted killings and bomb attacks, in addition to throwing the population into a state of despair and disillusionment, have created a volatile and difficult business environment. Key international businesses have already left the country and many others are reconsidering their investments. The disobedience movement with the legitimate goal to put pressure on the Generals has inevitably weakened the economy. Development and infrastructure project funding from donor partners have been frozen or cancelled. The European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States have re-established economic sanctions targeting military conglomerates. The unwritten pact of no return to a military dictatorship between the Tatmadaw's elites and the people of Myanmar, as well as the western international actors, has been broken. The country is back to its status of international pariah with a grim prospect to face years of sluggish economic growth and isolation to the only benefit of some military elites and their cronies, and to the detriment of the people, particularly the young generation grown up with the hope of a bright future. The paper will analyze the most likely scenarios for Myanmar in the next ten years, and possible roles to be played by the international community and the ASEAN in order to break the current impasse.

PANEL 4.1

Myanmar's Experiment with Trade in Live Cattle with China: Breakthrough, Collapse and Resuscitation?

Andrew **Leitha** (Yangon-based Independent Researcher), Terdsak **Yano** (Assistant Professor, Chiang Mai University), Manabu **Fujimura** (Professor, Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan) & Manoj **Potapohn** (Assistant Professor, Chiang Mai University)

Myanmar has a long history of being a major source of supply of live cattle to the rest of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) including Yunnan Province of China that has experienced a sustained rise in income per capita but relatively scarce grazing land. Some of Myanmar's cattle had been re-exported to China via Thailand and Laos after a few months' time of fattening; but in recent years (less than a decade) with improvement in transportation and lower rural labour force, China started buying cattle directly from Myanmar. Supply is getting tight within a long supply chain of Myanmar live cattle. In Myanmar, cattle is both drought animal and commodity. But its relative importance is uneven over space and time in Myanmar. As one moves from Ayeyarwady delta – major paddy rice growing area and location of significant use of drought animal– to the dry zone, cattle as commodity becomes important as it is in relatively abundant supply. Subsequent booming economies in the cities at the time of Myanmar returning to the world economy was marked by an outflow of rural labour force and waves of mechanization which produced redundant supply of previously drought animals. In 2017, Myanmar livestock department achieved a breakthrough in taking over legal power over the cattle movement from local authorities. It produced a spectacular result of export volume of cattle to China rising arguably unsustainably. Just as the officials were ready to develop Standard

List of Abstracts

Operating Procedure (SOP) to support cattle trade, the country was hit by the “double shock” of the covid-19 pandemic and the military coup. This complicated Myanmar’s attempt to build its capacities with neighbouring and trading countries to develop disease control infrastructure and upgrade the country’s capacity to handle foot-and-mouth (FMD) disease, bird flu and beyond. As quantifying the impact of the double shock is constrained by the scarcity of the latest data, this paper provides insights into how the double shock impacted on Myanmar’s cattle trade mainly drawing on interviews with farmers/collectors in the fields and consultations with local experts with prior experience, while supplementing the narratives by data from secondary sources.

PANEL 4.1

The Impact of the Double Crisis on the Garment Sector in Myanmar

Samukelisiwe Ngwenya-Tshuma (Independent Consultant)

When the military coup took place in Myanmar on the 1st of February 2021, it sent shock waves across the nation and an economy already reeling from the impacts of the global pandemic. Previously poised for tremendous growth, Myanmar’s economic growth now faces two crises, the pandemic and the military coup, a double crisis. Within seven months after the military coup, Myanmar’s garment export decreased about 30 percent, and exports to EU market declined the most. The double crisis in the export-oriented garment sector is a microcosm of the country’s overall industrial development. The data is from a quantitative factory survey that applied stratified random sampling technique and qualitative interviews with selected stakeholders. This paper sought to investigate significant changes to the production level, workforce, and wages expenditure experienced by the garment sector since the military coup and later compounded by the third wave of COVID-19. Factories reported that between January to September 2021, they experienced a decline in the workforce (-22%), overtime hours (-30%), wages expenditures (-26%), and the production level of the main products (-21%). Myanmar-owned factories experienced the highest order cancellations or suspensions. The paper also identified the most vulnerable players in the garment sector who faced the greatest changes; the smaller and medium-sized factories. Most respondents indicated political instability, limiting cash withdraws from banks, and the uncertainty of orders negatively affected the factory’s operation. On the other hand, only half of the respondents shared that their operations were negatively affected by the third wave of COVID-19. Findings also reveal that factories adopted a mixture of coping strategies. The most popular strategies employed included seeking new buyers, reducing the factory’s overtime operating hours, and hiring daily wage workers. Some coping strategies directly impacted garment workers, most being female workers who continue to face the greatest vulnerabilities.

List of Abstracts

PANEL 4.1

Flow of Drugs Where the Rivers Meet: Myanmar's Drug Economy before and after the Coup

Maria Elena **Sassaroli** (MA graduate student, University of Turin and Beijing Foreign Studies University)

At the border between Laos, Thailand and Myanmar, two rivers – the Mekong and the Ruak – touch each other, making the land extremely fertile. This territory, dubbed the Golden Triangle, represents the second region for opium production in the world, preceded only by the Central-Asian Golden Crescent. Myanmar, and in particular its eastern Shan State, is the Golden Triangle's main hub: through thick and thin, the drug production and trade in and from the area has represented a major economic driver for the whole country since the 1950s. Despite drug trafficking being a deeply rooted phenomenon in Myanmar, the first two decades of the 2000s had seen a decrease in the country's drug flow. Nevertheless, when the coup d'état occurred in early 2021 and added instability to the already fragile situation caused by the pandemic, researchers warned about an upsurge of drug trafficking. On these premises, this paper will first provide an overarching summary of the evolution of the drug economy in Myanmar. The focus will then shift to the way this phenomenon's scope and characteristics have changed after the coup: have the recent socio-political shifts exacerbated or loosened the already existing trends, and in which ways? The research on data and information on the flow of drugs in Myanmar will be conducted mainly through two channels: first, I will be retrieving data from international databases monitoring drugs' production and streams; second, I will analyse the discourse and framing of the issue in newspaper articles, by focusing on bordering countries' journals, with the primary sources being Chinese and Thai press. Burmese media will not be analysed for the self-evident reason that, ever since the coup, gathering information through Myanmar's online sources is a difficult and tricky process.

Conference Venue

University of Turin, Campus Luigi Einaudi

Lungodora Siena 100/A, 10153 Torino

Sala Lauree Rossa

Online registration

Speakers and papers' authors will receive the weblink to the conference in their mailbox.

All other prospective participants should register by sending a request to info@myern.org.

With the support of



Fondazione
Compagnia
di San Paolo