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Building a better future union: Postmemory as re-articulating struggles or repeating distinctions in Myanmar

Benedict S. Mette-Starke

This article examines how digital media in Myanmar enables postmemory transmission amid Ethno-political conflict. Using Hirsch's concept, I analyse how rights activists and Ethnic Armed Organisations employ postmemory work to construct belonging. Based on Yangon fieldwork (2019–2020), the study contrasts two modes: one transcending Ethnic boundaries through shared oppression narratives, another reinforcing Ethnic distinctions. A digital rights activist links minority persecution with activists' suffering, creating cross-ethnic solidarities. Conversely, the YouTube film The Way of Rakhita *mobilises postmemory to affirm Rakhine identity and armed struggle. Conceptualising postmemory as transmission clarifies how memory work perpetuates conflict or generates inclusive belonging.*

Introduction

Digital media in Myanmar, and social media in particular, can be 'poison if you don't know how to use it'.[1] They can solidify exclusive identities and fuel conflicts. However, they also provide postmemories, which open up space for reinterpretation, renegotiation and making connections. The digital sphere, the online space where memories are shared and re-made, blurs space and time and enables both solidification of identities and connections across them. In this article, I analyse the ways in which people in Myanmar enact belonging through postmemory work.[2]

Myanmar has been the site of Ethnic conflicts since its independence from the British Empire in 1948, with purported precursors in colonial times.[3] Located between

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1 Jenifer Whitten-Woodring et al., 'Poison if you don't know how to use it: Facebook, democracy, and human rights in Myanmar', *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 24, 3 (2020): 407–25.

2 I capitalise the term Ethnic where it is used as a political identity in itself, e.g. in the term Ethnic Armed Organisations.

3 The literature on conflicts in Myanmar is too extensive for a comprehensive overview here. For common analyses, see Nicholas Farrelly, 'Cooperation, contestation, conflict: Ethnic political interests in

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today's nation states of India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Thailand, Myanmar was conquered first by the British East India Company and then by the British Crown between 1824 and 1885. Like many countries in Mainland Southeast Asia, ethnic groups and economies in Myanmar are distinguished between the highlands and the dry zone, or lowlands more broadly. The late James Scott, for instance, based his monograph *The Art of Not Being Governed* on the lowland-highland distinction.[4] This distinction has also dominated many of the ongoing conflicts within the borders of today's Myanmar. In the course of the country's post-independence history, various groups, typically from the highlands, have fought for their independence from the Union of Myanmar or for greater autonomy within it. These conflicts of territorial independence, often framed in Ethnic terms, happen alongside conflicts about how Myanmar should be governed and what form the state should take. What makes up the Union of Myanmar both ethnically and politically, therefore, is continually re-articulated.

This re-articulation took on new forms with the establishment of Myanmar's first digital spaces in the 1990s.[5] While Myanmar's ethnic and territorial composition has by and large been a national question, digital spheres also involve the wider region, as mobile phone service providers like the state-owned MPT and Mytel are partnerships with Japanese and Vietnamese businesses respectively. Service providers enable communication but, in storing customers' data, they also enable surveillance. The surveillance noted by the digital rights activists I spoke with in 2019 and 2020 was not corporate surveillance *per se* but surveillance by various governmental and non-governmental agencies that had the ability to co-opt private enterprises to achieve their goals.

In a study on surveillance published in 2020, Phyu Phyu Kyaw addresses both the perception of surveillance among activists and the plausible surveillance capabilities present in Myanmar at the time.[6] In her report, it is clear that both the

Myanmar today', *South East Asia Research* 22, 2 (2014): 251–66; Nick Cheesman and Nicholas Farrelly, eds., *Conflict in Myanmar: War, Politics, Religion* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2016). Michael Aung-Thwin and Maitrii Aung-Thwin, *A history of Myanmar since ancient times: Traditions and transformations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013) report cases in which British troops employed Karen armed forces to suppress rebellions of Ethnic Bamar. Victor B. Lieberman, 'Reinterpreting Burmese history', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, 1 (1987): 162–94, in contrast, cautions against understanding precolonial dynamics along Ethnic lines.

4 James C. Scott, *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 1–39.

5 See Gustaaf Houtman, *Mental culture in Burmese crisis politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy* (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999), p. 2; Lisa Brooten, Jane Madlyn McElhone and Gayathry Venkiteswaran, 'Introduction: Myanmar media historically and the challenges of transition', in *Myanmar media in transition: Legacies, challenges and change*, ed. Lisa Brooten, Jane Madlyn McElhone and Gayathry Venkiteswaran (Singapore: ISEAS, 2019), pp. 1–56; Htaike Htaike Aung and Wai Myo Htut, 'From blogging to digital rights: Telecommunications reform in Myanmar', in *Myanmar media in transition: Legacies, challenges and change*, ed. Lisa Brooten, Jane Madlyn McElhone and Gayathry Venkiteswaran (Singapore: ISEAS, 2019), pp. 366–76.

6 Phyu Phyu Kyaw, 'The rise of online censorship and surveillance in Myanmar: A quantitative and qualitative study' (Washington (DC): Open Technology Fund, 2020), https://public.opentech.fund/documents/The_Rise_of_Online_Censorship_and_Surveillance_in_Myanmar.pdf (last accessed 12 May 2026).

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fear of surveillance and actual surveillance practices build upon practices employed before the advent of digital techniques. Under Myanmar law, surveillance can be legal. Article 40 of Myanmar's Telecommunication Law, for instance, enables the Post and Telecommunications Department or its proxies to access any information it deems necessary in connection with telecommunication services.[7] Phyu Phyu Kyaw further notes the use of surveillance software, such as Cellebrite, against at least one member of a team of journalists arrested in 2017 after their investigative work in connection with the events in Rakhine State (see Situating conflicts).[8] In addition, the National League for Democracy-led government established a social media monitoring team, ostensibly to curb online hate speech.[9]

Companies beyond Internet Service Providers are further enabling people to connect online. Such companies include social media companies like Bytedance, which operates TikTok from the People's Republic of China, and Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp and is based in the US. Problematic social media posts can get noticed by users, so called trusted partners of social media companies, employed moderators or algorithms; they are reported and flagged either for limited circulation or for removal. To adjudicate those decisions in what Monroe and Joshua Price have called 'the absence of the state,'[10] the Oversight Board was created by Meta.[11] The Oversight Board decided on a Myanmar case as one of its very first cases in a setting where Facebook had been accused of fomenting violence.[12] Thus, the digital spaces where what makes up Myanmar is discussed are themselves shaped by political and corporate processes of moderation and surveillance.

As this brief introduction has sketched out, and as will be elaborated on further, conflicts about who and what makes up the Union of Myanmar continue both online and offline. The historically persistent conflicts are unique to Myanmar's ethnopolitics. Digital media adds another level to those conflicts: Multiple media are readily accessible on digital devices both on- and offline. Through those media, past events

7 Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, 'ဆက်သွယ်ရေးဥပဒေ / Telecommunication Law', Pub. L. No. 31/2013 (2013), art. 40, https://www.myanmar-law-library.org/law-library/laws-and-regulations/laws/myanmar-laws-1988-until-now/union-solidarity-and-development-party-laws-2012-2016/myanmar-laws-2013/pyidaungsu-hluttaw-law-no-31-2013-telecommunication-law-burmese.html (last accessed 12 May 2026).

8 Phyu Phyu Kyaw, 'The rise of online censorship and surveillance in Myanmar: A quantitative and qualitative study', pp. 5–6.

9 Zaw Zaw Htwe and Aung Kyaw Nyunt, 'Critics rail against govt budget for monitoring of Facebook', *The Myanmar Times*, 28 Mar. 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20190419140424/https://www.mmtimes.com/news/critics-rail-against-govt-budget-monitoring-facebook.html (last accessed 12 May 2026).

10 Monroe E. Price and Yoshua M. Price, 'Building legitimacy in the absence of the state: Reflections on the Facebook oversight board', *International Journal Of Communication* 17, 11 (2023): 3315–24.

11 Kate Klonick, 'The Facebook oversight board: Creating an independent institution to adjudicate online free expression', *Yale Law Journal* 129, 8 (2020): 2418.

12 'Case Decision 2020-002-FB-UA', https://www.oversightboard.com/decision/FB-I2T6526K/ (last accessed 12 May 2026). Victoire Rio, 'Myanmar: The role of social media in fomenting violence', in *Social media impacts on conflict and democracy: The techtonic shift*, ed. Lisa Schirch (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 143–60.

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can be made present instantaneously, leading Rik Smit and colleagues to argue that the boundaries of past, present and future get blurred in digital media.[13]

Marianne Hirsch describes postmemory as 'the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before.'[14] Using the metaphor of family to describe how postmemories get transmitted, she emphasises postmemory's '*generational* structure of transmission'.[15] In other words, the transmission of postmemory creates generations. People come to relate to each other as part of a generation precisely through the act of transmitting postmemories. Tine Gammeltoft describes a similar form of relating as a kind of belonging, 'captur[ing] how selfhood is produced through imagined, claimed or socially practiced dependencies and commitments.'[16] She argues that people act in mutuality and responsiveness to others, which allows individuals to belong in relation to demands. As far as what may constitute the Union of Myanmar is concerned, the postmemories analysed below are not just about the relationship between past and present. They also entail hope for the future. Ethnic lines may be transcended or rearticulated.[17] Contributing to this special issue's theme of digital memory work, I argue that understanding postmemory as a process of transmission allows memory to come unbound from preconceived identity; in this way, people can circumvent entrenched identities such as Ethnic affiliations.

Drawing on long-term in-person ethnographic fieldwork with digital rights activists in Yangon in 2019/2020, remote ethnographic fieldwork throughout 2019 up until 2021, as well as continuing online research, I explore how digital rights activists conduct postmemory work. I understand postmemory work as the way people transmit, engage with and re-shape accounts of past events that they themselves may not have witnessed.[18] I then contrast that with the postmemory work present in a YouTube video, *The Way of Rakhita*, posted by someone close to the Arakan Army (AA), an

13 Rik Smit, Ansgard Heinrich and Marcel Broersma, 'Witnessing in the new memory ecology: Memory construction of the syrian conflict on Youtube', *New Media & Society* 19, 2 (2017): 292.

14 Marianne Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 5.

15 Ibid., p. 35, emphasis in original.

16 Tine M. Gammeltoft, 'Belonging', *Social Analysis* 62, 1 (2018): 78.

17 Birgit Bräuchler (this volume). See also Tine M. Gammeltoft, 'Potentiality and human temporality: Haunting futures in vietnamese pregnancy care', *Current Anthropology* 54, S7 (2013): S159–71; Melinda Hinkson, *Remembering the future: Warlpiri life through the prism of drawing* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014).

18 I adapt the term from what Marianne Hirsch has called 'the work of postmemory', describing the work that particular postmemories do or are used to do. See Marianne Hirsch, 'Surviving images: Holocaust photographs and the work of postmemory', *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, 1 (2001): 5–37; and Marianne Hirsch, 'The generation of postmemory', *Poetics Today* 29, 1 (2008): 103–28. This contrasts with Frigga Haug's memory work, which is a particular method to draw on memories to examine social relations, often gender and power relations, in order to re-evaluate them. See Frigga Haug, 'Memory work: A detailed rendering of the method for social science research', in *Dissecting the mundane: International perspectives on memory-work*, ed. Adrienne E. Hyle et al. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008); and also June Crawford et al., *Emotion and gender: Constructing meaning from memory*, gender and psychology (London; Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1992), pp. 39–55. The two approaches share a focus on redefinition and repair, though with a slightly stronger focus on description in Marianne Hirsch's work in comparison to Frigga Haug's more active use. It is this redefinition I draw on for my argument that postmemories can enact new ways of belonging.

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Ethnic Armed Organisation (EAO), which I put into context of ongoing conflicts.[19] In this way, I attend to the question of the role digital postmemory work plays in settings where memories of ongoing conflicts are produced.

In the following section, I provide a brief overview of the various overlapping conflicts in Myanmar, from the Rohingya crisis to conflicts of governance. After describing an ethnographic episode from my fieldwork, I analyse how postmemories can establish rare connections that transcend lines of division in these conflicts. I then draw upon the YouTube video described above which does the opposite: it puts postmemory to work but uses it to emphasise Ethnic identity. I conclude with my argument that the blurring of past, present and future in digital postmemories can mean an endlessly repeating loop of the same ongoing conflicts, but postmemories also carry the hope for a better future when they enable connections across divides.

Situating conflicts

Belonging to Myanmar has been contested on both individual and group levels for many of those living within the Union's territory. The issue of belonging is intertwined with the territorial union of the country and with various conflicts that have shaped Myanmar's past and continue to shape its present. Prior to the ongoing coup d'etat that started in 2021, most literature on Myanmar's digital sphere focused on the Rohingya crisis as that conflict was inextricably linked to social media use.[20] Lisa Brooten and colleagues championed a broader media studies focus even then.[21] Since the coup, the number of people including the Rohingya crisis in studies of politics and the digital, in the process deemphasising its Ethnic framing, has increased.[22]

Like other conflicts on Myanmar's soil, the Rohingya crisis is an ethnically and religiously framed conflict. The Rohingya comprise mostly Muslim people who live in Rakhine State and in a diaspora. Yet Myanmar's central governments have consistently contested the Rohingya's status as an Ethnic group. The passing of the 1982 Citizenship Law arguably deprived Rohingya of avenues to citizenship as long as they were identified as Rohingya.[23] Anti-Muslim sentiment in Myanmar in general, and in Rakhine State in particular, had been running high since 2012 as news of an alleged rape of a Buddhist woman by a Muslim man spread. As the conflict escalated, leading to whole villages being burned down, it was framed both as a conflict between Buddhists and Muslims and one between Rakhine people and Rohingya. This led to both Rohingya and non-Rohingya Muslims being targeted. 2013 saw riots involving

19 I chose the video for its prominence in the literature for social media use by Ethnic actors, its high view numbers and the ambiguous role the Arakan Army continues to play in Myanmar's conflicts.

20 Lisa Brooten, 'When media fuel the crisis: Fighting hate speech and communal violence in Myanmar', in *Media, journalism and disaster communities*, ed. Jamie Matthews and Einar Thorsen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 215–30.

21 Lisa Brooten et al., ed., *Myanmar media in transition*.

22 See Ingrid Jordt et al., *How Generation Z galvanised a revolutionary movement against Myanmar's 2021 Military Coup* (2021); Megan Ryan and Mai Van Tran, 'Democratic backsliding disrupted: The role of digitalized resistance in Myanmar', *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 9, 1 (2022): 133–58.

23 Melissa Crouch, 'Myanmar's Muslim mosaic and the politics of belonging', in *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim-Buddhist relations and the politics of belonging*, ed. Melissa Crouch (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 28–9.

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actors identified as Muslims and Buddhists by news and NGO reports erupting in several cities across the country. These violent outbursts predate the sharp uptick in the use of digital media like Facebook. Digital media was later used extensively during the violence from 2016 onwards, which saw whole Rohingya settlements burned to the ground.[24]

As the Rohingya crisis has demonstrated, who does and does not count as an Ethnic group lies at the core of Ethnic conflicts in the country. Ethnically framed conflicts have beset Myanmar since at least the time of Myanmar's independence from the British Empire after the end of the Second World War. Even though neither the British nor the Burmese delegation to the independence negotiations had members that identified as non-Bamar Ethnic people,[25] the distinction between highland and lowland groups was made by the colonial government when independence was negotiated in 1947, as shown by the Aung San-Attlee Agreement.[26] Like earlier colonial documents, this agreement talked about the Frontier Areas and Ministerial Burma in ways that were congruent with the distinction between highlands and lowlands. The agreement emphasised that it was up to the people in the highlands, i.e. non-Bamar Ethnic people, to decide whether they wanted to be part of the newly independent state. This emphasis may have been made on account of the varied allegiances of ethnically affiliated soldiers with or against the allied forces during the war, such as the Karen and Chin who had fought alongside the British.[27] Two weeks after the signing of the agreement by the two delegations, in February 1947, a conference was held at Panglong in Myanmar's Shan State. An agreement was signed there as well by people representing Shan, Kachin and Chin groups and representatives of the central state. In this agreement, the Ethnic group leaders agreed to join the independent state with guarantees of legal and fiscal autonomy. This conference, and the agreement it produced, has since been invoked by various actors as grounds for how Myanmar should be. Both conference and agreement assumed a status that possibly exceeds its importance at the time, leading Matthew Walton to call it a myth.[28] It is commemorated every Union Day, one of Myanmar's national holidays.

While the Panglong Agreement does not offer the right to secession from the Union *expressis verbis* but rather says that 'full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas is accepted in principle,'[29] the 1947 constitution holds a clause

24 Elliott Prasse-Freeman, 'The Rohingya crisis', *Anthropology Today* 33, 6 (2017): 1–2; Ken MacLean, 'The Rohingya crisis and the practices of erasure', *Journal of Genocide Research* 21, 1 (2019): 83–95.

25 Bamar is a designation for Myanmar's largest Ethnic group. Its members largely identify as Buddhist and predominantly inhabit central Myanmar. The identity often goes unmarked. On the privileged position of Bamar identity, see Matthew J. Walton, 'The "wages of Burman-ness": Ethnicity and Burman privilege in contemporary Myanmar', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, 1 (2013): 1–27.

26 Burma Information and Broadcasting Department, *Burma's fight for freedom: Independence commemoration* (Superintendent, Government Print. and Stationery, 1948), pp. 44–8.

27 Matthew J. Walton, 'Ethnicity, conflict, and history in Burma: The myths of Panglong', *Asian Survey* 48, 6 (2008): 896.

28 Walton, 'Ethnicity, conflict, and history in Burma'.

29 Hugh Tinker, Andrew Griffin and S.R. Ashton, *Burma, the struggle for independence, 1944–1948: From general strike to independence, 31 August 1946 to 4 January 1948* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1983), p. 405.

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on secession, possible 10 years after the passing of the constitution in 1947, in its chapter X.[30]

Besides the four groups represented at the Panglong Conference—the three expressly Ethnic ones and the Bamar-dominated central state of the lowlands—several other groups were either present only as observers, such as Karen representatives, or were absent all-together. The Karen National Union (KNU), today's political wing of Karen resistance with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) as its armed wing, for instance, was only formed briefly ahead of the Panglong Conference and armed struggle began in early 1949. Some Karen organisations later boycotted the Constituent Assembly, whose task it was to draft a constitution of the newly independent state, while others supported Aung San's league.[31]

The EAO conflicts

The literature on Ethnicity in Myanmar extends far beyond those ongoing conflicts, even preceding the works of Edmund Leach with various contending perspectives up until today.[32] Authors such as Robert H. Taylor have argued that Ethnicity played less of a role in the daily lives of the people living in the country than it did in the literature on identity formation and conflicts.[33] Also de-centring Ethnicity, Judith Beyer has argued that the colonial categorisation lives on in local uses of the term community rather than it being an indication of what she calls we-formation which do not necessarily follow Ethnic or community lines.[34]

Ethnically framed conflicts have led the central state's military, often called *tatmadaw*, to position themselves as the guardians of the Union. Formed during and after the struggle for independence, the *tatmadaw* has been strongly associated with Bamar identity in opposition to the Ethnic soldiers employed by the British colonial government. To protect the Union, the military took power under General Ne Win in 1962, when some Ethnic groups were thinking about secession, a right granted in the 1947 constitution. Ne Win's coup was nominally meant to stop the disintegration of the Union.

Since 1948, various EAOs have operated in Myanmar. New groups emerged as others dissolved. Besides the KNU's armed wing, the KNLA, Salai Samuel Hmung counted 19 other Ethnic Armed Organisations before the coup in 2021, two of which mainly fought the Indian rather than the Myanmar government, leaving 18 EAOs

30 Constituent Assembly of Burma, *The constitution of the Union of Burma* (Rangoon: Supdt., Govt. Printing and Stantionery Burma, 1947), pp. 50–51.

31 Walton, 'Ethnicity, conflict, and history in Burma', pp. 901–2.

32 Edmund Ronald Leach, *Political systems of highland Burma: A study of Kachin social structure* (London: Athlone Press, 1986).

33 Robert H. Taylor, 'Do states make nations?: The politics of identity in Myanmar revisited', *South East Asia Research* 13, 3 (2005): 261–86.

34 Judith Beyer, 'Community as a category of empire: "The work of community" among Burmese Indians in Myanmar', *History and Anthropology* 36, 1 (2023): 60–77; Judith Beyer, *Rethinking community in Myanmar: Practices of we-formation among Muslims and Hindus in Urban Yangon* (University of Hawaii Press, 2024), pp. 1–29. For a larger overview of conflicts and identity formation in Southeast Asia, see Aurel Croissant and Christoph Trinn, 'Culture, identity and conflict in Asia and Southeast Asia', *ASIEN: The German Journal on Contemporary Asia* 110 (2009): 13–43.

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fighting the *tatmadaw* and each other, e.g. for territorial dominance.[35] Besides the efforts at peace and unity through military means on the side of the *tatmadaw*, those conflicts were interrupted by various ceasefires, most notably the nationwide ceasefire initiative in the 2010s, splitting the EAOs into two camps, one engaging and one resisting the initiative. Having stalled, this process was further interrupted by the military coup in 2021. These various groups fighting the *tatmadaw* constitute one arena of ongoing conflicts. Since the coup, those conflicts have by and large increased rather than decreased. Additionally, new armed actors have emerged which are not necessarily Ethnically affiliated, such as various People's Defence Forces (PDF).[36]

Conflicts of governance

In addition to the Ethnically framed conflicts, an overlapping set of conflicts centres around how Myanmar ought to be governed. In this context, student activism and Myanmar's military feature prominently alongside Myanmar's probably most well-known party internationally, the National League for Democracy (NLD). Student movements have a long history of protest both against the colonial and later against military governments in Myanmar.[37] I will focus on developments since the 1988 uprisings and subsequent regime change. The nominally civilian government at the time had demonetised large parts of the currency for a third time in 1987, worsening the economic situation of a large part of the population, but protests were met with force by the military. Protests then broke out again in 1988 after a student from the Rangoon Institute of Technology was shot by police a day after he was involved in a tea shop brawl in Yangon.[38] The events led to mass protests which, among other things, sparked the establishment of the NLD with Aung San Suu Kyi as its central figure. The protests to a smaller degree addressed economic woes and were mostly aimed at changing the government. A coup in September lead to the change of the head of government. The incoming military regime suppressed the protests more violently. Although elections were held in 1990, the results were not honoured by the government.[39] While demonetisation played a role in 1988, cutting government subsidies for fuel contributed to the protests in 2007. The government newspaper *New Light of Myanmar* argued that the protestors were 'undermining peace and security of the State', raising the spectre of the dissolution of the Union and thus tying back the political conflicts to the question of the Union.[40] Besides the visibility of monks' robes in the protest, which earned it the colloquial name Saffron Revolution, international media coverage was shaped

35 Salai Samuel Hmung, 'New friends, old enemies: Politics of Ethnic armed organisations after the Myanmar Coup' (Canberra: SEARBO, Australian National University, 2021), pp. 4–5.
36 Compare Hmung, 'New friends, old enemies: Politics of Ethnic armed organisations after the Myanmar Coup'.
37 For a thorough history of the student movements of the twentieth century, see Aung Htun, မြန်မာနိုင်ငံကျောင်းသားလှုပ်ရှားမှုသမိုင်း (Chiang Mai: The Union Publishing, 2007).
38 Renaud Egreteau, 'The repression of the August 8–12 1988 (8-8-88) uprising in Burma/Myanmar', *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence,* 25 (2009).
39 Christina Fink, *Living silence in Burma: Surviving under military rule* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm 2009), pp. 66–69. Whether those elections were for a constitutional assembly or parliament remains disputed.
40 *The New Light of Myanmar*, 22 Aug. 2007.

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by access to images of the protests gained through bloggers and online channels.[41] The protests were suppressed by the military, and those involved in it or spreading information about it were arrested.[42] The military government went ahead with its plans for a new constitution, which was put to the ballot in 2008, shortly after large parts of Myanmar's coastal delta region was hit by a cyclone. The new constitution paved the way for the election of former general Thein Sein's nominally civilian government in 2011. The reforms started by this government included a liberalisation of the telecommunication market around 2013, leading to a massive increase in the use of mobile internet connections and allowing more people to access and share news, and is often described as the start of the transition period when Myanmar opened up.[43] While the NLD did not take part in the 2010 elections, they started participating in by-elections and competed the 2015 election. The previous year, an education reform bill had been passed and duly criticised because non-governmental input, which had suggested more autonomy for educational institutions and a more central role of languages other than Myanmar, had not been considered.[44] NLD MPs, who at this point had won seats through by-elections, had also voted for the law. This indicated that conflicts concerning governance would not end with an NLD election victory, which came in November 2015.

Despite impactful liberalisations, e.g. of the telecommunications market, conflicts concerning how Myanmar should be governed continued. People who passed as Bamar kept being at the centre of public politics but so did discussions about who makes up Myanmar, e.g. in terms of languages of instruction in state schools. Both Ethnic and political conflicts continued after the shift to an NLD-led semi-civilian government. To illustrate this continuity and the way that postmemories were used by an activist I did research with, I will recount an event from my fieldwork below.

Rally memories

It was a warm and sunny day in Yangon in December 2019. I was attending a rally to stand with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi,[45] who had chosen to represent the state at the

41 Lea Buck, 'Media and protests in the Myanmar Crisis', *Südostasien Aktuell: Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 26, 6 (2007): 50–66; Htaike Htaike Aung and Wai Myo Htut, 'From blogging to digital rights: Telecommunications reform in Myanmar'.

42 Htaike Htaike Aung and Wai Myo Htut, 'From blogging to digital rights: Telecommunications reform in Myanmar', p. 397.

43 Felix Girke and Judith Beyer, '"Transition" as a migratory model in Myanmar', *Journal of Burma Studies* 22, 2 (2018): 215.

44 Rosalie Metro, 'Whose democracy?: The university student protests in Burma/Myanmar, 2014–2016', in *Universities and conflict*, ed. Juliet Millican (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 205–218; Marie Lall, *Myanmar's education reforms: A pathway to social justice?* (UCL Press, 2021), pp. 71–73; Marie Lall, 'Overview of education in Myanmar', in *International handbook on education in South East Asia*, ed. Lorraine Pe Symaco and Martin Hayden (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021), pp. 1–23; Tamar Groves and Trude Stapnes, 'Prefiguring a democratic state: Student activism and the national education law in Myanmar', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 54, 7 (2023): 1229–46.

45 Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of one of Myanmar's independence heroes, General Aung San. She has herself taken an active part in Myanmar's politics after joining the protests against the then governing military regime in 1988. She has led the NLD as the chief opposition party since the 1990s, spending many years in house arrest. When the NLD won a majority in the parliamentary elections in 2015, she took on the role of State Counsellor, a position created for her because the constitution banned her from

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International Court of Justice where Myanmar had been charged for the prosecution of the Rohingya from 2016 onwards. At the time, Daw Suu was heading a nominally civilian government which, because the military held 25 percent of the seats in both chambers of parliament and directly appointed three ministers, inevitably also involved the military.[46] The previous days, international news sources had articulated puzzlement as to why Daw Suu, who was widely viewed as the champion of civilian democratic forces by international journalists, chose to represent Myanmar for actions carried out under a military regime by soldiers.[47]

I wanted to go for comparative reasons. I had been observing a kind of activism which rarely saw dedicated protests at the time because it either joined causes with activists concerned with other issues or had found predominantly other public means of making their concerns visible, be it on social media, TV or through reports. Now, I wanted to see how protest, often taken as a central part of activism in the literature, could look in the middle of Yangon. I had convinced a friend and research partner to come along but he decided to leave because he felt deeply uncomfortable standing amongst the protestors, implicitly supporting their cause of defending Myanmar's dignity. I continued to stand amongst the crowd of people, trying to catch a glimpse of what was happening on stage in front of a large Baptist church next to Downtown Yangon's Sule Pagoda and Yangon's City Hall. I knew from my activist friends that such a public gathering must have undergone the usually slow and tedious process of registering. In contrast to the effort of registering protests with local authorities which would then strictly circumscribe what could and could not be done at the gathering, which I'd heard about from those activist friends who had organised in-person protests, the gathering on this day seemed almost festive. People were handing out small paper flags, t-shirts printed for the occasion sporting an image of Daw Suu and other paraphernalia. As I escaped the scorching sunlight under the shade of a large tree at the edge of the main crowd, a middle-aged woman smilingly handed me a cooled water-bottle. I started walking around, trying to get glimpses from different angles, when a couple of middle-aged men approached me, asking whether I supported Myanmar. I tried to convey that Myanmar was a rather diverse country but that, yes, generally speaking I did support Myanmar. This was their opportunity to laud me and tell me that the only thing they could not support were Muslims or it would happen to Myanmar like it had happened to Indonesia which, they explained, had been a Buddhist country before it turned to Islam.

After spending a little more time at the now shrinking rally, I joined my friend and another close research partner, Ama, at an air-conditioned café about a five-minute walk away. We had been chatting about other projects for a while when we hit the topic of the rally. We talked about both their discomfort and my participant observation. I tried to make

becoming president because her sons are British subjects. When the military staged the still ongoing coup in February 2021, she was arrested again.

46 Many people in Myanmar use personal names only, rather than a combination of personal and family names. Since those names can be rather long, people are often referred to by only part of those names and, if not familiar, a pre-fixed honorific. Daw, for instance, indicates a woman of advanced age if it is used in combination with a name.

47 See Judith Beyer, 'Harmony ideology at the hague: Myanmar before the international court of justice', *Public Anthropologist* (blog), 14 Dec. 2019, https://publicanthropologist.cmi.no/2019/12/14/harmony-ideology-at-the-hague-myanmar-before-the-international-court-of-justice/ (last accessed 12 May 2026).

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> clear that I did not attend to show my support, although I worried that my presence could be viewed as support. We decided to head out to go to a computer store because Ama needed to buy a new computer for a new project of hers. As we were walking, the other two started talking about a Facebook post by a female Ethnic activist, identified as not of the majority Ethnic Bama, who outlined how the atrocities the military had committed in Ethnic areas, mostly outside the dry zone at the centre of the Union's territory, paralleled the prosecution of the Rohingya and civilians in the sites of conflict. They agreed that such takes should be shared far more widely on Facebook than they had been. Ama said she was thinking about sharing it, despite potential backlash. She thought that the military apparatus's treatment of Ethnic minorities was also similar to how the military apparatus had harmed those it understood as political opposition.
>
> edited fieldnotes, 10 December 2019[48]

On the one hand, the rally demonstrated belonging to Myanmar. Participants who 'stood with' Aung San Suu Kyi considered themselves defenders of Myanmar's dignity. Even though she had to travel to the Hague as a private individual rather than in her official capacity as State Counsellor and foreign minister, Aung San Suu Kyi had the opportunity to represent Myanmar before the International Court of Justice, a position that the *tatmadaw* alone had been able to occupy. Standing with her gave those at the rally the chance to come together as a group, to express their shared belonging, and to demonstrate their mutual support in activities like handing out water to each other.

On the other hand, the issue of the Rohingya belonging in Myanmar, and the alleged threat they pose to it, lay at the heart of the rally. Myanmar as a country was facing charges for the persecution of Rohingya during the 2010s. Who belongs to Myanmar, even a reformed one, has continued to be defined in terms of Ethnic, racial and religious affiliation.[49] Matt Schissler, Matt Walton and Phyu Phyu Thi have highlighted the work that goes into making a supposed Muslim threat viable in contemporary Myanmar. They argue that there are two strands of contradicting memory at work, one of peaceful co-existence and one of threat.[50] I propose that there is another way to interpret the transmission of memory, which is to engage with the concept of postmemory as something that connects people who might otherwise belong to different Ethnic, racial and religious groups. The middle-aged men I was talking to, the ones who argued that Indonesia was a Buddhist country that had been converted by Muslims, were using narrative transmission as a form of postmemory. While that which had happened to Indonesia had not yet happened to them, they felt as if it well could. This fear is akin to the postmemories of the 'generations after', whose lives, Hirsch argues, are shaped by events they never personally experienced.[51] Bound by this fear, the disparate participants of the rally thus articulated their belonging to a religion and a country that they perceived to be under threat.

48 The names of my interlocutors have been changed.

49 Juliane Schober, 'Belonging in a new Myanmar: Identity, law, and gender in the anthropology of contemporary Buddhism', *Religion and Society* 8, 1 (2017), pp. 158–172.

50 Matt Schissler, Matthew J. Walton, and Phyu Phyu Thi, 'Reconciling contradictions: Buddhist-Muslim violence, narrative making and memory in Myanmar', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, 3 (2017): 376–95.

51 Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 2012, p. 5.

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Posting positions

At the end of the rally, my research partners and I discussed a Facebook post that had been circulating. Ama used the post to do postmemory work. Through it, she constructed a new grouping of oppressed peoples, a group that transcended Ethnic affiliations. In my discussion so far, I have employed the distinction between Ethnically and politically framed conflicts as if the two were separate for simplicity's sake. Ama, however, drew attention to the Ethnic affiliation of the poster on Facebook but, rather than using that to keep the Ethnic and the political separate, she employed the memories of atrocities articulated in the post to blend the two. She used a digital articulation of what would otherwise have been counted as different conflicts, the remembrance of which would be kept separate by EAOs and political parties, as a singular struggle against military oppression.

Even though she did not personally experience persecution as an Ethnic person—she is identified as Bamar—and therefore the atrocities remembered in the post were not her memories or even her conflict, she engaged with it. As a postmemory, it became part of her story. Ama is an activist against various military and civilian regimes, and she knew about the persecution of activists through both narrative transmission and personal experience. When reading the post, she did not identify with the Bamar in this story, who are the military, but with those who resisted it. This kind of identification, which resides outside of Ethnic affiliation, is rare and tenuous, as Judith Beyer describes in her work on what she calls we-formation in Myanmar.[52]

Ama's postmemory work is born out of digital rights activist practices. A significant part of digital rights activist work that I was able to witness were documentation practices. The activists would monitor social media posts to get an overview of the issues in circulation on different platforms and of those who posted. Through these practices, they would identify themes and narratives online that enabled them to articulate different ways that those narratives related to one another, be it as narratives of oppression or of supremacy, for instance. Activists engaged in postmemory work in other contexts, too. In a campaign called Flower Speech, activists tried not only to document narratives but also to rearticulate and change them. In so doing, they tried to encourage people to refrain from conflict laden speech and to reframe their thoughts in more 'flowery' ways. As part of the campaign, cartoonists were commissioned to draw stickers that could then be used on Facebook. The stickers cautioned the readers to check what they were sharing, and they exhorted them to spread 'flowery' rather than 'hate speech'. While these stickers were not explicitly engaging the events of 2012 or 2016, for instance, the timing of the campaign put it in conversation with those conflicts. Matt Schissler, an anthropologist who worked with the people who ran the campaign at the time, reports that the campaign team held a press conference explicitly against hate speech by actors known for their anti-Muslim rhetoric.[53] As much as the campaign team was trying to shift the narrative, there were others who in turn tried to twist theirs. A Facebook page was set up in 2014 to mimic the campaign page,

52 Judith Beyer, *Rethinking community in Myanmar*.

53 Matt Schissler, 'On islamophobes and holocaust deniers: Making sense of violence, in Myanmar and elsewhere', in *Conflict in Myanmar*, ed. Nick Cheesman and Nicholas Farrelly (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2016), p. 293.

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but it later started posting anti-Muslim messages, arguing that Islam was a form of hate speech.[54] The Flower Speech campaign did not outrightly address memories, but rather encouraged people to rework their articulations, including those of memories, in service of a better future, along the lines that Yifat Gutman has argued in the case of Israel/Palestine.[55] They were trying to inspire and provide the tools for counter-speech, i.e. countering hateful speech online.[56] Rather than articulating a solidarity amongst marginalised and oppressed, Flower Speech tried to encourage a different way of talking and relating. It did not work on the level of postmemory but tried to change the process of transmission by appealing to affect and speech.

The strengths of (digital) postmemory

As an analytical category, Marianne Hirsch's postmemory has a major advantage in Myanmar's multi-conflict context: It focuses on the transmission of memory across time and space as a process, not as a matter of identity.[57] Many of the conflicts within Myanmar are framed along Ethnic lines. There are important reasons to regard many of the conflicts as matters of ethnicity, not least because of the people's self-identification.

Looking at these conflicts from a perspective of transmission, however, as Hirsch does, Ethnic affiliation becomes secondary and only one effect of postmemory, which may equally lead to shared postmemories across Ethnic divides. When Ama spoke about the Facebook post, the Ethnic identity of the original poster was relevant only insofar as it showed that her description of suffering at the hands of the military was credible and poignant. The transmission transcended Ethnic lines as Ama could relate as an activist who was marginalised as a politically active queer woman, despite her passing as Bamar. The post became important to her on account of her identification with a marginalised elective family. Postmemory therefore is a spark of hope at the same time as it is about sharing deeply traumatic memories. Postmemories are crystallisation points of empathy.

However, the temporal aspect of the prefix 'post' necessarily recedes to the background in a context where past, present and future are blurred because the conflicts are ongoing and in which past social media posts can re-surface. Yet past events within the conflicts can still work as postmemory. As memories get posted, i.e. transmitted online or offline, at dinner tables and in poetry books, they can be engaged again and again, both to draw new connections and old distinctions. Emphasising the distinctive, temporal aspect of postmemory over the transmissional one, e.g. to address an after, like what happens to memory after those who witnessed the event have passed away, it runs aground in contexts where the event is yet unfinished and/or unbounded.

54 Ibid.

55 Yifat Gutman, *Memory activism: Reimagining the past for the future in Israel-palestine* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017), pp. 143–52.

56 See Thant Sin Oo, Zaw Myo Min, and Matt Schissler, 'ချစ်ခင်ကိုရှည်ဒေ၊ မုန်းခင်ကိုတိုဒေ: Structures and vocabularies of counter-speech on Facebook in Myanmar', Working Paper (Bangkok: Article 19, Nov. 2020) for an overview of other counter-speech strategies in Myanmar. See Catherine Buerger, '#iamhere: Collective counterspeech and the quest to improve online discourse', *Social Media+Society* 7, 4 (2021); for a broader overview of counter-speech in general.

57 E.g. Hirch, *The generation of postmemory*, 2012, p. 35.

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Thus employed, postmemory potentially silos off events conceptually. Insofar as postmemory is articulated as 'postmemory of' something, a particular event, such as the Holocaust or the Khmer Rouge regime's years in power, these events are clipped at the edges so that they fit into an understanding of a certain period. This becomes problematic in a setting like Myanmar where overlapping conflicts have persisted since independence in 1949. Remembering the Panglong Agreement would be one such instance where the presences and absences of representatives of certain Ethnic groups have become arguments for their future role within Myanmar at the expense of the personal dynamics that brought the participants to the conference.

Understanding of postmemory as a process of transmission allows me to understand digital engagement with memory without being beholden to Ethnic identity. Hirsch characterises postmemory as stories that shape people's lives and yet are not 'their own' because they themselves did not go through them. Rather, postmemories get passed along. Those they get passed to creatively engage with them. Hirsch's transmission across both time and space allows me to tell the story of transmission across cyber space.

In the case of Ama, she could relate to the suffering of the ethnically marginalised as that which paralleled the oppression that activists suffered at the hands of a violent military regime, and in so doing she participated in the transmission of memories of suffering and resistance. Even though the military had not deployed tanks on the streets of Yangon for a while at the time of our conversation, she was able to relate to the suffering of others across geographic space. Digital media is used to tell those stories and is a place of engagement. Through this engagement, the distinction between generations—those who witness something and those whose lives are shaped by the memory but did not experience it—is bridged. With Myanmar's ongoing conflicts, a distinction between generations could also be said to break down as different generations share similar experiences, such as the recurring protests and their suppression by changing military regimes. As the conflicts continue, there is not yet closure as to what constitutes the limits of each.

Re-membering Ethnic identities

By means of another, shorter vignette, I illustrate another way postmemory can play out. Postmemory can also be used to strengthen distinctions of generations as well as distinctions of identity, even in widely available digital media. To contrast the first case in which postmemory work was done by a digital rights activist in Yangon to show parallels between her own experiences and those of marginalised Ethnic activists, I turn to an account in which postmemory is used to shore up Ethnic identity. In 2018, an account called Tribal Action Group posted *The Way of Rakhita* on YouTube, a short film about the Arakan Army (AA), a relatively recently formed Ethnic Armed Organisation. Not only has the film garnered a fair amount of engagement, with over 2.5 million views at the time of writing, the AA also continues to play an important but ambivalent role within post-2021 Myanmar. The film centres on soldiers of different rank among the Arakan Army who tell of their cause—getting their Fatherland back from under Burmese oppression and the hardships they endure for it. Even though the soldiers either speak English or are subtitled in English, the film has had a large impact

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on young ethnically Rakhine people, according to Stein Tønnesson and colleagues.[58] While the film goes on to emphasise the alliances of the AA with other EAOs, and the Kachin Independence Army in particular, it starts with the image of two coins representing the long history of Arakan as an independent state. Here, the memory of an independent Arakan state is put front and centre. The memories of hardships are expressed with the hope that it may inspire a younger generation to join the fight for a free Arakan. Neither the young people who watch the film on YouTube nor those fighting in the AA are likely able to remember when Arakan was not on some level part of Burma back in the late nineteenth century or, before colonisation, the mid-eighteenth century. Rather than harking back to the days when Rakhine was part of the British Empire but central Burma was not, after the First and before the Third Anglo-Burmese War, or using images of the temples of Arakan's former capital Mrauk U, the coins, allegedly minted in Arakan in the eighth century CE, are used to remind the viewer of Arakan's historic existence and hence the existence of the people who have constituted and will constitute it. The process of transmission across generations is explicitly addressed when both a notion of a Fatherland and of a young generation who now fight for it are invoked, putting the postmemory generation in a direct line of succession. The film uses the coins to reify the kingdom of Arakan. No one who took part in the film has memories of the kingdom. Rather, it lets postmemory work to emphasise the kingdom's relevance for today. It constructs and affirms Ethnic Arakanese identity.

While *The Way of Rakhita* emphasises the uniqueness of Arakan identity, the way it uses the trope of generations is rather common in Myanmar. In the early days of the Spring Revolution triggered by the ongoing coup of 2021, the protestors emphasised that 'you [i.e. the military] messed with the wrong generation.'[59] Like the '88 Generation before[60], protestors both put themselves in a line of transmission of political opposition and distinguished themselves from previous generations, arguing that this time it will be different. History will not repeat itself. There is also a line of practice that portrays Aung San not just as an independence hero but as the progenitor of today's struggles with the subsequent generations as inheritors.[61] The AA and the protestors thus form two parallel but seemingly separate lines of transmission of resistance against the military, one Ethnic and armed, the other non-violent and political. However, as the *tatmadaw* continued to use lethal force against protesters, people started to form forces of their own, from small militia and People's Defence Forces (PDFs) to new armies to fight Myanmar's military alongside and with the support of older EAOs.

Among these intermingling conflicts, the AA has gained an additional role as part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance consisting of three EAOs which sided with the resistance. They have trained and supported smaller forces which cropped up. Several

58 Stein Tønnesson, Min Zaw Oo and Ne Lynn Aung, 'Pretending to be states: The use of Facebook by armed groups in Myanmar', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 52, 2 (2021): 200–25.

59 Elena Marlar and Justine Chambers, 'Our htamein, our flag, our victory: The role of young women in Myanmar's spring revolution', *Journal of Burma Studies* 27, 1 (2023): 65–99.

60 Ingrid Jordt, Tharaphi Than and Sue Ye Lin, *How Generation Z galvanised a revolutionary movement against Myanmar's 2021 Military Coup* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021), p. 18.

61 See Felix Girke, 'Das Bildnis des General Aung San', in *Dinge als Herausforderung*, ed. Hans Peter Hahn and Friedemann Neumann (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018), pp. 143–66.

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groups have tried to form lasting alliances across Ethnic lines to fight the *tatmadaw*. Yet the AA's role remains ambiguous and contested. In late May 2024, there were reports that the AA had been burning down houses of people identified as Rohingya who still live in Western Myanmar, particularly Rakhine State. Their actions seemed to mirror how the *tatmadaw* is reported to have acted in 2016/2017. As those events unfolded, Yasmin Ullah, a Rohingya activist in exile, posted a brief video on Instagram describing how the current situation exhausts her, even in exile and particularly because it parallels what happened in 2016/2017.[62] Those events are over and yet, they recur. It is as if history is repeating itself over and over again with different generations fighting the same battles. The memory returns to Yasmin Ullah in the guise of today's events, even though she has not witnessed them herself in an inversion of postmemory. Where postmemory has not been witnessed by those who receive and rework it, these memories seem to be something that every generation is going through. While Yasmin Ullah uses her social media profiles for her advocacy work, reaching out to people who do not share her identity and despite efforts amongst those resisting the *tatmadaw* to build alliances across entrenched divides, cooperation is tenuous and sharing postmemories across Ethnic lines is still rare.

While the state as a user may appear less prominent in the analysis of identity formation in the digital sphere above, it lurks on social media. Much local administration and economic power has been in the hands of Ethnic actors. Local news is thus directly impacted by Ethnic actors. Their economic capital could be used to promote social media content through platforms' advertising mechanisms. Yet it seems that the Myanmar military and other Bamar Buddhist have used those mechanisms the most.[63] If the state appears, it does so in the ethnically framed guise of Bamar Buddhists and a Bamar Buddhist framed articulation of national unity. Yet Ethnicity does not translate directly in digital spheres which, in their early days at least, emphasised coming together in spite of Ethnicity, rather than through it, as the Union of the Republic of Myanmar is narratively framed as a Union of Ethnicities. As Htaike Htaike Aung and Wai Myo Htut[64] describe it, the blogger scene was one uniting around shared online and offline places where people engaged in written conversations through blogging.

Conclusion: Making memories, making us

The two examples, my discussion with my research partners of a Facebook post by an Ethnic activist on the day of a rally to stand with Aung San Suu Kyi and *The Way of Rakhita*, have showcased two sides of postmemory: its ability to transmit across boundaries and the siloing of identities. Both have happened in tenuously connected digital spheres in Myanmar.

62 Yasmin Ullah, 'Yasmin Ullah (@yasminjahan_u)', Instagram, 21 May 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/C7OZ2ylBjWG/ (last accessed 26 July 2024).

63 I use the term hyperlocal news to describe news that have been shared in village or township based news groups on social media, as described for other places by David Harte et al., *Hyperlocal journalism: The decline of local newspapers and the rise of online community news* (London: Routledge 2019); concerning state media use, see Ronan Lee, 'Extreme speech in Myanmar: The role of state media in the rohingya forced migration crisis', *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019): 3203–24.

64 Htaike Htaike Aung and Wai Myo Htut, 'From blogging to digital rights: Telecommunications reform in Myanmar'.

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While few may actively remember the beginning of the various conflicts in Myanmar, making the transmission of postmemories a key aspect of the conflict, postmemories themselves become interwoven with experience and memories as the conflict continues. In a similar vein, the conflicts within the territory that is Myanmar often overlap. As digital postmemory crosses time and space, it can do both: delimiting who belongs to which side of a conflict and forming new ways of belonging by relating stories across identities. Postmemories can be postmemories *of* a particular delimited conflict analytically separated from other social contexts, or it can transcend Ethnic distinctions, as was the case with the postmemory of violence at the hands of the military regime Ama articulated. If the latter happens, focusing on the processes of transmission is helpful in tracing how new narratives are being articulated.

Benedict Anderson has noted the difference between remembering conflicts as brotherly wars or as wars between separate states.[65] What Ama does could be read as framing Ethnic conflicts as brotherly wars: Ultimately, they are all part of the same struggle against the *tatmadaw*, despite their differences. The AA could be read as operating more along the lines of understanding those conflicts as being between different nations. Yet, understanding what they both do as framing rather than as transmission of postmemories overemphasises the role of linear inheritors, which Ama does not lay claim to, and underexposes non-linear transmissions across time and space, like picking up a Facebook post, which the analytical term postmemory can capture.

Myanmar's Union has often been tenuous, which has been a challenge for both its military and civilian regimes. Defining who belongs and for what reason has sparked as much conflict as it has brought people together. Postmemory is central to articulating who belongs and how through providing small hooks that can bind people together into a new 'we'. Digital postmemory, in particular, allows connections across time and space, allowing people like Ama to find new ways of belonging.

65 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), pp. 201–2.

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