



THE MAKING OF FIRST MOVERS:

A micro-level study of high-risk dissent initiators in Burma 1988-2011

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of DPhil in Public Policy in the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford.

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Hilary 2020

Word Count: 78,994

Abstract

In the high-risk environment of authoritarian regimes, why do some people dissent while others do not? Specifically, what motivates some people to be the *first* to dissent when there is no safety in numbers, and no guarantee that others will join? The willingness of some individuals to seemingly disregard the high personal risk of dissent, evincing a readiness to bear costs, puzzles scholars in the social sciences.

This project draws on semi-structured interviews, archival evidence, and secondary sources from the United States, Burma, and the United Kingdom to investigate first movers in Burma and their attempts to initiate dissent that took place between 1988-2011. Based on my data, I developed a narrative-driven grounded theory on what motivates some individuals to become first movers – the initiators – of high-risk dissent against authoritarian regimes at high personal risk.

This project's overarching theoretical claim is that first movers are made, not born. My cumulative three-part theory is as follows: The individuals in my sample who became first movers of high-risk dissent had been experienced dissenters who (1) acquired informal political education and had undergone socialization among dissenters; (2) were radicalized by state repression into becoming “devoted dissenters”; and ultimately (3) viewed participation in high-risk dissent to be in their self-interest.

First movers are the human catalysts for every political event that has the potential to snowball into a consequential episode of dissent in an authoritarian country. This question is important because the kind of mass protests that upend authoritarian regimes cannot transpire without this subset of high-risk political dissidents who instigate dissent activity. This project will attempt to play a role in better understanding this small group of people whose human agency can lead to lasting changes to undesirable regimes.

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Acknowledgements

In authoritarian states, why do people dissent? And why do they dissent first? I have spent the last four years investigating this question in the context of Burma, and trying to understand how some people become initiators of high-risk dissent. This intellectual and personal adventure was made possible through the robust support of many people and institutions.

I will always be grateful to my advisor, Professor Maya Tudor, for so patiently guiding and shaping my research over the years, even when some of my ideas were a tad unconventional, to say the least. From all the drafts, outlines, and diagrams you reviewed to the many hours we spent discussing chapter ideas in your office, you have spent an extraordinary amount of time on my project and refining my research skills, and I will always be grateful. Dr. Pepper Culpepper, thank you for being such a strong champion for the entire doctoral program, and for encouraging us all along our research journeys. Moreover, thank you, Mary-Louise and your whole family for creating a home away from home for the doctoral students and always making us feel so welcomed.

Dean Ngairé Woods, thank you for always being so generous with your time and advice, especially at several major decision points during my time at Oxford. You always provided advice on both life and academic queries with frameworks and questions that I will take with me after Oxford.

One of the major gains that Oxford recently benefited from was the esteemed Professor Stathis Kalyvas moving to Oxford, and I was one of the students who was fortunate to benefit from his generous mentorship and advice on both academic and career subject matters. Thank you for being so receptive to my queries, stories, existential questions — all listed out on spreadsheets and graph paper — and for pushing me to constantly refine my methodological and theoretical ideas.

I have been extremely fortunate to know you, Dr. Jody LaPorte. Your enthusiasm for my subject, and all the conversations we had about how to frame my project were incredibly helpful. I will always cherish the many evenings we spent at Rickety Press chatting about democratization theories, protests in post-Soviet states, and sharing our life updates. I could not have been more fortunate to have been advised and supported by one of the world's leading scholars on Burma, Dr. Matthew Walton. Matt, your passion for your research and especially for raising young scholars of Burma studies is so clearly evident, and I am so fortunate to have been a recipient of your generous mentorship.

In addition to research and writing, I spent significant time reinvesting in my faith and thinking about how I could integrate my faith and vocation. I thank the Oxford Pastorate, Christians in Academia community and St. Ebbes Church community for providing such an inviting and enriching place for me to think about some of the questions that matter the most in life. Professor Tom Simpson, I thank you so much for always being willing to listen to me about my thoughts and questions about the intersections of faith, values, and academic endeavors, and for all the encouragement you provided over the years. Chaplain Mia Smith, I will always be grateful for your prayers, and for our conversations over lunches, formal dinners, and coffee in your sunny office at Hertford College. You are a source of strength for so many students at Oxford.

The actual research, multiple rounds of fieldwork, and writing was made possible by the generous funding support of the Blavatnik School, St. Cross College, Oxford-Burma Fund, the Blakely Foundation, and the Rotarian Mr. Peter Kim who, through his philanthropy, has actively supported and encouraged me in my academic endeavors.

My encouragement to press on through the daily challenges of a doctoral project came from brilliant and fun-loving colleagues with whom I shared an office filled with laughter, an ever-present flurry of post-it notes, cups of tea from the second floor, and discussions that often yielded insights for our respective research. Helen Baxendale, Zahra

Mansoor, Claire Cullen, Noam Angrist, and Yeajin Yoon — the most fun-loving group of erudite graduate students I could have ever asked for to work with — cheers to our many post-RDS and DRIPS sessions at Raouls! Helen, I spent more time with you than anyone else over the past four years and I thank you for making my time at Oxford filled with adventures and friendship. My “big brother” Jose Maria-Valenzuela, thank you for always being so kind-hearted and actively engaged with my weekly mini “epiphanies” as you talked through them with me over lunch in the BSG café and white boards across the first floor. Siobhan Shinn and Tess Doeffinger, thank you to my confidants from St. Cross College – I loved our weekly get-togethers as we casually discussed Siobhan’s latest archaeological dig in Sudan and Tess’ global water security concerns. To Danny Hatem, Fuadi Pitsuan, and Nina Teng – I am so grateful to have had HKS friends who were all able to reconnect at Oxford, and for those friends to be you, people who have so much generosity and compassion for others. To Richard Roewer and Shona Loong – from Yangon to Bangkok to Richard’s famous dinners at St. Antony’s College, what memorable times we had in all the adventures that our research took us. Thank you for never being shy of giving me ‘gentle’ feedback on my writing.

Since my project was largely based on intensive interviews, I made many research fieldwork trips to Burma between 2017-2019, and have many people to thank. First, thank you to every interviewee and your family who opened up your homes, monasteries, offices, teashops, bookstores, and your hearts to me so graciously. Your stories and interviews will live on beyond this dissertation, and they will serve as a foundation for better understanding first movers in Burma and beyond. I will cherish every conversation we had over bowls of homemade *mohinga*, plates of *lahpet thoke*, and curries. I especially want to thank U Myat Thu for welcoming my new ideas and teaching style in the courses that I taught at the Yangon School of Public Policy, and for introducing me to the vibrant and progressive YSPS community. I learned so much as a lecturer (both in class, and in our post-lecture dinners

at teashops on 51st street) from the students about their family dissent histories and the latest issues they were campaigning for. Thank you to all the NGOs and organizations for inviting me to speak to your students and cohorts, including Saw Thet Tun and Sky Age, Ma Wai Wai Nu and Yangon Youth Leadership Center, and Ko Aung Kyaw Moe and Center for Social Integrity.

I will always be indebted to my small army of translators, interpreters, and research assistants whose talent and intelligence were paralleled by their empathy and kindness. Momo (A Zun Mo), I still think you have more than 24 hours in a day – I continue to be amazed by how you are able to balance your university studies, teaching, working, learning so many languages, traveling, all the while enjoying life to the fullest! You were by far the most fashionable person I had the pleasure to work with. Than Toe Aung, Han Htoo Khant Paing, Zaw Myo Min, and Wai Phyo Maung: I learned so much from conducting interviews together, debriefing them, and from reviewing our field notes and impressions together. I want to remind you what many of the older interviewees told me, which was that they are so proud that Burma has such intelligent, ambitious and kind young men like you all. I learned so much about the cultural and historical intricacies of Burma's dissent landscape from our conversations, and I also have so many memories from all our meals and long taxi rides over the past several years. You guys will always be my Burmese brothers! Thank you to Raju Gautam, Nandar Ko, and Nyan Wah for your expert translations: my analysis would not have been possible without your tireless work.

The most meaningful, substantive and loving support continues to come from my mom and dad who have always encouraged my love of discovery, travel and intellectual pursuits. You always listen as I narrate my latest adventure, trust me when I tell you that it is safe to travel to countries in the midst of epidemics, cheer me on no matter how challenging times can be, and always, always remind me to use my resources and opportunities in pursuit of serving others in our world. Thank you.

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1. Introduction

On February 22, 2007, in the middle of the bustling Theingyi Market in downtown Yangon, Htin Kyaw started shouting condemnations of the authoritarian government's ineptitude that led to rising living costs, widespread poverty, and poor public education. Not long into his speech, he was arrested, brutally beaten, and eventually released in July of the same year. One month later, on August 25, 2007, he was one of the key organizers of what became known as the Saffron Revolution, the first mass protests since 1988. He was immediately arrested and sentenced to 80 years in prison.

Because of his repeat political dissent organizing since 1988, Htin Kyaw has been divorced twice and lost custody over his children. His brother has not spoken to him since 1988 out of fear of reprisal for affiliating with a political activist. Htin Kyaw has lost all of his businesses and his house. He has been imprisoned countless times. The grisly scars across his body and his toothless smile are evidence of the torture he has endured as a consequence of his high-risk dissent. What could explain Htin Kyaw's willingness to risk his family, livelihood, and even his own life to dissent? And why would he do this alone?

In the high-risk environment of authoritarian regimes, why do some people dissent while others do not? Specifically, what motivates some people to be the *first* to dissent when there is no safety in numbers, and no guarantee that others will join? The willingness of some individuals to seemingly disregard the high personal risk of dissent, evincing a readiness to bear costs, puzzles scholars in the social sciences.

This thesis asks, in situations when public dissent has not yet scaled into the mass mobilization that provides safety in numbers, why do some individuals attempt to initiate dissent against authoritarian regimes at high personal risk? To capture a highly risky environment for dissidents, I turned to the military dictatorship era of Burma, a regime that instituted widespread brutal methods to suppress dissent. To understand dissidents who

knowingly engaged in highly risky activities, I studied first movers, the *initiators*, of high-risk dissent.

This project is situated in the literature that attempts to better understand highly risky political dissent at the micro-level. While there is compelling research on the micro-dynamics and micro-mobilization of collective action, and the causal mechanisms that partially explain why some individuals engage in high-risk political dissent, there is limited understanding of first movers of high-risk political dissent.

Through inductive analysis, I developed a narrative-driven theory that attempts to explain why some individuals became first movers of high-risk dissent when they were not assured any guarantee that others would join them and could not benefit from safety in numbers. I discovered through my fieldwork and analysis that first movers are *made*, not born.

My cumulative three-part theory is as follows: The individuals in my sample who had become first movers of high-risk dissent had been experienced dissenters who (1) acquired informal political education and had undergone socialization among dissenters; (2) were radicalized by state repression into becoming “devoted dissenters”; and eventually (3) viewed participation in high-risk dissent to be in their self-interest.

There are three reasons why this project is significant. This research project’s *first* contribution is to expand the scholarly literature on initial stages of dissent by studying first movers. Unlike the earlier and limited scholarship on this topic, this study is the first to undertake analysis of first mover dynamics in a single country across multiple dissent events and over many years. A micro-dynamics approach to explaining macro-political events like protests is important because, “the mechanisms through which social causation is mediated turn on the structured circumstances of choice of intentional agents and nothing else” (Little 1998, p. 203). This research aspires to contribute to the literature by identifying the

archetypes of first movers, their motivations, and the causal mechanisms that underpin their risk-insensitive behaviors and their potentially lasting impact on authoritarian regimes.

This project's *second* contribution is to bring a richer understanding of first movers in Burma. Currently transitioning into a democracy, this former military dictatorship and its rich history of dissent is understudied. By applying qualitative research methods to analyze first movers in Burma, I hoped to uncover some of the dynamism, energy and motivations of citizens who have been living in a closed dictatorship since 1962. Moreover, this project would create an agenda for future research on Burma's dissent history based on my collection of observable dissent events. While they were extraordinary moments of mass demonstrations in Burma's history, the 1988 Uprising and 2007 'Saffron Revolution' are not the only protests that warrant scholarly and mainstream attention. This project would contribute by peeling back the layers of the initial stages of dissent and hopes to be the springboard for further research on Burma's vibrant history of political dissent against military dictatorship.

Third, this research is significant from a *policy* perspective because first movers must be present to catalyze any act of dissent that may ultimately result in regime liberalization or another type of change. In other words, our hopes for a freer, more democratic world reside in large part with the small groups of individuals who take extraordinary risks to catalyze the dissent events that sometimes cascade into consequential movements. In the absence of first movers, the world would be devoid of all dissent activities, a subset of which escalate to mass demonstrations that upend undesirable regimes or incrementally transform segments of governments. A richer understanding of first movers will contribute to a stronger grasp of the initial stages of dissent and revolutions, and perhaps enable policymakers to embolden certain dissent acts by better identifying and supporting first movers.

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to a stronger comprehension of a critical, yet understudied, category of individuals who are the human catalysts for every political event that has the potential to snowball into a consequential episode in an authoritarian country. Even though not all sparks of dissent will light a proverbial fire, understanding the micro conditions under which such sparks are likely to arise is an important area of scholarly inquiry. This question is important because the kind of mass protests that upend authoritarian regimes cannot happen without this subset of high-risk political dissidents who instigate dissent.

The dissertation will endeavor to explain not *how*, but *why* first movers try to mobilize dissent. Not all first movers' actions lead to dissent escalation. In fact, most acts of dissent fail to result in immediate or permanent changes to a political system. However, in some cases, ordinary men and women decided to make the first moves to challenge their authoritarian system and their first moves have changed the course of human history. This project will attempt to play a role in better understanding this small group of people whose human agency can lead to lasting changes to undesirable regimes.

2. Background of Burma's dissent history

The purpose of this primer on Burma's modern political and dissent history is to provide context for this project's country case study. Recognizing that the history of Myanmar dates back to the 9th century, this brief backgrounder will provide broad strokes of political eras, and highlight select events to contextualize the project's interviews. Burma expert Steinberg (2013, p. 1) wrote that "Burma is, after North Korea, probably the most obscure and obscured state in the contemporary world." While this dissertation is not a case study on Burma as a *country*, but rather the *first movers* in Burma, it is important to provide a short historical context of the country that the first movers in this study are from.

2.1. Burma's pre-colonial era

The Pagan Kingdom was established in the early 11th century. Under the reign of one of the most prominent Pagan monarchs King Anawrahta, Theravada Buddhism and the Burman language and culture rose to dominance, which persisted over the next several centuries. The Pagan Kingdom and the surrounding territories comprised warring tribal lands. Due to repeat invasions by the Mongols, the Pagan Kingdom fell and the territory was reunified by the Taungoo Dynasty in the 16th century. After a series of internal and external territorial conflicts, the Konbaung Dynasty ruled much of what is now modern Burma. Threatened by the increasing influence of the French colonial powers in the Indochina region, the British Empire elevated their military campaigns to take over this region.

2.2. Burma's colonial era: 1824-1948

After each of the three Anglo-Burmese Wars, (1824-1826; 1852-1853; 1885), the British had annexed parts of Burma. After the third war, the Buddhist monarchy fell and the region of what is now present-day Myanmar was formally annexed by Britain on January 1, 1886. This meant the end of the Konbaung Dynasty, with the exile of King Thibaw and his family. Burma was incorporated as a province of British India between 1886-1937.

Rangoon was made the capital city of British Burma, and served as an important port city where trade, education, and culture flourished.

The Burmese province of British India — a region that never had a unified identity prior to this period — comprised over a hundred ethno-linguistic groups and shared very few commonalities. However, some groups of people started to unify in their resentment towards the Indian civil servants and British colonial rulers. Much of the acrimony stemmed from the blatant British condescension of Burmese culture.

Beginning in the 1920s, “anticolonial sentiment and agitation did begin to shift more explicitly from a Buddhist orientation to a nationalist one” (Walton 2016, p. 24). The first recorded protests led by university students took place in 1920, during which Rangoon University students protested the University Act, which they believed would perpetuate colonial rule.¹ Notably, the Buddhist monk U Wisara died in 1929 after a 166-day hunger strike in prison while protesting the colonial rule that forbade him from wearing Buddhist robes while a prisoner. He became known as the first martyr for the nationalist movement. He helped set a precedent for Buddhist monks to lead political protests against the British in support of the Burmese independence movement.

The ‘Thakin’ movement arose in the 1930s, led by intellectuals and students who started to call themselves and each other *Thakin* or ‘master’ in Burmese, a term that Burmese used exclusively to refer to their British colonizers. This movement was rooted in a Burmese desire to claim self-ownership by viewing themselves as masters of their own lives even if they could not expel their colonizers. The Dobama Asiayona (We Burmans Associations), also known as the Thakins, was founded in 1933, and played a significant role in stirring political consciousness and discussions of self-rule in Burma. They promoted a pro-

¹ For more details on the university student-led protests in the 1920s, see (Aye Kyaw 1993).

Burmese sentiment, and had a rallying cry around Burmese language and culture, at times inciting anti-Muslim riots.

There continued to be waves of protests led by university students against the British, and Burmese nationalist authors and poets who advocated for the autonomy of Burmese people. The British security forces brutally cracked down on any challenges to their rule, and despite widespread grievances against the colonial forces, there were little sustained efforts to upend British rule.

In 1937, Burma became a separately administered colony from British India. The first Prime Minister of Burma, Ba Maw, became an outspoken supporter of Burmese self-rule once out of office and was eventually arrested for sedition. It was during this time when Aung San, a young man in his twenties, gained popularity as he expertly maneuvered power politics to train a small group of men in Japan with the goal of expelling the British forces. These few dozen troops, who would be memorialized as the Thirty Comrades, grew to become the Burmese Independence Army. The Japanese, as part of the Axis Powers during World War II, were willing to support this colony of their British enemies with the intention to occupy Burma after the expulsion of the British.

Many Burmese joined Aung San's Burmese Independence Army that, with the help of the Japanese, fought the British, whereas many ethnic minorities fought with the British Burmese Army. The Burmese Independence Army and General Aung San successfully expelled the British with the support of Japan. To their dismay, Japan refused to leave Burma and began to re-colonize Burma. General Aung San was then able to re-enlist the support of the British to eject the Japanese from Burma.

After the end of World War II, Aung San was widely regarded as the founder of independent modern Burma, the "George Washington of modern Burma." He was credited with negotiating the Panglong Agreement with representatives from three of the largest minority groups (Chin, Shan and Kachin) in pursuit of creating an independent Burma as a

unified state.² In 1947, Aung San became the Deputy Chairman of the Executive Council of Myanmar, a transitional government. During a cabinet meeting on July 19, 1947, political rivals assassinated Aung San, seven other leaders in his government, and a bodyguard.³

Under the Burma Independent Act of 1947, Burma gained full independence from Britain on January 4, 1948.

2.3. Burma's independent era: 1948-1962

The new country, named Union of Burma, was led by President Sao Shwe Thaik and Prime Minister U Nu. Legislative and political institutions were rebuilt during this independent period for Burma between 1948-1962. The main political alliance during this period was the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). Burma did not become a British commonwealth member, a bicameral parliament was formed, and multi-party elections were held every few years until 1960. In 1961, U Thant, who was then Burma's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, was elected the Secretary-General of the United Nations. With the split of the AFPFL, and when the non-Burman ethnic groups started pointing to sections of the Panglong Agreement that would have allowed them to secede after ten years, the military staged a coup d'état on March 2, 1962 and the country came under military rule.

2.4. Burma's military rule era: 1962-2011

On March 2, 1962, General Ne Win and the military staged a coup d'état, forcing the country to be under military rule until 2011. Between 1962 and 1974, Burma was ruled by the Revolutionary Council, headed by Ne Win, who established one-party rule under the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). The BSPP sought to implement the Burmese

² Other prominent ethnic groups, including the Karen and Rohingya, did not participate in the Panglong Conference that resulted in the 1947 Panglong Agreement. There are conflicting versions of this consequential conference and agreement, as well as its legacy. For more on this, see (Walton 2008).

³ Known as Martyrs' Day, July 19 is a national holiday to commemorate the assassination of Aung San and his pre-independent interim government's cabinet.

Way to Socialism, an ideology “that combined Marxist dialectical reasoning with Buddhist moral teachings” (Walton 2016, p. 30). In 1964, all remaining newspapers were shut down, and the ones that reopened were nationalized and allowed “freedom of expression only within the accepted limits of the Burmese Way to Socialism” (Allot 1981, p. 19). The nation became one of the world’s most isolated, unfree nations.

In 1974, the government adopted a new constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. The country continued to descend into extreme poverty and low levels of human development. In December 1987, Burma was labeled as one of the world’s least developed countries by the United Nations, during which the country’s GDP per capita was well under \$200 per year in this resource-rich country (United Nations’ Economic & Social Council 1987).

During Ne Win’s rule, there were intermittent protests, mostly led by university students, calling for democracy and more rights for civilians. On July 7, 1962, the new military government cracked down on protests and dynamited the student union building at Rangoon University, the nation’s most prominent university with a rich history of student activism since its founding in 1920. According to eyewitnesses, the military killed over a hundred students and arrested over 3,000 students. The military claimed that only fifteen students were killed (Lintner 1990a).

The violence exhibited by the government against demonstrating students on that day as well as dynamiting the symbol of anti-colonial nationalism became one of the several rallying cries for subsequent demonstrations and movements.

After the 1962 student union massacre shocked Burmese society into silence, the government set to work on eliminating protests from Burmese society, and particularly from the cities. Most activists evaded detection by taking great care and few risks. Some students withdrew into an underground existence, and in 1964 joined BCP (Burma Communist Party) cadres in their countryside bases. Authorities made little effort to stop the student exodus and seemed content to police urban territory and quash the threat of new mass protests. The regime was then also busy eliminating structures and institutions that supported student protests (at first) and broader dissent thereafter. Throughout, the shock of the campus murders underscored the deadly consequences of renewed protest or open dissent. (Boudreau 2004, p. 9)

In December 1974, the protests and military crackdown that ensued from the euphemistically named “U Thant disturbances” comprised a significant turning point in modern Burma’s history of dissent. U Thant was a beacon of liberal values and democracy, which made him a natural adversary of the military. Upon learning that Ne Win’s government would not hold a proper state funeral for U Thant who had passed away, students and monks seized the remains of the deceased UN Secretary-General that were flown to Burma from New York.⁴

Sporadic protests and periods of unrest flared up throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, but they were always met with overwhelming force by the military government. In addition to contentious political activity in Rangoon and other major cities, fighting took place between the military and various ethnic armed groups, especially around border areas near Thailand.

On September 5, 1987, the government demonetized the 25, 35, and 75 kyat bank notes without notice nor much compensation, which wiped out approximately 70-80% of the nation’s money in circulation.⁵ A few weeks after the 1987 devaluation, kyat notes in the denominations of 45 and 90 were released. It is widely speculated that Ne Win’s well-known superstitions—in this case, his affinity for the lucky number 9—largely motivated the move ($4+5=9$). “Abstruse astrological and numerical calculations (all involving the number nine or numbers adding up to nine) were involved, designed to enable Ne Win (for whom the number nine is said to be lucky) to live to be 90 years old. Whether or not this is accurate, it is significant that this is widely believed, indicating both the continuing aura

⁴ For more details on the U Thant Funeral crises and protests, see (Selth 1989).

⁵ This was not the first time the government demonetized bank notes without warning nor much compensation. The Demonetization Act of 1964 declared that all Burmese kyat notes of denominations of 50 and 100 ceased to be legal tender overnight. In 1985, the government devalued the 20, 50, 100-kyat notes, and released the 25, 35, and 75-kyat notes.

around Ne Win's person and the seemingly vast capacity for the personalization of power in Burmese society" (Steinberg 1991, p. 22).

The majority of the citizens lost their cash savings in this cash-based society, as a banking system was not available to citizens. This demonetization policy threw the nation into a panic and demonstrations broke out across the country. Eyewitness accounts tell of frustrated students throwing rocks at buses they could no longer afford to ride.⁶ Military forces were ordered to suppress any protests, temporarily shut down universities, and successfully ended most of the protest activity. The aggrieved population became even more impoverished than before, resorting to desperate measures to survive.⁷ To add insult to injury, civilians continued to learn of the extremely decadent lifestyles that military and political elite families enjoyed.

In addition to the civilian-military tensions, there were cleavages between university students and local residents, what the British would refer to as the town-and-gown divide. On March 12, 1988 at a teashop in Rangoon, a small argument between a few students from the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) and local students ensued over what song to play on the jukebox. The argument escalated into a brawl, and the riot police, *lon btein*, quickly arrived on the scene. They broke up the fight, killing an engineering university student named Ko Phone Maw in the process. One other university student, Ko So Naing, later died at the hospital from police-inflicted wounds. Whereas two university students from non-military families died, a male student who was the son of a senior ranking military official and was also part of the brawl was let off lightly.⁸ In the coming days, activists from

⁶ Eighteen interviewees referenced this, some calling it "the 1987 Currency Affair." See (Crossette 1987).

⁷ The World Bank estimates Burma's GDP per capita in 2000 at \$193. While I could not find economic data from 1980s, it could be assumed that the GDP per capita was substantially lower in the 1980s than in 2000. For example, a New York Times article from 1987 gathers that Burma's GNP/capital was estimated to be \$180 (Crossette 1987).

⁸ Annual commemoration events of this fateful evening continue to present day. See (Kyaw Phyo Tha 2018). To honor the deaths of Ko Phone Maw and Ko Soe Naing, political activists in 2012 nominated March 13, the day the students were shot, as Myanmar Human Rights Day.

RIT distributed leaflets around Rangoon and other university campuses to inform fellow students of what had happened. “The first steps towards organized dissent had been taken” (Lintner 1990a, p. 13).

Rogers, a Burma watcher and activist wrote, “[Phone Maw’s] fellow students were outraged. The fuse had been lit” (Rogers 2012, p. 20). The unjust death of Ko Phone Maw and the release of the military officer’s son was the trigger that Burma was waiting for. This event would catalyze a sequence of events that would eventually lead to the famous 8888 Uprising in August 1988.

In the context of the Polish Revolution, Timothy Garton Ash (1991, p. 15) wrote that “to the shipyard workers [in Gdansk], . . . the Poles murdered by the Poles . . . became *the symbol for all their accumulated grievances* . . . the duty to honour the martyrs’ memory became a *driving force*, almost an obsession” [*emphasis added*]. In the Burmese context, Phone Maw’s death served as this ‘symbol for all their accumulated grievances’ and the duty to honor his unjust death also became a near obsessive “driving force” for protesters throughout 1988 and afterwards.

News of Ko Phone Maw’s death spread like wildfire across Rangoon and by the next day, there were demonstrations and protests led by university students demanding the truth from the authorities. The police’s weak attempt to cover up the story only further enraged the aggrieved population. Days later, protesting students were massacred on the White Bridge, which came to be known as the Red Bridge Incident, as the white bridge was covered in students’ blood. Group 41 referred to the 41 students who suffocated to death inside a police van that was on its way to prison. Students were shot, tortured, beaten to death and drowned, and those who survived the street protests were then taken to the infamous Insein prison. Rumors of female students having been raped added to the escalating rage among the public. All schools were closed indefinitely, and a dusk-to-dawn curfew was implemented.

Three months later, a series of protests and brutal crackdowns that became known as the June Affair contributed to the public's collective anger. "Everybody already felt dissent and resentment, and these erupted like a volcano," according to Khin Ohmar, one of the female organizers of the protests throughout the June Affair and after (Rogers 2012, p. 22).⁹

In a surprise move, on July 23, 1988, Ne Win resigned as chairman and member of the BSPP, pointing to his "indirect responsibility for the March and June affairs" and due to his "advanced age." In his speech to the BSPP Extraordinary Congress that was broadcast on state television and radio, he reminded the Burmese people that "in continuing to maintain control, I want the entire nation, the people, to know that if in the future there are mob disturbances, if the army shoots, it hits – there is no firing into the air to scare" (Sein Win 1988, para. 16).

On August 8, 1988, at 8:08AM, there was a nation-wide strike where students, laborers and government employees walked out of their offices and classrooms to march on the streets, seeking substantive political and economic reforms, and for more freedoms. It was during these daily mass demonstrations in August 1988 that Aung San Suu Kyi – the Oxford-educated daughter of the beloved General Aung San – became a national leader. While she was visiting her ill mother in the Rangoon hospital from Oxford University, the protests erupted. Senior academics and supporters of her father's legacy implored her to lead the demonstrators. On August 26, 1988, she addressed over half a million Burmese citizens at the nation's most cherished pagoda, the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon. With her father's facial features and natural charisma, she rose to prominence overnight in her nation desperate for change, hope, and a democratic leader. She also became the instant enemy of the military regime.

⁹ For more detailed accounts of the protests between March 13, 1988 through the end of the 8888 Uprising, see (Lintner 1990a).

As the protests continued, security forces killed thousands of demonstrators and imprisoned many more. General Saw Maung staged a coup d'état and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) on September 19, 1988. The SLORC implemented even more authoritarian measures. The nation was put under martial law and the repressive costs for demonstrating against the government were doubly reinforced by the state. Horror stories of torture during interrogation sessions of protestors swirled throughout the country, and these stories rang true as the security forces of SLORC unremorsefully killed demonstrators on the streets. Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest in July 1989. Between 1989-2011, she spent fifteen years under house arrest.

In attempt to loosen some pressure, the SLORC held “free” elections for the first time in thirty years in May 1990. Over 200 political parties ran, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party of Aung San Suu Kyi. The NLD won 392 out of 492 seats, surprising themselves, the nation, and the military. The military, however, refused to cede power and jailed most of the prominent politicians who ran for office. SLORC ruled the nation until 1997 at which point they changed their name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the official name of the military government. The SPDC was dissolved in 2011, when the military government began a series of political and economic reforms to incrementally liberalize the country.

There were limited protests and other forms of dissent between 1988-2011 (the period that this project covers). Memorials of political leaders and historical figures, commemorations of significant historical events, and symbolic birthday celebrations of imprisoned activists took place often, frequently inviting the military's violent response.

There were dissent activities underpinned by demands for democracy and series of liberal reforms. There were protests with specific demands such as allowing Aung San Suu Kyi to be allowed to leave house arrest to receive her 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. There were also protests by various ethnic groups calling for more rights for their ethno-linguistic

religious groups, as well as their rights to secede from the union. Appendices G and H contain the lists of dissent events and activities that my interviews described.

In 2003, General Khin Nyunt introduced the seven-step “Roadmap to Discipline-Flourishing Democracy,” after which economic pressures accumulated, setting the stage for the 2007 Saffron protests, organized in part by veterans of previous student movements, including the 88 Generation Students Group.¹⁰ Hundreds of thousands marched throughout the country led by chanting monks. This nation-wide demonstration was met with the repressive echoes of the 1988 crackdowns. Other than the 8888 Uprising, the 2007 Saffron protests comprised the largest mass demonstrations that unfolded in Burma to date. At least 227 distinct protests were staged between August – October of 2007 in over sixty-six towns throughout the country. There were protests in each of the seven states and seven divisions (National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, Human Rights Documentation Unit 2008).

In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit the southern coast, leaving over 100,000 people dead and at least 2.5 million people displaced. The regime initially refused offers of international aid totaling over \$40 million and intentionally withheld disaster relief and humanitarian aid from specific segments of the population. There are numerous accounts of the little aid that was permitted to enter Burma having been diverted for the regime’s gain. Furthermore, the regime is believed to have criminalized citizens helping victims of the cyclone because the cyclone hit areas that were inhabited by ethnic minorities who the regime had long discriminated against.

¹⁰ In this dissertation, I will refer to the protests that took place across Burma in late August and September of 2007 as the ‘2007 Saffron protests.’ These protests led to what the mainstream media labeled the ‘2007 Saffron Revolution’ because of the “sea of dark maroon robes creat[ed] the lasting image [by] the color commonly associated with monks’ robes in the country” (Walton 2016, p. 1). However, academics generally do not consider these mass demonstrations to have constituted a revolution because they did not lead to any substantive changes in Burma. I will refer to these protests as the Saffron Revolution only when quoting interviewees and other sources.

The “junta saw the storm as doing their dirty work for them, eliminating a proportion of an ethnic group which they had been trying to eliminate militarily for years . . . a Tatmadaw officer was overheard, a few weeks after the cyclone, saying ‘there are a lot of bullets for the Karen people in eastern Burma, but Cyclone Nargis has already cleansed Karens in the Delta’” (Rogers 2012, p. 196). The intentional absence of state-led responses enraged activists and non-political people alike, sparking widespread civic activity across the country. “Much of Myanmar’s political activism of the last decade has come from the networks that were built or strengthened during the public response to this disaster” (Walton 2016, p. 32).

It was during this crisis when the regime insisted on holding a referendum on a new constitution on May 10, 2008. The SPDC announced that 93.83% of the voters favored the new constitution, which permitted the Tatmadaw (Myanmar’s Armed Forces) to retain significant control over the government. For example, a quarter of the seats in Parliament are reserved for active military officers, and this does not include party members from the present-day Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), a military-backed political party. Furthermore, the 2008 constitution reserves the heads of the ministries of border affairs, defense, and home for active military officers.

In November 2010, the country held elections that were widely deemed unfree. A new quasi-civilian-led government came into power in March 2011, led by former General Thein Sein, who surprisingly began to implement new political and economic reforms. Aung San Suu Kyi was released right after the 2010 elections, along with many other political prisoners.

Burma continues to be comprised of an extremely diverse combination of ethno-linguistic and religious groups. The Myanmar government recognizes 135 ethnic groups and many religions in addition to Buddhism. For the first time since 1983, the Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Population conducted a national census in 2014. The collected

data from both censuses contain widely contested and incomplete information. The government claims that the Burman Buddhists comprise the vast majority of the country. As of December 2019, the ethnic data from the 2014 census has not been released (Myanmar Government. Department of Population, Ministry of Immigration and Population 2016).

It is a stunning revelation that despite the high risks and costs involved with dissent under the military regime of Burma, there were so many overt dissent events and activities. Each one of those dissent events were sparked by first movers, of which forty-eight of them were investigated in this dissertation research.

2.5. Burma's politically repressive and information-poor environment

This section contours Burma's politically repressive and information-poor environment between 1988-2011 to contextualize this thesis' subsequent content.

The 'rice basket' of Asia devolved into the richest 'basket case' in the region due to the failed policies of the military-imposed "Burmese Way to Socialism" (Aung-Thwin & Myint-U 1992; Fenichel & Khan 1981). After the 1962 military coup led by General Ne Win, the reclusive and impoverished society was structured in a way that cultivated information- and media-poor environments. In addition to their notoriously low levels of investment in education, Burma had some of the most repressive media censorship laws in the world, ranking 174th out of 178 on Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index in 2010 (Wiles 2016).¹¹ Thus, accessing unauthorized information was both illegal and difficult for the average citizen. Severe restrictions on civil and political rights consistently landed

¹¹ According to available World Bank data, Burma invested 2-2.5% of its GDP in education throughout the 1970s. In 2011, the figure dipped to 0.78%. In 2017, the figure rose to 2.16%. The main instrument of BSPP's ability to control the media was the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Law, which enabled censorship boards to monitor every aspect of the written word (song lyrics, film, video scripts newspapers, books). These controlled text, language, subjects and even numbers in all publications. Under BSPP, all books were expected to foster Burmese culture and socialism. After the 8888 Uprising, this act was amended by substantially raising fines for newspapers that broke any publication regulations. Between 2002-2010, Burma remained on Freedom House's top ten least free countries regarding press freedom (Smith 1991b).

the country a Freedom House Index Score of 7, where 1 = most free, and 7= least free. In our interview, Ko Jimmy described the repressiveness of speech restrictions instituted by the military junta: “The BSPP government brutally suppressed the people. They strictly controlled the country. Nobody dared to say bad news of the government and the country. Everybody must say only good news. The country was not for human beings. It was just for animals.”

Challenges to daily life induced by a failed nationalized economy were compounded by fragile and corrupt institutions as well as the lack of access to opportunities for citizens who were not constituents of the military and political elite (McGowan 1993; Tin Maung Maung Than 2014).¹²

The style and substance of Burmese formal education was notoriously rigid during the military era. Official political education was centered on “the Burmese Way to Socialism,” and touted the government’s official policies. Curricula were based on rote memorization, schools forbade debate nor questioning of teachers, and suppressed critical thinking. Specifically, political science was forbidden, which is why universities to this day have departments of international relations, rather than political science.¹³ Furthermore, the government repeatedly closed high schools and universities for months, and even years, at a time to prevent students from gathering for protests. But in order to “maintain the illusion of a successful system, the government continued to pass large numbers of students, even though their base of knowledge was shrinking precipitately” (Packer 2008, para. 8). In our interview, D Nyein Lynn expressed the common sentiment, that “[e]ven if we were final

¹² According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, Myanmar ranked one of the most corrupt nations in the world since it was able to survey and add the country to their index. To provide a snapshot, in 2003 and 2004, they were the most corrupt, only after Haiti, Nigeria, and Bangladesh. In 2005, Myanmar was the most corrupt, only after was Turkmenistan, Bangladesh, and Chad (Transparency International 2005).

¹³ Yangon School of Political Science, an alternative school founded in 2011 by former political prisoners, is the first organization that openly teaches political science in Burma.

[year] students at university, we were not really educated, as the education system under dictatorship was very bad in Myanmar.”

University degrees did not guarantee social mobility, stability, nor employment for graduates. In our interview, Swe Win described how young people idly spent most days at teashops:

We were always chitchatting because you have no real education, you have no social life, you have no job. So, it means that people will spend a lot of time in roadside cafes talking for endless hours just over green tea. Normally, until the country opened in 2010, green tea is always free anywhere. . . . We had nothing to lose. We can't even go out of the country easily. We couldn't get a passport in those days. So, what? It means that the younger people would spend hours on a daily basis in those cafes.

Since most people lived with or near their families, they grew up knowing their neighbors in their townships throughout their lives. Interviewees explained how they developed familial ties with their neighbors, often sharing food and gifts with each other, and keeping a watchful eye out for neighbors' children as if they were their own. Min Zeya's comment about how he would often “wander around [the village], visit my neighbors, eat at their homes, and have conversations with them,” was a frequently expressed sentiment among my interviewees about their interactions with their respective neighbors.

It's a very conservative and old-fashioned society. You don't go anywhere, you don't know too many people, you were always in your own community or circle. So, people are not knowledgeable. For example, 20 is not too young, but in those days, we felt so young. You don't have the knowledge about the world, about your own society. . . . But, from the radio or from your own small life, you get a sense of how this country is being ruled. But, for normal social knowledge, nothing. No knowledge. (Swe Win)

Consequently, most people lived in insular environments, exposed to few people outside their hometowns, much less foreigners. It was in this information-poor environment, engendered by government's severe restrictions on speech, and traditional configurations of families, in which a small, segment of the population found informal political education to be “eye-opening,” “addicting,” and “thrilling.”¹⁴ It was relevant to their lives and it introduced them to histories unknown to them. Moreover, it connected

¹⁴ Interviews with Nay Chi and Swe Win.

them with politically knowledgeable and active people who were less bound to traditional social customs and rigid social hierarchies in contrast to average citizens. The dynamics of interacting with “enlightened” people were refreshingly different.¹⁵

¹⁵ Interviews including those with Swe Win, U Nay Min, Min Zeya, and Aung Thein often described people who had political and social awareness as “enlightened.”

3. Research design and methodology

My research question was, *what factors motivate individuals to become first movers of dissent in an authoritarian country?* What are the characteristics and pathways that differentiate this extremely risk-tolerant subset of individuals from their peers? This project adopted a case study research design within one country to generate a theory on why some individuals become first movers of dissent. The core unit of analysis is the individual, defined in this project as the ‘micro-level.’ The dependent variable, which is a binary variable in this thesis, is whether or not an individual is a first mover of high-risk dissent. This research question aims to identify and distil the motivating factors – the independent variables – that push some individuals to become first movers. In this section, I discuss the methodology, data collection strategies, case selection, scope conditions, ethics, and researcher positionality for this study.

3.1. Inductive theory-building, grounded theory

Given the scant literature on first movers of high-risk dissent, I turned to inductive theory-building to guide my data collection, analysis, and theory generation. First developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, grounded theory is “a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants (Creswell 2013, p. 83). An iterative process of data collection and analysis guided the development of this project’s theory. I regularly revised my interview guides throughout my rounds of fieldwork to reflect what I found to be important in interviews. I constructed my theory with the themes and common experiences that emerged throughout my data collection and analysis.

As a researcher, I take a social constructivist approach, where I seek to understand the world in which I live.

Constructivist researchers often address the ‘processes’ of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they ‘position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their

interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences. Thus, the researchers make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background. The researcher's intent, then, is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world. (Creswell 2013, p. 25)

As I continued to develop subjective meanings of my experiences, I leaned heavily on the experiences lived by my interviewees and the motivations and meanings they attach to their experiences. This was why my interviews were semi-structured, leaving sufficient time and space for the interviewees to share stories, memories, and experiences that were not prompted.

3.2. Case study approach

There are three general techniques for investigating causal relationships in the social sciences: experimental designs, statistical methods and case study approaches (King, Keohane & Verba 1994). An experimental design was unfeasible for my research puzzle because I investigated a question that required unpacking motives, events, and actions that took place in the past. Quite simply, the events of interest could not have been 're-run' in controlled conditions. A statistical method was also ill-suited for my research project because the data I needed to collect was qualitative in nature. Whereas a statistical approach would allow me to understand how a change in X leads to a correlative change in Y, I was interested in investigating the intervening causal processes between X and Y, which called for a qualitative case-study methodology. Only a case study approach could provide the fine-grained analysis of motivations and close attention to causal processes that the research project required.

There are several strengths to taking the case study approach for my project. *First*, my project was in the realm of theory generation because so little was known about first movers. In other words, the project aimed for theory-building rather than theory-testing in the scant political science literature on first movers. I generated a theory by "inductively identify(ng) new variables" of specific motivating factors (George & Bennett 2005, p. 75). To methodically and structurally achieve this research goal, my research design was a

heuristic case study (Eckstein 2000, p. 137), also known as a hypothesis-generating case study, which has the “objective to develop theoretical generalizations in areas where no theory exists yet” (Lijphart 1971, p. 682). For the purposes of theory generation, an intensive case study is the most appropriate approach (Lieberman 2005).

Second, case studies have “powerful advantages in the heuristic identification of new variables and hypotheses through the study of deviant or outlier cases and in the course of field work” (George & Bennett 2005, p. 20). Through observations and data collection, case studies enable a researcher to discover causally relevant variables not previously considered. “Inductive field research methods typically lie behind every newly identified variable,” which aptly described my research plan (George & Bennett 2005, p. 20). I unearthed new variables (specific motivating events, pathways, theorized experiences) through inductive field research.

Third, case studies “examine the operation of causal mechanisms in individual cases in detail,” which was instrumental to my research puzzle (George & Bennett 2005, p. 21). There is no agreement on the definition of causal mechanism. But for this project, I turned to George and Bennett’s definition because it is the most nuanced description that gave me the flexibility to explore, observe, and eventually analyze processes leading up to individuals initiating dissent. Their definition for causal mechanism is:

Ultimately the unobservable physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities operate, but only in specific contexts or conditions, to transfer energy, information, or matter to other entities. In so doing, the causal agent changes the affected entity’s characteristics, capacities, or propensities in ways that persist until subsequent causal mechanisms act upon it. If we can measure changes in the entity being acted upon after the intervention of the causal mechanism and in temporal or spatial isolation from other mechanisms, then the causal mechanisms may be said to have generated the observed change in this entity. (George & Bennet 2005, p. 137)

Fourth, the case study approach—defined by George and Bennett (2005, p. 5) as “the detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events”—structurally and systematically allowed me to generate a theory that may travel to cases beyond Burma.

3.3. Unit of analysis: individual

I selected a micro-level study because this approach allowed me to concentrate on individuals, and the interactions among individuals and small groups. McAdam (1988, p.154) wrote that “movements may occur in broad macro context, but their actual development clearly depends on a series of more specific dynamics at the micro level.” Understanding the people who initiate dissent events is critical to better understanding the early stages of risky collective action.

There has been limited work on first movers, not because the question is insignificant, but rather because traditional political science research designs and methodologies proved challenging to rigorously investigate first movers at the micro-level. Scott (1992, p. 217) acknowledged the methodological challenges in studying this important subset of individuals: “Who will be the first to make an open declaration of the hidden transcript and exactly how and when it will be made are matters largely beyond the scope of social science techniques.” Recognizing the methodological limitations in political science, I decided to take a rather novel approach in researching this theoretically and empirically consequential question by moving forward with a micro-level study and writing a narrative-driven theory to summarize my findings.¹⁶

3.4. Case selection

My project investigated first movers of dissent in Burma and their actions of initiating dissent that took place between 1988-2011.

Given the theoretical and policy importance of first movers, I sought to identify a country whose first mover population was understudied by scholars, did not experience interview fatigue by researchers, and had dissent experience in sufficiently recent times so

¹⁶ Dr. Stathis Kalyvas suggested the narrative-driven theorizing approach for my project. This is a new social science method that he is developing for consequential questions that currently cannot be sufficiently investigated using existing qualitative methods.

that the primary and secondary actors were still alive, coherent, and willing to be interviewed by me.

As a longstanding military dictatorship that has been transitioning into a democracy since 2011, Burma and its people who incrementally pushed for this recent political transition ought to be subjects of academic inquiry more often. However, Burma's recent history of dissent and first movers are grossly understudied in academia. Aside from the 1988 Uprising and 2007 Saffron protests – the two spectacular mass uprisings that captivated the world's attention – small acts of dissent that cascaded into larger events or merely fizzled out have not been systematically captured and analyzed. Hence, Burma and its first movers presented itself as an empirically and theoretically appealing case for my research.

Moreover, I was in an advantageous position to pursue this project because I had embedded myself as a researcher in the appropriate political networks inside and outside of Burma that provided me access to information and the social networks necessary to obtain my data.

The two cities that I examined are Yangon and Pakokku. I conducted 57 interviews in Yangon, 10 interviews in Pakokku, and 1 video conference interview on Skype. Yangon was an obvious city to select. This urban city is the former capital city of Burma and the most populated city that houses major universities and companies.¹⁷ Most of the known acts of dissent – small or large scale – took place in Yangon due to the city's centrality throughout the country's colonial and post-colonial era.

Pakokku was the second city in which I conducted interviews with dissidents and key informants. Its population size comprised only 4% of Yangon's population, and was

¹⁷ Yangon was the capital city of Burma from 1853-2007. The current capital city of Burma is in Nay Pi Taw.

considered a rural, undeveloped town.¹⁸ Surprisingly, it had the third highest number of monasteries and monks in the country – after Yangon and Mandalay – and was widely known to have one of the highest ratio of monasteries and monks to population in the country, although I was unable to verify this data point.¹⁹ Known to be one of the most religious cities in Burma, Pakokku was referred to as the ‘birthplace’ for the 2007 Saffron protests, the first nation-wide uprising after the 8888 Uprising. Aside from the Saffron protests, there have been several other attempts to initiate dissent events in Pakokku, which I found surprising given its relatively small and rural population. While short of being a ‘hotspot’ for dissent, I selected Pakokku because of its structurally contrasting characteristics when compared to Yangon.

Case study research must make clear, justifiable decisions on when cases begin and end (Bennett & Checkel 2015). I selected 1988 as the beginning temporal boundary of my case because it was the year when the first major revolution erupted in independent Burma and the state’s hard power – and the costs involved in dissent – was reinforced among the population. Burma has a rich history of dissent, protests and activism that date back to the British colonial era (1824 – 1948). Inevitably, first movers who initiated dissent prior to 1988 have surely influenced first movers and dissent during the 1988-2011 period. However, I must temporally scope the case selection for the project’s feasibility, and believe that the justification for selecting 1988 as the temporal beginning of my case study is sufficient.

During the 1988 uprising, the military shot and killed an estimated 3,000 protesters, mainly high school and university students. The exact number of civilians who died during

¹⁸ According to the 2014 government census, Pakokku has 290,000 residents; Yangon has 7.3 million. There have been many disputes over the accuracy of the census, but these are the only figures available (Myanmar Government. Department of Population, Ministry of Immigration and Population 2015).

¹⁹ Many people associated Pakokku with being the most religious town in Myanmar, and said the city had the highest ratio of monasteries to population in the country. To verify this claim, I made numerous attempts at retrieving information on the numbers of monasteries and monks across different cities from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain this data.

the protests and while in police custody is unknown. Many more civilians died due to torture and other forms of mistreatment in prisons. The military's brutal crackdown on civilians and the September 18, 1988 military coup sent an incontestable signal throughout the country that dissent would not be tolerated.

Before the uprising, the civilian population was aware of the authoritarian policies of their government. But the stories of the military's brutality that spread by word-of-mouth and illegal publications reinforced the state's hard power, the level of risk that was associated with protesting and engaging in any form of political dissent. In our interview, Htin Kyaw said that "during the time of General Than Shwe, the military intelligence raised the levels of torture and suppression to the extreme. Therefore, people were afraid. They did not dare talk about politics. They were too afraid to even say the word 'democracy.'"

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) wrote that "the harsh sentences handed down and the torture and punishments inflicted on political activists threatens the wider population, sending a clear message: refrain from opposition activities or risk the consequences. The consequences are well known" (Bo Kyi 2010, para. 3). Therefore, given this fortified signal of danger that served as a domestic deterrent for opposition, why dissent? And why be the *first* person to dissent?

I selected 2011 as the last temporal boundary to scope my case because it is the year that Burma began its transition into a civilian-led democracy, which is still an ongoing process as of 2020. The elections held in November 2010 were widely recognized as unfair and unfree. The election commission was hand-picked by the State Peace and Development Council, which was the military leadership that renamed itself in 2010. The National League for Democracy (NLD) boycotted the elections, and the National Democratic Force, a breakaway political faction of the NLD, contested the elections and won four seats in the upper house and eight seats in the lower house. The outgoing Prime Minister Thein Sein was chosen as president of the new parliament and took office in March 2011. To the

surprise of many, he took substantive steps towards liberal reform, which included the easing of longstanding restrictions on foreign and domestic media, and encouragement of political exiles to return to the country.

While these reforms – and those that exist at the time of writing – are nowhere near comprising the infrastructure of a free and liberal society, they are concrete steps towards incremental reform. Consequently, the government signaled to its population that the cost of dissent – while still high – was to be lower than that prior to 2011, and these are acts that my project does not need to capture. Therefore, I selected 2011 to mark the last year of my temporal scoping for my case selection.²⁰

3.5. Interviews

In-depth interviews form the evidentiary backbone of my research. I conducted 68 semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews in Burma over five research trips between June 2017 and December 2019. I stopped at 68 interviews because I reached a point of saturation, where I was not collecting any more significantly new data from interviewees. Most interviews ran between one hour and four hours. The longest interview comprised three separate sessions, totaling ten hours spent with the interviewee. Pursuing a grounded, face-to-face research approach with individuals took a significant amount of time, energy (particularly emotional energy), and resources. With written informed consent, every interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated if necessary. Two-thirds of the interviewees spoke in Burmese, in which case one of my translators would provide summarized translations throughout the interview. Ten interviews were conducted in English. The remainder of the interviews were conducted in “Myanglish” (portmanteau for

²⁰ Burma’s polity score was “-8” in 2008, “-6” in 2010, and “-3” in 2012. Freedom House scored Burma at a “7” (1 being best, 7 being worst) on all three metrics of freedom rating, civil liberties, and political rights from 1998 through 2011. They do not have scores on Burma prior to 1998 on their website. Starting in 2012, Freedom House scored Burma’s freedom rating at “6.5,” and its civil liberties at “6.” Their political rights remained at “7” as of 2016.

“Myanmar” and “English”) and a translator accompanied and assisted me with those interviews as well.

There were three groups of people I interviewed. First, and most importantly, were the individuals who participated in dissent events in Burma between 1988 – 2011. Only during my data analysis stage of coding interviews did I categorize dissidents as first movers and non-first mover dissidents. Secondly, I interviewed ‘negative cases’ – individuals with similar profiles who had similar opportunities to dissent as first movers but never initiated dissent. Examining these ‘most similar’ negative cases was an attempt to heighten the unique characteristics of first movers, which would allow me to draw stronger inferences about the factors that catalyze first mover dissent. I will expand more on this point under “Challenges during fieldwork.” The third group of interviewees were key informants: experts, researchers, former and current government officials, and monks to obtain thicker descriptions of as many dissent events and dissidents as possible.

Sixty of the interviewees participated in at least one dissent event. Fifty-five interviewees were repeat dissidents. My data analysis found that 48 were first movers of dissent. Twelve dissidents were not first movers. I interviewed eight key informants, some of whom had participated in a dissent event. The most challenging group of people to interview were the initial set of negative cases – siblings of first movers who did not dissent. I was able to interview two siblings of first movers, who were surprisingly the only individuals of the 68 interviewees who requested to anonymize their interviews.

Of the 68 interviewees, 60 were men, eight were women. Birthyear ranged from 1937-1993. Fifty-one had university or graduate degrees, ten had high school degrees, three had primary/middle school education, and four had monastic education. Thirty-nine were born in Yangon, seven in Pakokku, and twenty-two were born in various villages across the country. Fifty-five were Buddhist, six were Muslim, and seven were agnostic or atheists. Fifty-seven were ethnically Burmese, three were Mon, one Rakhine.

Knowing the ethnicity and religion of a dissident provides important context because it helps to explain their level of social precariousness and access to resources and international networks (Banki 2016). “Dissidents from virtually every ethnic and political group have taken up arms against the central government at some stage since independence” and student activist groups have proliferated throughout Burmese history (Smith 1991b, p. 28). While imperfect, the country’s census data reveals that the country remains majority Burman Buddhist. The country’s ethno-religious group of Burman Buddhists have been the privileged majority and while the military dictatorship was repressive for nearly all people, it generally discriminated against non-Burman Buddhists.

There is significant literature on the political complexities of Burma’s ethnic composition and the histories of various groups’ resistance and succession movements, but this project will not delve into these topics. It is vital to note that while dissent against the military regime was widespread across the country, the pro-democracy movements were historically concentrated in Yangon, and were largely led by Burman Buddhists. There have been numerous movements that were otherwise critical of the government that pushed for ethnic and religious minority rights (e.g., Kachin, Karen, Chin, Rohingya) that this project does not investigate.

3.5.1. Building inroads into target networks and techniques

Before passing Transfer of Status, I made a preliminary site visit to Yangon between July-August 2017 to further “soak and poke” my research subject, and to embed myself in activist networks across Yangon by teaching public policy courses at Yangon School of Political Science (YSPS). The YSPS is an alternative school founded in 2011 by five Burmese former political prisoners and teaches social sciences to the children of former political prisoners, and other dissidents. I built a personal network of activists starting with the “88 Generation” (activists from the 1988 Uprising). Furthermore, I conducted seven interactive

workshops on civic duties with various disenfranchised groups in the city, including Rohingya men and internally displaced persons.

The time I spent in Yangon during the summer of 2017 was crucial to building inroads into the politically sensitive networks of dissidents and former political prisoners to conduct on-the-record interviews in subsequent research trips. With every interview and off-the-record conversation, I tried to build trust-based relationships with the interviewees, which allowed me to pursue grounded, face-to-face research with individuals. In these different types of spaces and contexts, I absorbed as much as possible of people's experiences, opinions, habits, and stories to contextualize the formal interviews that I conducted.

Given that this project largely explored new theoretical terrain, in-depth interviews were critical to “discern meaningful patterns within thick descriptions” to answer my research question (Warren 2001, p. 87). “While we cannot actually observe the underlying mental process that gives rise to their responses, we can witness many of its outward manifestations through in-depth interviews” (Chong 1993, p. 867). From these interviews, I attempted to identify and capture initial motivations for dissent. By analyzing the interviews, I was able to pinpoint turning points and periods of transformation in the lives of first movers.

Since I interviewed people about their experiences that date back to 1988, I needed to employ interview elicitation techniques to extract information about their initial motivations and accurate information about events and people from the past. Also known as systematic data collection techniques, elicitation techniques were particularly important for my interviews because first movers in Burma are understudied, and they have not had the opportunity to be interviewed about this particular question. Therefore, “elicitation methods are especially critical for the elicitation of unarticulated personal experience, in this

case forms of expert knowledge that are often tacit and difficult to obtain through normal interviews or from simple descriptive discourse” (Johnson & Weller 2002, p. 492).

These techniques that were essential to my in-depth interviews helped me acquire richer data than I would otherwise collect. For example, the ‘free-recall’ and ‘network elicitation’ techniques helped me build a fuller list of people to potentially interview. By reading back their responses and jogging the interviewees’ memory, I was able to have the interviewees better recall specific periods of time and events. Through visual elicitation, for which I asked to be shown photographs, artefacts, and other items of interest by the interviewees, I was able to elicit memories, stories, and other evidentiary building blocks that enabled me to stitch together thick descriptions for individuals. From such rich narrative storylines, I extracted and distilled motivating factors for my interviewees.

3.5.2. Interview limitations

There are limitations to in-depth interviews. I recognize that survivorship bias may have skewed my findings, as I was only able to interview first movers and others who have lived to tell their tale who may have a distorted post-hoc rationalization of the risks they took and the subsequent pay-offs. In addition to the first movers who have passed away, I did not have access to first movers who were still in prison, have disappeared, or otherwise did not wish to be interviewed. In these cases, I turned to witnesses, colleagues, and documentary sources to endeavor constructing narratives of the first movers I was unable to meet in person. But ultimately, I recognize that I was unable to capture all first movers by conducting interviews.

Fallibility of memory is another limitation of interviews serving as a primary data source. Human subjects naturally do not have perfect memory, and their recollection of past events tend to evolve as years pass, even in the absence of intentions to mislead others. Post hoc rationalization of events is a form of fallibility of memory that affects people’s recollection of events and motivations. Due to these two common limitations of using

interviews as data sources, I triangulated my interview material with other qualitative evidentiary data. Triangulation often involves turning to different sources to check the integrity of the inferences drawn from a data source. As a widely adopted concept and method by qualitative researchers as a means of investigating the convergence of the data and inferences derived from them, I triangulated my data as often as possible, consulting archival, news, local, academic, and media sources. I was able to turn to English sources only, but my research assistants helped with cross-checking Burmese sources.

3.6. Data sources, collection, and maintenance

I conducted 68 on-the-record interviews for my study. Given that my target population for my study comprises a hard-to-reach population that is difficult to randomly sample, I employed a combination of purposive sampling and respondent-driven sampling (Tansey 2007). My strategy for building a list of interviewees was to first maintain a list of possible first movers I had identified in academic readings, articles, books, memoirs, and conversations about Burmese dissent. Furthermore, my Burmese contacts who have been long-time activists suggested other dissidents to interview and referred me to the individuals I wanted to speak with. Given the sensitivity of the subject matter, I was convinced of the importance of being introduced to potential interviewees through someone they knew and trusted (e.g., previous interviewees). I was unable to interview twenty-five individuals I pursued because they were out of the country, too ill, or otherwise did not wish to be interviewed.

To identify and interview my negative cases, I asked dissidents to introduce me to people who *could* have been first movers given similar profiles and interests but did not initiate dissent. I sought to speak with their siblings, classmates, colleagues, and close friends. As mentioned previously, I was able to interview only two non-dissenting siblings of dissidents, which is why I modified my negative cases to dissenters who did not become first movers.

In addition to in-depth interviews, I collected qualitative data to create a robust evidentiary base for my analysis and findings. Such materials included autobiographical and biographical materials (e.g. books, magazine articles, newspaper articles, previously conducted interviews), audio-visual materials, and primary textual materials from protests (e.g., pamphlets, video footages, journal entries). To ensure the validity and robustness of my findings, I triangulated my data from in-depth interviews using these primary and secondary documents, wherever possible.

For my interviews, I developed and followed an interview protocol. All interviewees were given an information and consent form in Burmese or English, which could be found in Appendix D. I began my interview only after the interviewee signed the consent form in my presence. I followed an interview guide that I developed for the three interviewee categories: potential first movers/dissidents, non-dissenting negative cases, and key informants. All interviews were audio-recorded while I took hand-written notes. All interviewees were anonymized in any documentation of my interviews. All audio recordings, transcribed notes, and any other qualitative materials were backed up on an encrypted external hard drive. I digitally sent a scanned copy of signed consent form to all interviewees via e-mail, Viber, or WhatsApp. I hired eight local research assistants to translate interviews and relevant materials from Burmese to English, and to accompany me to interviews with individuals who did not speak English. I kept my own daily journal of notes and observations during my field research.

3.6.1. Working with interpreters and research assistants

Since I did not speak Burmese, I relied on a rota of eight carefully selected translators, interpreters, and research assistants to assist me with data collection. One was a female student I had met at Yangon University who was in an introductory course on public policy that I taught. Seven of my interpreters were people I met at YSPS, or through referrals made by my students at YSPS. The eight assistants all signed confidentiality agreements

before starting their work. All of them had prior experience in translation, interpretation, interview support, and research assistance, especially with sensitive topics in Burma.

All eight individuals were paid competitive rates for their work. While my compensation for the assistants was competitive compared to other foreign doctoral students' fees, I told my assistants that I knew they could be making more money working for international aid organizations. The eight assistants told me that they agreed to work with me for lower rates because they believed in the value of my research, enjoyed working with me, and they found it to be an honor to meet some of the people I had planned to interview, as some of my interviewees are considered to be national heroes. I offered to compensate them more in non-monetary ways, including writing recommendation letters, helping them with future graduate school applications, and serving as their mentor after my fieldwork was completed.

Four of the eight assistants worked as interpreters at interviews. One person would accompany me on every interview that was not exclusively conducted in English. To hone my interviewing skills, and for the interpreters' professional development, I would always debrief with my interpreter after every interview and share feedback about areas of the interview that went well, and other areas where the interpreter and I could improve to elicit stronger information while maintaining a positive environment for the interviewee. Through these debrief sessions, I gained tremendous insight from my interpreters' feedback and my reflections on how I could sharpen or change my questions, my facial expressions and body language, and how I could exhibit even more empathy while not losing my firm ground as a researcher in subsequent interviews in the Burmese context. Receiving such frequent feedback from local interpreters who had empathy and admiration for their fellow citizens who had risked so much on behalf of people like my interpreters was a very rewarding, humbling, and productive process.

3.6.2. Coding and NVivo

All 68 interviews were transcribed in English. For the interviews that were conducted in Burmese through an interpreter, my research assistants transcribed and then translated the Burmese interview transcripts into English so that I would be able to read and analyze them. For the interviews that were conducted in English, my research assistants or I transcribed them into English.

I used the NVivo software to code all of my interviews in order to draw out themes and arrive at analytical findings from my interviews. I uploaded all of my interviews into NVivo and read each one of them twice before starting to code. On my third round of reading my interviews, I started to identify large themes and coded every one of my interviews. With each subsequent round of coding, I revised my codes and my codebook grew as I continued to draw out more complex codes.

I coded my interviews over seven rounds. I underwent an iterative process of coding interviews by fitting parts of my interview text into identified codes, and creating new codes based on the themes that I was identifying while re-reading my interviews (Saldaña 2013). The codebook for my NVivo codes is included in Appendix K.

3.6.3. Ethical considerations

The most critical ethical consideration for this research was my ability to protect interviewees' confidentiality and anonymity. I applied for and received CUREC's approval before I conducted any interviews on the record. My ethics approval reference is: BSG-C1A-18-004. As part of abiding by the university's ethical guidelines when working with human subjects, I digitally provided project information sheets and informed consent forms in both English and Burmese to all interviewees before the interview date through e-mail, Viber, Signal, or WhatsApp. I then brought hard copies of the information sheet and informed consent forms to the interview and had the interviewee sign the consent form in my presence. I would then counter-sign the form by way of receiving their consent. I scanned and e-mailed a copy of interviewees' signed consent forms to my interviewees.

Sixty-six out of 68 interviewees opted to have the interviews conducted on-the-record. Even though the majority of my interviewees wanted to be on-the-record, I took extreme precautions to anonymize and encrypt my interview data. This is because I wanted to protect the anonymity of future interviewees who may wish to speak off-the-record, or if any interviewees who previously preferred to be on-the-record changed their minds and contacted me at a later time to be off-the-record.

3.6.4. Challenges during fieldwork

There were several types of challenges I encountered during my data collection. First, I unexpectedly faced difficulty in accessing and interviewing my initial set of negative cases, or the non-dissenting siblings of dissidents who I interviewed. Since I coded my interviews and categorized first movers and non-first movers only after I completed my fieldwork, I did not know who among my interviewees were first movers while I was conducting interviews. Therefore, I asked every interviewee who had dissented if I could interview his/her siblings who had not dissented. Out of sixty interviewees, two people

were able to connect me with their siblings who were willing to be interviewed by me. Ultimately, I was able to interview two non-dissenting siblings.

The challenge with identifying and interviewing non-dissenting siblings of first movers was part of the reason I decided to compare first movers with dissidents who never initiated dissent, rather than to compare first movers with their non-dissenting siblings. The differences between those who dissent first and those who do not dissent at all are likely to be too broad and difficult to identify. Therefore, I decided to reduce the range of comparison by comparing first movers with dissidents who never initiated dissent.

The second challenge I faced during fieldwork was the general fear and understandable paranoia that people in Pakokku had when speaking to a foreigner, especially about dissent activities after 1988. Given that so many people across the nation were involved in the 1988 Uprising, and that it was such a long time ago, there seems to have been sufficient distance and space to openly discuss events in 1988. In contrast, the 2007 Saffron protests and other dissent events that took place in more recent years elicited more fear and caution among my interviewees. This cautiousness was very pronounced in my interviews conducted in Pakokku. Some interviewees said off the record that since Pakokku is such a rural area, far from Yangon and the foreigners and journalists who visit Yangon, people still assume that the government and its informer networks are omnipresent.

One particular incident underscored this point about the sensitivities of discussing topics around dissent in areas outside major cities. When my interpreter and I got lost on our motorbike at night, I saw a large wooden post with a police banner. There were some men in uniform and helmets, carrying guns. With both of our phones out of battery and not a stranger in sight, I suggested that we ask the police for directions. Incredulous, he asked if I had lost my mind. He pointed out that the police, especially in a sparsely populated area as the one we were in, was in fact the military. He said that the military would definitely not appreciate a foreign academic to be interviewing dissidents about the 2007 Revolution,

which Pakokku is referred to as its birthplace. Furthermore, my interpreter visibly seemed worked for the first time since we had been working together. His assistance for my type of research would be incriminating and would potentially land him in trouble. If questioned, we were to tell the military at their 'police post' that we were visiting nearby Bagan – a major tourist hotspot – and we had some extra time, so we decided to spend a few nights in a quieter town.

I explicitly remember him telling me as we both hopped onto our rented motorbike, “Ji, this country isn’t a real democracy yet. You know this, right?”

3.7. “Walking the terrains” of Burma: researcher positionality

While my research is not explicitly focused on violence, I followed Russell Ramsey’s (1973, p. 44) advice about scholarship in the context of Colombia: “The scholar who will walk the terrain of Tolima, or Santander, or Boyacá, interview eyewitnesses, and exhaust local collections of letters and newspapers, will have the basis for a new level of sophistication in *violencia* scholarship.” I heeded his advice, and fully immersed myself into the spaces and conversations I was invited to join throughout my fieldwork in Burma.

Recognizing my social constructivist lens as a qualitative researcher, I had to have a rich understanding of Burmese culture. While the time period under study is between 1988-2011, and I was in Burma between 2017-2019, I did my best to “walk the terrain” of Yangon and Pakokku and “exhaust local collections” of conversations with street vendors, students, teachers, taxi drivers, cashiers, parents, and other local people to gain a finely tuned understanding of the social norms, the dynamics among locals and between local-foreigner interactions, and the general ethos that drives human existence in Yangon, Pakokku, and beyond.

In qualitative research, especially in an interview-heavy research design as this project, the researcher serves as a key instrument in data collection. “The qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour,

and interviewing participants” (Creswell, p. 45). Bearing this point in mind, I remained vigilant of my identifiers, mood, and general demeanour when I was in Burma. Word spreads fast in small cities, and Yangon and Pakokku were no different. Within days of being in each city, people were aware that there was a Korean-American Oxford doctoral student conducting interviews for her dissertation.

A combination of three identifiers encouraged people (interviewees and people I met along the way) to be more positively inclined to trust me. This led interviewees to open up to me and to refer me to their colleagues. My American nationality, Korean ethnicity, and institutional affiliation with Oxford University worked to my advantage to gain access to conversations and other human interactions that provided glimpses into people’s lived experiences.

The United States has a very positive image in Burma as a moral superpower, which I benefited from in personal interactions. South Korea’s “Korean Wave” has swept through Burma since 2011 and has enormous soft power in Burma – probably second, only to America – and people instantly opened up to me when they realized I was ethnically Korean. People, especially the younger interviewees or the children of older interviewees, spoke a few Korean phrases to me that they learned from Korean television dramas. Young women showed me images of Korean male celebrities and told me they wanted to find husbands just like them. Several students I taught spoke in broken English, but fluent Korean. One interviewee in Pakokku interrupted our interview to call his youngest daughter studying Korean language at a foreign language university in Mandalay so that she could demonstrate her fluency in Korean. Korean stores, music, and makeup stalls abounded in malls and open markets, and passers-by blatantly stared at me, and would ask, “Korean?” If I nodded, people would brightly smile and greet me in Korean, and often would link arms with me without asking, and give their phones to friends to take pictures with me.

In addition to my benefiting from South Korea's soft power in Myanmar, Burmese dissidents connected with me instantly after learning about my ethnicity because all of them had a working familiarity with South Korea's history of dissent, mass demonstrations, state repression against dissidents, and the country's ultimate transition from a military dictatorship to a liberal democracy in 1989. Before the start of most interviews, when I would give my introductory remarks, I often mentioned that my father had been a student activist in Seoul during the tumultuous democratization protests in the mid-1980s and had been arrested along with many of his friends. This personal story instantly opened up space between the dissidents and myself to trust each other more than we otherwise would if I had not shared that story.

Interviewees, no matter how impoverished they were, always offered me tea and often meals. Meals or snacks often comprised Burmese tealeaf salad (*lahpet thoke*), fermented vegetables, generous portions of white rice, and pungent fermented fish paste. While serving, women often apologized with heads bowed that their offerings to a guest was insufficient, and they were sorry they could not offer more to a "Korean Oxford scholar."

I cannot emphasize enough how much these three identifiers – American-Korean-Oxford – framed my interactions with people in the country. To minimize the mental and emotional distance created by a perceived imbalance of power between myself and my hosts, I tried to be a polite and modest guest. This meant eating nearly everything that was given to me, including meals offered by monks in their monasteries, which comprise the leftovers from monks' lunches that finish before noon.

My ethnicity unexpectedly placed me in a very advantageous position for people to actively want to speak and fraternize with me. This researcher's positionality, of course, benefited my relationships with my interviewees tremendously, as most people seemed to trust me, and let their guard down.

My institutional affiliation with Oxford University and role as a doctoral researcher was helpful in building credibility and trust among interviewees and my burgeoning professional network in Yangon. With the onslaught of journalists and aid workers eager to conduct short interviews, some interviewees had memorized soundbites to share with foreign interviewers. In my interviews, I was clear that I wanted to ask open-ended questions as a thorough and trained researcher, and I wanted to really listen to what interviewees had to say.

My willingness to listen to what people had to say, to spend time with them, and then to answer whatever questions interviewees asked me further built trust between me and interviewees. Interviewee Ashin “Cricket” (an activist monk) explicitly pointed this out and said that I was different, because most foreigners who came to interview him and his fellow monks would rush in with no introduction, hurriedly ask their questions, and leave as soon as they collected what they needed.

While I did not compensate my interviewees for their time, I was attuned to the cultural sensitivities in Burma. I adhered to cultural norms by showing reverence to elders, being a respectful guest by bringing sweets and cakes to interviewees’ homes and being respectful to monks and Buddhist rituals as a Christian. Furthermore, I spent significant time before and after the recorded interviews to have small talk with the interviewees, their family members who were present, and any friends or neighbours who may have been invited by the interviewees to sit in on the interviews. I played with children, chatted with visitors, went shopping and ran errands with relatives of interviewees, shared meals and tea, and cooked together. This level of personal relationship-building was not a learned research interview tactic that I employed to gain people’s trust.

Rather, as a natural extrovert who genuinely enjoys meeting new people, I did not view nor treat interviewees merely as ‘research subjects,’ but rather as people with lived experiences who were sharing their story, experiences, and outlooks to a complete foreign

stranger (me). My upbringing in a Korean household with traditional Confucian values of respect for elders and age-based seniority, among other values, was instrumental in naturally code-switching for my interviews and off-the-record conversations.

4. A Grounded theory on the making of first movers

In this chapter, I present a grounded theory to explain what motivates some individuals to initiate high-risk dissent. This inductive project generated a three-part theory based on observations and trends that I distilled from my data and data analysis. The overarching claim that my theory suggests is that first movers—the initiators of high-risk dissent—are *made*, not born.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I present the research puzzle and research question. Second, I explain the research question’s theoretical and policy significance. Third, I describe the central terms and concepts for the dissertation. Fourth, I describe the existing literature and detail the two known case studies on first movers and their theoretical limitations. Lastly, I present my theory, and discuss its theoretical contribution.

4.1. Research puzzle and question

This project investigated why some people become the first movers of high-risk dissent events and activities when they are almost certain to be met with brutal backlash, and when there is no safety in numbers and no guarantee that others will follow.

The initial stages of a dissent event are critical to its escalation potential and outcome of a dissent event. This is because the escalation of risky collective action largely depends on political entrepreneurship, resource mobilization, and convincing potential participants of the benefits of joining risky, public-oriented action. Therefore, the authorities seeking to crack down on a dissent event always try to identify the organizers and recruiters. Sunstein (2003, p. 77) noted that this “problem is especially severe for the earliest disclosers or dissenters, who may bear especially high costs because they are conspicuous, individually identified, and easy to isolate for reprisals. And if the earliest dissenters are successfully deterred, dissent is likely to be exceedingly rare.” This is especially the case in authoritarian states where mobilization is particularly difficult under the constant threat of strong

repression, and therefore the emergence of dissent is unlikely (Opp & Gern 1993; Pearlman 2018; Tilly 1978).

To “successfully deter the earliest dissenters,” who are usually highly committed individuals, would require unusually severe punishment not only as retribution for first movers, but also to send a strong signal as deterrence to others. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the risk is the highest for the individuals at the initial stages of a dissent event.

It is within this puzzle that my research question lies: *what factors motivate individuals to become first movers of dissent in an authoritarian country?* What are the characteristics and pathways that differentiate this extremely risk-tolerant subset of individuals from their peers?

4.2. Significance of question

This project has both theoretical and policy significance. This project is *theoretically* significant because the scholarly literature and understanding of first movers is decidedly limited. This project aimed to uncover observations and causal pathways about the beginning stages of dissent escalation that other studies may have missed by investigating the “exceptional minority” of individuals who trigger, or merely attempt to initiate, dissent events without any assurance that such events will escalate (Pearlman 2018). Understanding the mechanisms that motivate first movers can contribute to our understanding of how and why dissent escalates, since these individuals play such a critical role in the “initiation and early spread of collective action” (Lawrence 2013, p. 29).

There is extensive literature on the different factors that lead to the onset of contentious collective action. Commonly cited exogenous or macro factors that lead to collective action include resource mobilization (McCarthy & Zald 1977); opportunities and changes in threat perception (McAdam et al. 2001); framing (Snow et al. 1986); and organization and mobilization (Tilly 1978).

Internal, or more micro-level, determinants may also lead to collective action. Relative deprivations (Davies 1962; Gurr 1971) heighten the gap between what people have

and what they believe they *ought* to have, which could drive them to pursue some social change to narrow this gap. A wide array of grievances (Hechter, Pfaff & Underwood 2016; McAdam 1988; McAdam et al. 2001), whether they are socio-economic in nature or otherwise, could also motivate people to pursue collective action. There has been extensive scholarship on the role that emotions could play in inspiring individuals to engage in risky dissent (Einwohner 2003; Jasper 2011; Loewenstein 1996; Lofland 1985; Pearlman 2013; Wood 2001). Similarly, visceral responses, or emotionally charged reactions, to shocking events could push people to unexpectedly participate in risky collective action (Loewenstein 1996, 2005).

Moral inducements (Marwell & Ames 1979; Muller & Opp 1986; Olson 1965); and other “soft incentives” (Breton & Breton 1969; Opp 1986) could persuade people to pursue risky dissent activities that they otherwise would not engage in. Political opportunism (Tilly 1978) could play a role in changing individuals’ cost-benefit calculations in such a way in which the benefits of risky dissent seems to outweigh the risks.

Psychological studies of dissidents have investigated the profiles of individuals who are more likely to become political dissenters. Such scholarly investigations have led to numerous interpersonal theories on social networks and relationships, psychological motivations, configurations of personality traits and childhood socialization (Louw-Potgieter 1988).²¹ Scholars have studied various personality traits that may lead to extreme political views and dissent behavior, including determinants of fascist and anti-democratic traits (Adorno et al. 1950), as well as anti-authoritarian dispositions (Cantoni et al. 2016). Persuasive, revolutionary, charismatic personality types of leaders (Gurr 1971; Schwartz 1970) could also explain why some people decide to pursue risky dissent activities.

²¹ For an extensive overview of psychological studies of political dissidents, see (Louw-Potgieter 1988).

Beyond personality traits, scholars have examined links between extreme political behavior and overconfidence (Ortoleva & Snowberg 2013), risk preferences (Kam 2012), extremely risky political behavior and altruism (Monroe 1991; Zettler & Hilbig 2010), and a desire for a sense of control (Bandura 1977; Loewenstein 1996). Moreover, certain aspects of identity (Viterna 2014) could explain why some people are more likely than others to engage in risky dissent.

In spite of the extensive scholarship that tries to explain why some people are more likely to engage in risky dissent, a gap in the literature still remains. Scott (1985) addresses the challenging nature of seeking an academic understanding of risk-tolerant dissidents and underscores the nebulousness that researchers face once they drill down from macro- to micro-level explanations. Scott wrote, “Once all the structural factors that might shed some light on this matter have been considered, there will be a large and irreducible element of voluntarism left. The vagaries of temperament, personal circumstances, and individual socialization ensure that, under the same circumstances, one can anticipate a wide variety of responses to systematic subordination. In one respect, however, the open declaration of the hidden transcript can be considered a *constant* rather than a variable” [emphasis added] (p. 217).

It is this very constant – the ever-present first movers in risky situations – that remains understudied, and about which this project endeavored to draw some potentially generalizable theoretical precepts. While the literature on contentious collective action provides a multidimensional understanding of how and why collective action may escalate, there is a clear gap in the literature about the individuals who strike the proverbial match in the hopes of lighting a fire. This thesis delves into the underexplored domain of first movers — who they are, what motivates them, and under which conditions they take risky actions.

From a *policy* perspective, this research is significant because first movers must be present to catalyze any act of dissent that may ultimately result in regime liberalization or

another type of change. In other words, our hopes for a freer, more democratic world reside in large part with the individuals who take extraordinary risks to catalyze the dissent events that sometimes cascade into consequential movements. According to Freedom House, 61% of the world's population were deemed to be living in either "partly free" or "not free" countries as of 2018. In other words, 4.5 billion people as of 2018 are living in circumstances that are deemed not free or partly free.

In spite of the low probabilities of successful mobilization, dissent events have unfolded in authoritarian regimes around the globe where the prospect of dissent was considered impossible. Such high-risk events will continue to materialize and first movers will be present at each dissent event.

In the absence of first movers, the world would be devoid of all dissent activities, a subset of which escalate to mass demonstrations that upend undesirable regimes or incrementally transform segments of governments.²² Petersen (2001, p. 272) underscored the empirical and theoretical necessity of first movers, stating that, "[t]he entire snowballing process leading to the downfalls of regimes may never be catalyzed without these first actors. In any type of mass activities, only a very few individuals are needed to show that the emperor has no clothes . . . for any given threshold analysis, there must be a set of 'first players' to begin the interactive 'tipping process' . . . first action is the clearest example of risk-insensitive behavior." A richer understanding of first movers will contribute to a stronger grasp of the initial stages of dissent and revolutions, and perhaps enable policymakers to embolden certain dissent acts by better identifying and supporting first movers.

²² There are some instances of apparently spontaneous protests, such as the decisive Leipzig protests in 1989 in the German Democratic Republic. In the absence of political entrepreneurs, people gathered around the focal point of Monday prayers from 5-6PM (Tucker 2007). These had taken place in St. Nicholas' Church in Leipzig, near Karl Marx Square in East Germany from 1982-1989 (Opp 1993). While spontaneous protests do take place, they are quite rare in the empirical record, and the evidence that they transpire in the absence of first movers is inconclusive.

4.3. Central concepts and terms

4.3.1. *First movers of high-risk dissent*

My conceptualization of first movers of high-risk dissent are those who (A) organize a dissent event, (B) recruit for a dissent event before the event transpires, and/or are (C) the first participants with premeditated intent at a high-risk dissent event.

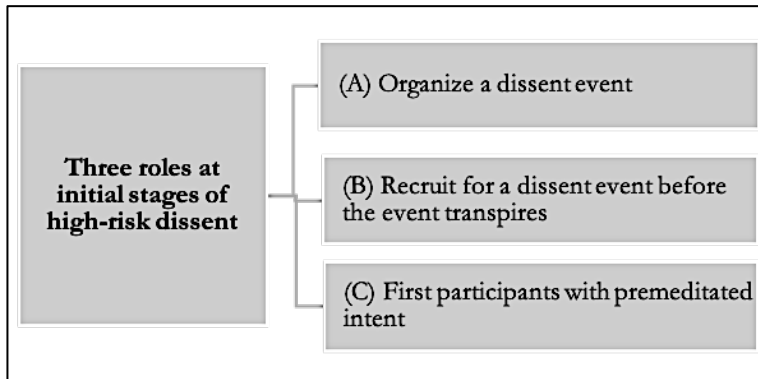


FIGURE 1. Three roles of the initial stages of high-risk dissent

Put differently, to be a first mover of high-risk dissent, it is sufficient to be either [A] or [B] or [C].²³ All overt dissent in Burma between 1988-2011 was highly risky. Therefore, rather than evaluating the risk level of different types of dissent activities, I assessed the risk level of the form of one's engagement at the initial stage of dissent.

My dependent variable is binary; was an individual ever a first mover or not? To systematically categorize an individual as a first mover, I analyzed my interview transcripts and other data sources, and evaluated each interviewee against the following three criteria:

- Did the individual engage in a high-risk dissent event that was intended to be observed by a public audience?
- Was the individual involved in any one of the three initial stages of a dissent event: organizing, recruiting, and/or being one of the first participants of a dissent event?

²³ There were 48 first movers in my study. A=1, B=5, C=10, A+B=1, B+C=4, A+C=2, A+B+C=25.

- Was I able to independently verify the interviewee’s claim that s/he organized dissent by turning to at least one other data source?

If answers to these questions were ‘yes,’ then I labeled the individual as a first mover. This systematic process of analyzing my interviews produced a total of forty-eight first movers in my study.

4.3.2. Devoted dissenters

I borrowed this term ‘devoted dissenter’ from the ‘devoted actor’ framework that was developed by scholars at Artis International to “better understand the social and psychological mechanisms underlying people’s willingness to make costly sacrifices for a group and a cause” (Atran & Gómez 2018, p. e193).²⁴ By devoted actors, they refer to “deontic (i.e., duty-based)” actors who “adhere to sacred, transcendent values that generate actions dissociated from rationally expected risks and rewards.” ‘Acts by devoted actors’ are *not chiefly motivated by instrumental concerns*, or at least those of which people are usually aware. Instead, they are *motivated by sacred values* that drive actions independent from or all out of proportion to outlays and outcomes [emphasis added]” (Atran & Medin 2008). Their studies show that devoted actors, who are “unconditionally committed to sacred causes and whose personal identities are fused within a unique collective identity, willingly make costly sacrifices” (Atran 2016, p. S192).

I used part of this framework to describe dissenters who were radicalized in part by repression who became extremely committed to their cause. But I decided to refrain from referring to them as radical dissenters because of the negative connotations of the term *radical* or *radicalized*. I adapted the “devoted actor” term and framework to my project and changed the term to “devoted dissenter” because my project focused exclusively on

²⁴ Artis International is a non-profit group that uses social science research to help resolve seemingly intractable political and cultural conflicts. www.artisinternational.org

dissenters. More substantively, I found that there was one major difference between the ‘devoted actor’ framework and the ‘devoted dissenters’ in my sample. The devoted actor hypothesis states that devoted actors are “willing to kill” to protect their sacred values, but I did not find this to be the case in my sample of interviewees. They were willing to risk their *own* lives in pursuit of creating a better society for their country but were not willing to kill others to achieve their goal.²⁵

In the case of the first movers in my sample, their sacred values revolved around the establishment of democracy and freedom in the country. Other values may have motivated them, but by the time they became very experienced, most of their motivating sacred values were funneled and distilled into achieving freedom and democracy for their country and these values became intrinsic to their identity and the purpose behind their existence.

4.3.3. High risks

In the context of dissent, high risks are the anticipated or expected extreme dangers that may result from engaging with dissent activities. Such dangers could be legal, social, physical, status-specific, and/or financial in nature. Risk also refers to the activists’ *subjective* anticipation or expectation of costs that they may incur as a result from their dissent participation. While this project focused on high-risk dissent, it is essential to note that risks and costs are inextricably linked (McAdam 1986, p. 64). In addition to the risk of direct repression that dissenters face, repression also generates informal disincentives to dissent. Individuals who have been exposed to official sanctions may be shunned by colleagues, neighbors, friends, and even family who do not want to risk being associated with dissenters

²⁵ There were armed groups operating from the border areas, and other pro-democratic entities that preferred armed resistance and other violent strategies to upend the military regime. To the best of my knowledge, my sample of first movers were not involved with killing others to achieve their political goals.

(McAdam 1986; Opp & Roehl 1990).²⁶ The types of risks involved with dissent in the Burma case study are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1: *Risk categories for dissent in Burma*²⁷

Risk Category	Description
Arrest	“Anyone suspected of political dissent can be arrested, detained, and interrogated by the Military Intelligence (MI) without a warrant, and without accountability of the MI to the judicial authority.” The ability for the MI to carry out arrests and interrogations of those suspected of dissent had been codified into Burma’s criminal procedural codes. ²⁸ Arrests often took place in the middle of the night.
Collective punishment	Punishment of family members and relatives, due to an individual’s dissent activities.
Death	Causes of death included shootings and beatings during a protest crackdown, torture during interrogation, physical challenges during and after prison sentence.
Interrogation	Interrogations by the intelligence services included both physical and psychological methods of torture, and regularly led to lifelong injuries, trauma, and death. ²⁹
Professional penalties / school expulsion	Expulsion from school, revocation of professional licenses, termination of employment; the reasons for expulsion remained on people’s records, causing great challenges to find work; losing one’s job negatively affected one’s livelihood and ability to provide for one’s family.
Political imprisonment	Sentences to Burma’s prison system, which included forced labor and extremely challenging living conditions, and often led to severe illness and death.
Pressure and harassment from government	Forms of direct and indirect pressure from the military government to deter dissent activities; such pressure included constant surveillance, monitoring, preventing customers from patronizing a dissident’s business.
Social Stigma	Social stigma for one’s involvement with dissent; others would act on their fear of mere association of dissidents by evicting tenants, shutting down businesses, informing on dissidents.
Torture	Torture during interrogation and political imprisonment left many people with permanent physical and mental injuries. ³⁰

²⁶ Interview with Htin Kyaw, “I have an elder brother. He was a humanitarian guy and I have not seen him for a long time. Since 1988, we haven’t met each other. He was a volunteer for the fire brigade, and he is afraid to meet me since I was involved in political activities.”

²⁷ These categories were derived from interviews, and from reports written by advocacy groups for political prisoners and human rights groups.

²⁸ For more, see (Assistance Association of Political Prisoners 2005).

²⁹ There are numerous accounts of political dissenters who have provided accounts of their interrogation and torture for their dissent activities. For more, see (Assistance Association of Political Prisoners 2005; Fink 2001).

³⁰ For more on torture methods and tactics that were used against political prisoners between 1988-2011, see (Assistance Association of Political Prisoners 2010).

4.3.4. Costs

Cost is defined as “the expenditure of time, money, and energy required of a person engaged in any particular form of activism” (McAdam 1986, p. 64). Cost is anything given up, foregone, spent, lost, or ‘negatively’ experienced (pain, fatigue, physical harm, time spent in prison) by activists and dissenters during their participation in dissent activities.

4.3.5. Dissent event

A dissent event is any *event or activity* that clearly expresses dissatisfaction with, or criticism of, the central government or any extension of the central government. While dissent events include both covert and overt dissent, my project studied first movers who have engaged in *overt* dissent because these observable dissent events and the identity of participants can be verified.

It is reasonable to argue that any overt dissent event that criticized the Burmese military regime was perceived to be highly risky. All interviewees – first movers, late joiners, expert observers – stated that the minimum risk for dissent activity was arrest and interrogation.³¹ Interrogation during Burma’s military dictatorship was notorious for the physical and psychological torture that accompanied the coercive questioning. Another probable risk was sentencing to prison. Death was often a result of torture, interrogation, time in prison, and crackdown by the military on dissent activities.

While important, covert dissent and hidden acts of everyday forms of resistance (coined by James C. Scott) that were not intended to be observed by others were excluded from my project because they were not necessarily as risky as overt acts of dissent. Furthermore, hidden forms of dissent were difficult to investigate without access to

³¹ For more information on the repercussions of unsanctioned political activity in Burma during this time period, see (Human Rights Watch 1990). There are also numerous other reports on the repression of rights, especially political rights of dissidents written by Human Rights Watch. Freedom House scored Burma on its political rights, civil liberties, and freedom ratings at 7 (1 = best, 7 = worst) in all the years between 1998-2011 (such scores available online begin in 1998). Along with the scores, there are annual reports on the restrictions of liberties for the citizens.

classified intelligence and other sensitive data sources to which I was unable to gain access for my dissertation (Scott 1985). While hidden acts of resistance are vital to understanding dissent among repressed populations, I will focus on dissent activities that were intended for a public audience in attempt to capture the highest levels of risk that individuals were willing to absorb.

The act of organizing an overt dissent event is usually done in private, so the organizing portion of a dissent event is not overt. However, I categorized dissidents who I independently verified to have planned dissent events as first movers in my study. I recognize that there is no clear dividing line between overt and covert acts of dissent, as different components of a given dissent event can have both overt and covert aspects. But I was careful to capture organizers for overt dissent events and activities. Examples of overt dissent include public protests, strikes, and Buddhist monks overturning their alms bowls to signal political dissatisfaction with the government.³² Comprehensive lists of dissent events and activities in my project are included in Appendices G and H.

4.3.6. Clarification of central concepts

I must make three clarifying distinctions about the central concepts and project scope. First, it is important to guard against conflating anti-authoritarian demands as being pro-democratic in nature. Demands of dissenters captured in my study included a range of local and national demands (e.g., protesting an arrest of a local student versus demanding the release of all political prisoners), as well as reactive and proactive claims (e.g., criticizing demonetization policy versus demanding increased protections of economic rights) (Tilly

³² In the 2007 Saffron protests, thousands of participating monks overturned their alms bowls to signal that they refused to accept donations from the military. In a country where the government and military derive legitimacy from Buddhist leadership and believers, this overturning of alms bowls was politically meaningful because the participating monks were “threatening to expose the veil of political legitimacy that the current rulers have attempted to maintain internally” (McCarthy 2008, p. 298).

1978). Many local calls did eventually evolve into broader, more lofty demands, but this was not always the case.³³

Second, I make a distinction between first movers and early joiners of dissent. Theoretically, first movers take on considerably more risk than early joiners because first movers' risk threshold is zero; they organize and participate in dissent events without having any guarantee that others will join or follow them (Petersen 2001). Early joiners, while they do take on significant risk, usually make a calculated decision based on mitigated risk because they join a dissent event after observing that there are people already present, and therefore can feel a sense of safety in numbers. Early joiners are sometimes described to be opportunistic because they may gain the benefits of being perceived as early movers without taking as much risk as first movers.

Empirically, this distinction is important because “[repression] is especially severe for the earliest disclosers or dissenters, who may bear especially high costs because they are conspicuous, individually identified, and easy to isolate for reprisals” (Sunstein 2003, p. 77). Labeling an individual as an early mover rather than a first mover is not making any judgment of one's level of commitment or contribution as a dissenter. Rather, this exercise is simply to define an accurate pool of individuals to investigate for this research project's objectives.

A third distinction I make to study a precise group of individuals is between first movers and movement leaders. There is certainly an overlap between these two categories of actors, but there is a clear delineation between their roles and respective levels of risk appetite. First movers are individuals who engage in the initial three stages of dissent: organizing, recruiting, and being the first participants. Furthermore, many first movers do

³³ Interview with Myat Thu: “So we would walk around the university and ask for the demands [for our university's curricular reform] and later, it always would end up as calls for democracy and human rights.” Interviewee was making the larger point that no matter how local or specific a protest demand started out as, the demands tended to “end up calling for democracy and human rights.”

not survive the early waves of crackdown by the authorities to ever become movement leaders.

After investigating first movers in a different context – in insurgencies rather than dissent – Kalyvas and Kocher (2007, p. 182) pointedly differentiate between first movers and leaders. They wrote, “[f]irst movers, whom Jon Elster aptly calls ‘everyday Kantians,’ are political entrepreneurs with strong motivations, willing to assume high risks. The world does not lack Che Guevaras ready to launch insurgencies – and likely to fail. What it does lack, however, is the mass of followers willing to take the necessary risks; it is *the success of entrepreneurs in recruiting followers that results in insurgencies and that calls for investigation*” [emphasis added].

A first mover can *become* a leader of a larger movement that results from her attempts at dissent initiation. However, this is not usually the case. A first mover could initiate dissent, followed by mobilization and then a credible, educated individual could step in and lead the group. “In revolutions that have occurred, such groups [of intellectuals] have been crucial – especially as the agents of state building and central organization after the destruction of the old authority. Such intellectuals have seldom been the prime movers in creating revolutionary movements, even when they have given them their major ideological orientations” (Calhoun 2012, p. 103). A leader who was not a first mover was not considered a first mover for this project.

A clear example of a movement leader who was not a first mover, as I define it, was Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Her 1988 visit from Oxford, United Kingdom to Yangon to care for her ailing mother coincided with nation-wide protests, now known as the 8888 Uprising. As the daughter of General Aung San, the revered founder and independence leader of modern Burma (and sometimes referred to as the George Washington of modern Burma), Aung San Suu Kyi quickly rose in prominence and became the primary leader of the democratic movement for Burma. Thirty years later, Aung San Suu Kyi remains in the

spotlight as the iconic – and increasingly maligned – political leader for Burma’s struggle for democracy. Like other movement leaders who were not first movers, Aung San Suu Kyi – while important for Burma’s modern history of dissent and politics – will not be included as a first mover in my research.

4.4. Literature review

Scholars of the breakdown of authoritarian regimes, risky collective action, and contentious politics have long explored how and why high-risk dissent escalates. This project is situated primarily in political science literature that engages these topics, but also draws on research from sociology and political psychology. In this section, I engaged literature that sought to understand political dissidents: who they were, why they dissented, how they mobilized and recruited, and what were their desired outcomes. I grouped the literature by existing arguments for *structural* drivers of dissent versus *individual* explanations for dissent. Classifying arguments into these categories was more of an art rather than a science, so there may be blurred lines across categories. The larger goal of this section is to argue that while rich literature exists on this subject, the scholarly understanding of first movers is decidedly limited.

4.4.1. *Structural vs. individual drivers of dissent*

Given that a common goal behind mass demonstrations is to achieve a successful revolution, or a transformational change in a political system, I first turned to classic structural arguments for why revolutions may occur. Skocpol’s (1979) argument that revolutions are caused by transformations in a society’s state, economic, and class structures paved the way for scholars to continue investigating this puzzle of what causes revolutions from a structural perspective. A different structural explanation for the occurrence of revolutions points to changes in people’s perceptions of political opportunities and threats, which could embolden people to choose an optimal time to participate in collective action (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001). The domestic configuration and relations among the elite

could also be a contextually powerful predictor of when and how a revolution may occur (Lachmann 1997). In contrast to endogenous pressures for change, revolutions could be a result of external factors and pressures (Levitsky & Way 2006), which could potentially weaken the state's capability to defend against internal protests, in turn, emboldening people to protest en masse.

Coercive authoritarian regimes are often characterized by a state of equilibrium in which the regime is underpinned by widespread preference falsification where discontented populations do not dissent (Kuran 1991). Yet for widescale preference falsification to end, dissent must become evident and escalate to such a degree that a sufficient number of individuals feel safe enough to reveal their true preferences in some way. One explanation points to aggrieved populations revealing their true preferences, which could cascade into a series of behaviors revealing people's private preferences, leading to an unanticipated mass revolution (Kuran 1991).

Focal points and timing of politically meaningful events comprise another explanation for why popular mobilization may spark. Mass mobilization sometimes coincides with fraudulent elections and other planned political events because, despite citizens' falsified preferences, dissatisfied individuals assume that other voters' general dissatisfaction will also be heightened around such events. This is because fraudulent elections are an example of focal points that embody the systemic problems of a government that create grievances for citizens. Therefore, people assume that other disgruntled citizens will also view the timing of a fraudulent election as a timely signal to protest in the streets (Tucker 2007).

Now we move to theories that are not strictly structural, nor individual reasons for why some individuals dissent. Sparks and signals that people interpret as rationalizations for taking more risky political action add to this category of semi-structural/semi-individual

theories for why some people may dissent (Lohmann 1994).³⁴ Self-immolation and other extreme forms of protest are often interpreted as emotional, provocative signals that witnesses and responders use to convert their silent grievances into public outrage, which can lead to public action (Biggs & Gambetta 2005). Signals could also stem from the government. When an authoritarian “government signals that it is lowering the costs for engaging in collective action and is permitting some contestation . . . former political identities re-emerge and others appear” (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986, p. 47).

Finally, we turn to literature on dissidents that scans the reasons for why early dissidents and late joiners participate in risky dissent and other forms of contentious political activity. Selbin (2003, p. 118) argues for strong scholarly focus on humans when studying revolutions because, “[r]evolutions are human creations. . . . rather than inevitable natural processes. The focus, therefore, needs to be on people, not structures; choices, not determinism; and the transformation of society, not simply transitions.” And while this dissertation did not study why revolutions occur, I agree with Selbin’s emphasis on the importance of studying individuals when trying to understand macro level phenomenon.

Theories about the importance of the ‘strong man’ rising up to mobilize and lead contentious activity abound. Biographical studies of movement leaders and their revolutionary personalities (Chong 1991; Davies 1962; Gurr 1971; Schwartz 1970), political entrepreneurs, and everyday Kantians (Elster 1989) partially explain the onset of mobilization at the micro level. Political opportunism and rational calculations, such as considering the high costs of *non*-participation and free-riding (Kalyvas & Kocher 2007) explains why some people engage in risky political activity.

³⁴ According to Lohmann’s theory, Tunisian Mohammed Bouazizi, whose self-immolation in December 2010 sparked the Arab Spring protests, was a signal that others perceived and were triggered by to engage in collective action. Bouazizi may not have had the intention to spark mass collective action across Arab nations, but his action sufficiently provoked multiple revolutions across the Middle East.

In contrast, some scholars argue there are reasons beyond opportunism and other considerations of personal gain that lead to dissent. Such arguments include meanings of identities and membership in social networks (Viterna 2014), moral shocks (Jasper 2011), the pleasure of agency (Wood 2003) and an individual's moral commitments that could compel an individual to do one's perceived 'fair share' to pursue a collectively desired outcome through political dissent.

While many of these structural and individual theories about political dissent incrementally add to the theoretical understanding of why individuals decide to — or decide *not* to — dissent, there is an absence of focus on first movers. The risk-tolerant behavior of early- and late-joiners who are protected by the presence of many is relatively easier to explain than the behavior and motivations of first movers. Despite the theoretical importance of first movers, we know little about what affects their risk calculation and decision-making in becoming first movers.

4.4.2. Existing explanations and theoretical shortcomings

While there is a limited understanding of first movers, the importance of first movers is widely recognized in different bodies of social science literature. Chong (1991, p. 95) argues that “the most difficult part of organizing a movement . . . is the task of building up the movements to the point where an obligation or incentive to contribute to arises. . . . A group of highly motivated individuals – purists, zealots, moralists, Kantians, what have you – will have to provide the leadership required to convince others that large-scale coordination will be a profitable activity.”

Elster (1989) described first movers as ‘everyday Kantians’ – people who cooperate if and only if it would be better for all if everyone cooperated than if nobody did. Put differently, Elster (1989, p. 95) theorized first movers as “unconditional cooperators” who value cooperation irrespective of the actions of other parties. First movers, by definition,

are a 'rare breed' who equate costs and benefits of participation. Chong (1991, p. 140)

described that:

The problem [of collective action] is that every potential activist may be . . . waiting for others to build up collective action to the point where he is willing to contribute. What is needed under the circumstances are some highly dedicated, morally committed activists who will contribute to collective action when few others are willing to do. These might be the people Hirschmann referred to — who equate the costs of participation with its benefits. They provide the leadership in the movement and constitute its critical mass. However, such self-starters — gamblers, really — who are willing to support collective action in its earliest, least promising stages are relatively rare, I suspect. And, I would argue, it is because they are a rare breed that public-spirited collective action is uncommon.

Some scholars anchor their conceptualization of first movers in their high levels of risk tolerance. In the context of participation in high-risk rebellion in civil wars, first movers are referred to as “political entrepreneurs . . . with strong motivation, willing to assume high risks” (Kalyvas & Kocher 2007, p. 182). In his study of resistance and rebellion in Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism, Petersen (2001, p. 272) investigated first movers, whom he referred to as “individuals [who have] come to hold zero percent risk thresholds . . . for any given threshold analysis, there must be a set of ‘first players,’ who begin the interactive process.”

Other scholars argue that extreme ideological commitments and dispositions are what motivate people to initiate risky political action. In her research of the 2011 Moroccan protests, Lawrence (2013, p. 5) studied first movers, whom she referred to as “committed activists – those who were the first to take to the streets when protests beg[a]n.” Ginkel and Smith (1999) argued that first movers are the most willing to protest since they have less to lose and the most to gain, whereas Apodaca (2017, p. 67) defined first movers as “extremist, highly-committed disciples, committed to opposing the regime or devoted to a particular cause no matter what the consequences.” Others have tried to make sense of these “self-starters,” “gamblers,” and “the origin of the activators of the revolutionary corps” by “the typical social science response to this problem, [which] is couched in terms of the personality of the revolutionary leader” (Chong 1991; Schwartz 1970).

Weinstein (2005, p. 603) suggested a more opportunistic view of first movers, who he described as those who are “dedicated to the cause of the organization and willing to make costly investments today with the promise of receiving rewards in the future.”

In addition to theorizations of what types of people first movers are, or what they are motivated by – whether it is high risk tolerance, extreme commitment, or equating costs of participation to benefits – there are two case studies that investigate the motivations behind the rise of first movers.

4.4.3. Two existing studies on first movers

To my knowledge, there are only two studies that have endeavored to investigate the motivations of first movers of dissent in an authoritarian country: Petersen’s (2001) study of first movers during the 1991 pro-independence and anti-Soviet protests in Vilnius, Lithuania and Lawrence’s (2013) study of first movers during the 2011 pro-democracy protests in Morocco.

In his 1991 study of Lithuanian first movers and their ‘fanatical behavior,’ Petersen (2001) tested the explanatory power of several mechanisms for different strands of first mover activity. While rational mechanisms for different categories of people (e.g., political entrepreneurs and youth), personality-based mechanisms, and participation-based mechanisms (e.g., status rewards) partially explain first movers’ behavior, Petersen (2001, p. 291) identified a new mechanism to supplement the shortcomings of the aforementioned mechanisms, and to present a possible explanation for the “creation of first actors.”

Petersen (2001, p. 284) labeled a “small risk of martyrdom” as a new mechanism that had three elements: martyrdom must have contextual symbolic significance, events “must produce martyr roles” and the opportunity for first movers to step in and play the roles, and the event must not pose an overwhelming risk that may actually result in death. By being very close to the fatal cost of death, but surviving to be able to reap the rewards,

one is able to socially benefit from exhibiting a commitment and willingness to die for one's nation or some cause.

Lawrence (2013) investigated the role that government repression and brutality play on contentious collective action among citizens. To understand how repression affects individuals' willingness to protest, Lawrence analyzed committed individuals who were the first to protest in Morocco. Lawrence shared the belief that Petersen (2001, p. 5) expressed, in that "understanding the effects of regime brutality on this group is important because of their role in organizing and leading street protests. If they are deterred from action, mass protests are unlikely to occur."

Based on her qualitative study of Moroccan protests in 2011, Lawrence (2013) identified a positive intergenerational effect of repression on activism. The majority of first movers came from families who experienced human rights violations by the state, and this finding lends itself to the causal inference that a family history of regime repression increases an individual's willingness to protest. Lawrence also found that state repression during the Arab Spring in Morocco was counterproductive from the government's perspective; repression actually increased "support for protest among first movers and their social networks" (p. 5).

As instrumental as these projects are in enhancing our understanding of first movers, Petersen's (2001) and Lawrence's (2013) studies looked at protests across only a single year in their respective studies and uncovered important, but narrow, mechanisms that explain first movers' risk-insensitive actions in isolated protest events.

This research constitutes the first project that sought to investigate first movers of many dissent events in the same country over a longer time period. By studying first movers over many dissent events across twenty-three years, I found that first movers often operate in small groups of highly determined, veteran dissenters who are instrumental in maintaining the structural possibility to spark mass protests. These individuals are especially important

over time because once they are first movers, they repeatedly initiate public dissent events, which increases the possibility of mass mobilization because the first movers contribute to creating a larger pool of dissent activities that all have the potential to escalate. Metaphorically, they repeatedly strike matches with the hopes that one of these attempts could spark the proverbial fire.

There is a clear gap in the literature about the micro-dynamics of the *initial* stages of dissent that can lead to long-lasting changes in a regime. To understand the micro-foundations of dissent, we must turn to individual first movers and attempt to understand why they were the first to dissent. Within the sizeable political science literature on the causes of revolutions and other forms of contentious political activity, the presence of first movers is assumed, but their motivations, considerations, and attributes go largely unexamined. Lawrence (2013, p. 6) explicitly identified the gap in the scholarly literature on first movers by stating that the “[f]ocus on first movers represents a departure from the existing literature, which largely neglects this group in favor of studying the conditions under which protests expand or contract. The presence of first movers tends to be taken for granted.”

My conceptualization and theory of first movers attempt to capture their broader motivations that led them to take first actions of dissent, actions that continue to puzzle social scientists. I hope my analysis and theory provide a complementary, yet distinct, understanding of first movers of dissent.

4.5. A Grounded theory on the making of first movers of high-risk dissent

This section presents a theory that is based on observations and trends that I distilled from my data analysis.

4.5.1. Theory

The individuals in my sample who had become first movers of high-risk dissent had been experienced dissenters who had:

- (1) Acquired informal political education and had undergone socialization among dissenters;
- (2) Been radicalized by state repression into becoming “devoted dissenters;” and
- (3) Viewed participation in high-risk dissent to be in their self-interest.

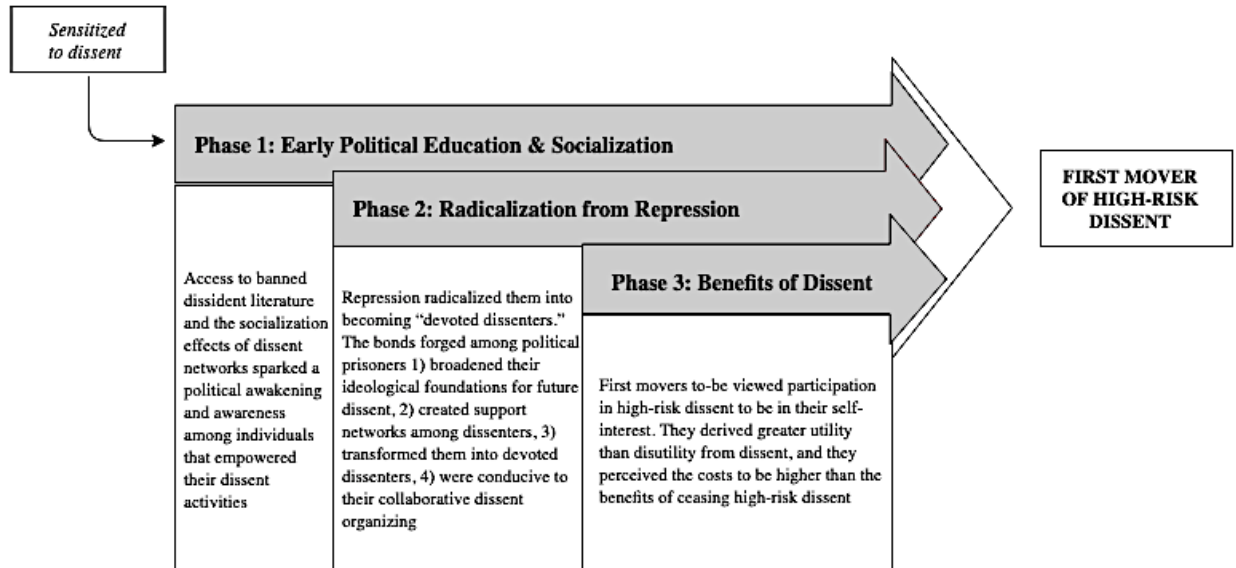


FIGURE 2. Theory diagram

This theory comprises a three-part sequential, overlapping, and cumulative process that theorizes the construction of a first mover of high-risk dissent. For a dissenter to become a first mover according to this theory, a dissenter experiences all three phases; furthermore, the three factors are not substitutable, and an ‘oversupply’ of one factor does not compensate for the absence of another. The subsequent section details the theory by following a theorized *first mover in the making* through the three phases of the theory.

The theory is activated by a catalytic event that sparks an individual's preliminary interest in political dissent. In other words, a catalytic event sensitizes an individual to dissent, which is the onramp to the theory. *Morally shocking events triggered a deep, lasting sense of moral injustice* for the first mover in the making. Moreover, such incidental grievances made individuals *disillusioned with the military* – the foremost authority of the state and their primary adversary – which made them more likely to dissent.

An individual who was socialized in a household with dissenters may be more primed to react to a morally shocking event than an individual raised in a nonpolitical household. This is because children raised in dissent households often *observed, replicated, and adopted the political values and behaviors of their parents and relatives who were dissenters*. They also gained a sense of *moral duty and responsibility to create changes in their society*, especially those who personalized the regime's repression. Furthermore, their *identity was largely defined by their parents' status as former political prisoners or otherwise dissenters*.

But for both types of individuals – those raised in households with dissenters and without – , a shock that catalyzes one's politicization is necessary to kickstart this theory.

Informal political education and socialization among dissenters is the first of the three phases in this sequential process. Triggered by a catalytic event, one's nascent political consciousness heightens one's sensitivity to perceived injustices and may develop a curiosity in acquiring informal political education. The individual may secretly seek out unauthorized literature on politics, political philosophy, democracy, human rights, and protest histories of her country, as well as connect with veteran dissenters who foster this newfound interest.

Dissident literature helped spark a political awakening among individuals in three ways. First, the content from banned literature made the readers *question the state's official narrative and legitimacy*. The consumption of dissident literature also helped *contextualize the contemporary political chaos* that unfolded around them and framed contemporary events within a longer historical arc of protest movements in her country. A third mechanism through which access to banned literature helped spark a political awakening among individuals is that first movers-to-be came to *view privations and injustices as a result of the state's corruption and mismanagement, a phenomenon that needed reform*.

In addition to seeking out and consuming dissident literature, she may also start identifying and associating with dissenters and other like-minded people who have grievances against the state. By associating with like-minded people, *individuals had access to*

more banned literature and media that reinforced their interest and enhanced their political knowledge.

Additionally, novice dissenters were heavily influenced by veteran dissenters, adopting their views, language, and political values.

These surreptitious acts of seeking out dissident literature, or connecting with aggrieved citizens in her near proximity indicate the nascent stages of one's political awakening. *These acts can serve as a signal of one's political awakening and interest to veteran dissenters, who may in turn invite her to join dissent activities and underground dissent networks.* Given the extremely repressive environment, word travelled quietly yet quickly among dissent networks about novice dissenters. Without having demonstrated one's level of risk appetite, a new recruit will unlikely be assigned to consequential organizing tasks. But by repeatedly participating in dissent events, an individual's risk appetite may grow more robust for riskier dissent activities, and this increased risk tolerance and commitment to dissent may be clearly exhibited to fellow dissenters.

Her deepened socialization in exclusive dissent networks reinforces her political awareness and can empower her to engage with increasingly riskier dissent activities. Common experiences among dissenters normally draw novice dissenters closer to one another, further entrenching them in their dissent networks. Repeatedly participating in dissent activities also exposes an individual to formal and informal sanctions against dissent. The more sanctions a dissenter is subjected to, the more committed to dissent she may become, and be perceived to be. She may experience significant validation from fellow dissenters for her risky actions, which may encourage her to take even riskier actions.

The individual is now in phase two of the theory. *State repression, especially in the form of political imprisonment, can have the unintended effect of radicalizing – rather than deterring – her to become what I call a “devoted dissenter.”* A devoted dissenter is someone who is a radically committed dissenter who learned to value the causes behind her dissent so deeply that these “sacred values” became intrinsic to her fused identity as a dissenter against the state. In the

case of the first movers in my sample, these sacred values revolved around the establishment of democracy and freedom in the country. Other values may have motivated them, but by the time they became veteran dissenters, most of their motivating sacred values were funneled and distilled into achieving freedom and democracy for their country and these values became intrinsic to their identity and the purpose behind their existence.

In prison, intense bonds are forged among first movers-to-be. These bonds are used to broaden the dissenter's political knowledge base, which builds her ideological foundation that motivates her future dissent activities. These bonds also facilitate the formations of networks of hardened dissenters who support one another inside and outside of prison. Upon release, these dissenters reconnect to plan future dissent events together.

The individual is now in phase three of the theory. The components and effects of acquiring informal political education, undergoing socialization among dissenters, and being radicalized by state repression may *ultimately bring her to view participation in high-risk dissent to be in her self-interest*. Due to the extensive experiences that the dissenter amassed up until this point, she *derives greater utility from dissent than disutility from sanctions threatened against her*. *The more experienced the dissenter is, the more expressive and non-instrumental benefits she may enjoy*. The act of dissenting allows for an individual to use her voice, express her autonomy, her opinion, and to assert her dignity as a human being in fighting the source of repression.

Moreover, a dissenter at this point may view the costs of quitting dissent to be higher than the benefits of ceasing high-risk dissent because of reputational concerns, guilt associated with quitting, inability to cut losses, and a deep sense of duty and responsibility. For these reasons, an individual who is at this advanced point in the theory is likely to experience an inability to reverse course. Quitting dissent at this point may invite immense shame and criticism, which is particularly consequential in an honor-based society.

If an individual has amassed the experiences associated with these three factors, then she is most likely a “devoted dissenter” willing to risk her own life for her political cause,

derives immense utility from high-risk dissent and leads a highly politicized existence. It is at this point when an individual most likely has initiated and organized high-risk dissent activities, making her a first mover of high-risk dissent.

4.5.2. Theoretical contribution

My theory and data present a novel narrative about first movers, suggesting that first movers are *made*, not born; they are more likely than not to be *constructed* through social processes, which my theory attempts to capture. Some first movers may indeed have “a revolutionary personality,” seek a small risk of martyrdom, or exhibit fanatical behavior at times, as suggested by other scholars. But most of the individuals in my study who eventually became first movers expressed an absence of initial interest in politics and emphasized how ‘ordinary’ they were prior to dissenting.

Existing scholarly literature on first movers point to their impulsiveness, implying that they are not acting in a thoughtful, reasoned manner. After all, “why would reasonable people place their lives and their loved ones in jeopardy in pursuit of a highly uncertain goal” (Calhoun 2012, p. 82)? These types of scholarly rhetorical questions assume that one must not be thinking clearly when she figuratively, and sometimes literally, walks into the barrel of a soldier’s gun. But my theory argues that experienced dissenters — if they have accumulated these three factors that the theory propounds — are actively acting in their self-interest by initiating high-risk dissent. This is because these experienced dissenters have arrived at a point at which the utility derived from initiating dissent outweighs sanctions associated with dissent. Furthermore, since they are so advanced in their dissent careers by the point at which they consider initiating dissent, the personal and reputational costs of quitting dissent are too high for them to extricate themselves from the dissent networks in which they are embedded, and their identities are anchored. Simply put, it is too costly to quit.

Given that first movers comprise a critical, yet “exceptional minority” of activists, much less the population, I compare first movers to experienced dissenters who did not dissent first, rather than comparing them to people who did not dissent at all. The differences between those who initiate dissent, and those who do not dissent at all are likely to be too broad and difficult to identify. Therefore, I decided to reduce the range of comparison by comparing first movers with dissidents who never initiated dissent activities. Scholars of movement recruitment often ask why some individuals, but not others, join social movements. But given that activists do not “constitute a homogenous population,” there has been a push to also “study variation between participants . . . [in addition] to study[ing] the differences between activists and nonactivists” (McAdam & Wiltfang 1991, p. 988).

Traditional political science or public policy scholarship that address similar questions to the ones this dissertation poses tend to produce discrete contributing factors or causal mechanisms – such as high unemployment among impoverished men, state sanctioned repression, or specific personality traits – to explain why some people may become extremely committed to a political cause, whether it be high-risk political activism, anti-government dissent, or terrorism. While theories of such causal mechanisms have partial explanatory power, I opted not to follow this theoretical pattern that would likely have led to constructing an overly distilled theory due to traditional methodological constraints. The combination of qualitative research methods, thick descriptions, and narratives helped construct a theory that attempts to capture the diverse ideological, social, and psychological factors that collectively motivate individuals to become high-risk political dissidents (Patterson & Monroe 1998).

By employing qualitative research methods, I was able to obtain rich descriptions of a variety of dissent activities as well as personal dissent histories. To my knowledge, there has not been a qualitative study that obtained thick descriptions of first movers’ experiences

across their dissent careers, and across multiple dissent events. This approach enabled me to capture various moral shocks, exogenous and endogenous motivations for dissent, and remarkably detailed descriptions of emotions and events that provided rich materials for my grounded theory. Furthermore, my research design allowed me to account for people's evolving and complex preferences, risk thresholds, and utility derived from dissent over time. As people in the real world do not have fixed preferences, fixed risk thresholds, nor fixed utility functions over time, I believe this research approach permitted me to capture people's attitudes and social adaptiveness towards high-risk events.

While the data was gathered in Burma, the theory can be generalizable and applicable to other country contexts; this is a matter for future testing. While there were multiple pathways and various permutations of factors that interviewees experienced as part of their process of becoming first movers, the theorized combination of factors described above was the pattern most frequently observed among the interviewees. The subsequent empirical chapters will unpack the theory with the collected data.

5. Early education and dissent socialization

“I was the first in my village to go to university. I was the only one in my family who took an interest in politics. I am what I am because I read. I read many books and I know many things and as a result I had to go to prison.” (laughing)

- Myo Aung Htun

This chapter illuminates the first phase in my theory of how first movers are made by analyzing the effects produced by early political education and dissent socialization experienced by first movers in the making. This section makes the argument *that access to banned dissident literature and the socialization effects of dissent networks sparked a political awakening and awareness among individuals that empowered their dissent activities.* Their inclusion in dissent networks reinforced their participation in dissent activities. The mechanisms through which these socialization effects materialized translated into an increased willingness for individuals to become first movers of high-risk dissent.³⁵

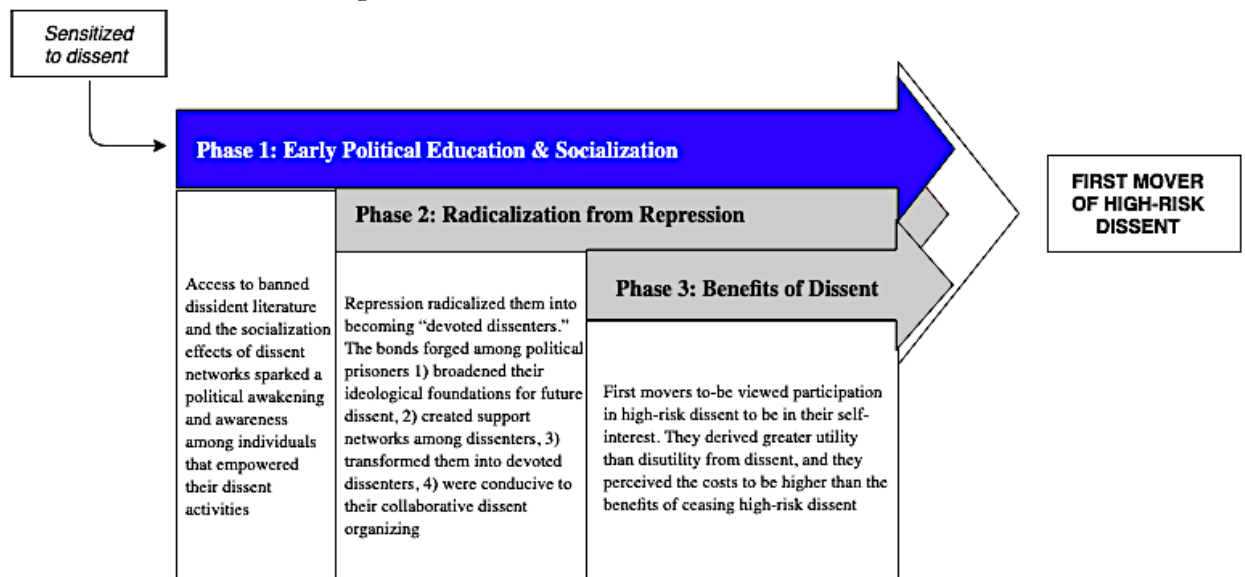


FIGURE 3. This chapter discusses the first phase of the theory

³⁵ This chapter and the subsequent two empirical chapters trace the experiences of first movers in my study. As stated in my theory chapter, the theorizations and other general statements made in these three empirical chapters are drawn from my qualitative interview data. I do not make universal claims about first movers across Burma or other contexts, although my theoretical claims can be tested in future research.

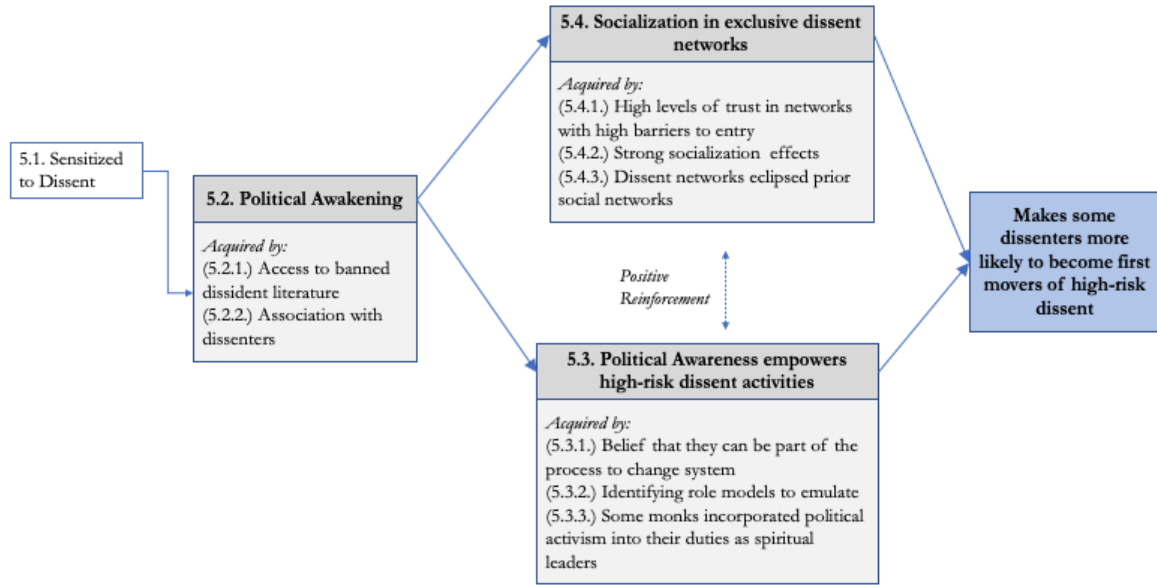


FIGURE 4. Argument of the chapter. *Note:* The numbers correspond to the sections below

5.1. Who becomes first movers?

What types of people become first movers? Under what conditions did they first begin their journeys and careers in dissent? This section engages these questions by discussing the two types of people in my sample who became first movers of dissent: children raised in households with dissenters (52% of my sample), and children raised in households *without* dissenters, and were morally shocked by politically catalytic events (48% of my sample).

TABLE 2: *Breakdown of first movers by dissenting/ non-dissenting households*

	# in my study	% in my study
First movers who were raised in households with dissenters	25	52%
First movers who were raised in households <i>without</i> dissenters	23	48%

This section first discusses the mechanisms for how some children socialized in households with dissidents were likely to become sensitized to dissent. Next, it discusses

how some people from non-dissident households also became sensitized to dissent by becoming politicized by morally shocking events, and the mechanisms through which these catalytic events drew individuals towards dissent activities. When referring to morally shocking events, I turn to Jasper's (1997, p. 106) definition of moral shock, which is "an unexpected event or piece of information which raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action, with or without the network of personal contacts emphasized in mobilization and process theories." Moral shock, a term Jasper coined, is a significant concept in sociology and social movements in part because it refers to a motivating factor for individuals' participation in protest beyond reductive factors such as political opportunity, resource mobilization, and pre-existing beliefs.

5.1.1. Political socialization in dissident households

For some first movers-to-be, their political socialization began as children because they were raised in politicized households with dissidents, where high-risk dissent was normalized. Fifty-two percent of the first movers in my study were raised in households with dissenters. I observed three mechanisms through which the socialization of children in dissent households made them likely to be sensitized to dissent and thus more likely to engage with dissent.

First, children of political prisoners often *observed, replicated, and adopted the political values and behaviors of their parents and relatives who were dissenters*. The diffusion of values from parents or other family members to children was particularly pertinent in Burmese society, given the high levels of social orientation around the family unit (Jennings & Niemi 1968).

A child's absorption of his political environment was evident in Wai Moe's childhood socialization. Wai Moe, a journalist today, scoured his father's library starting at age seven and grew up reading biographies of revolutionary leaders like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Wai Moe's father wrote for a journal called "People Star," and when the journal was banned in the mid-1980s, Wai Moe's father and his colleagues joined an

underground group of left-wing activists. Wai Moe's grandfather had a great interest in global affairs and would turn on the television or radio at night and, due to his poor vision and hearing, would ask his grandson in elementary school to repeat after the news presenters.³⁶ Sometimes, the grandfather asked Wai Moe to write out the main points on their small chalkboard for him to read at his own pace. His father's fellow activists would often congregate at his home for meals and quiz Wai Moe about the names of the various heads of states. In return, he was encouraged to ask the adults questions about politics. At age twelve, Wai Moe accompanied his father to the 1988 demonstrations. After the 1988 uprising, Wai Moe grew up organizing dissent events, which later landed him in prison for many years.

What struck me about Wai Moe's experience was that the adults encouraged him to ask questions, rather than having him simply observe the political discussions, which could have been the expected dynamic between adults and a child. So, in addition to the subversive content he was exposed to, he was also introduced to social dynamics that seemed unique to dissenters.

This example of a politicized household that instilled an interest in politics in a young child and invited him to join the adults at the table for discussions about sensitive subjects was uncommon in Burma during the time period under study. And it was precisely these types of politicized households with dissenters that normalized dissent and interest in sensitive political matters among their young children. Moreover, due to the centrality of the family unit in Burmese society, the influence of parents and family members was potent and long lasting.

³⁶ While not officially approved, foreign radio programs were somewhat accessible in Burma. Popular radio programs were the Democratic Voice of Burma, Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, and the British Broadcasting Corporation.

One particular effect of dissent socialization on the children was that they came to perceive dissent as a positive and noble phenomenon, rather than as criminal activity as portrayed by the state. Phyo Phyo Aung's experience highlights the significance of the positive reframing of political activity for children being raised in households with dissenters. Phyo Phyo Aung's father was imprisoned in the aftermath of the 1988 Uprising when she was nine months old.³⁷ Growing up, she and her mother overheard many insults from neighbors, criticizing her "criminal" father for being irresponsible, leaving his infant daughter and young wife to support themselves without an income. But Phyo Phyo Aung's mother firmly reminded her daughter that they must be proud of her father who was jailed for his "heroic and patriotic deeds"; the neighbors' insults were borne out of narrow-mindedness.

My mom didn't think my father did anything wrong. My father wanted democracy for our country. So my father did what the people needed. My mom always told me that's not criminal, so I shouldn't feel ashamed because my father is in prison. I needed to be proud of my father, proud that I'm his daughter. So if someone asks you where's your father, you can proudly say that, 'oh my father is in prison because of his participation in the democracy movement, the 8888 uprising.' My mom always told me to be proud of my father.

Rather than perceiving protesters as criminal and self-indulgent, she considered them to be patriotic, sacrificial, and noble. Phyo Phyo Aung indeed grew up admiring the father she saw only during rare prison visits and once he was released from prison during her first year in university, she clung to his advice. He permitted her to join dissent networks, including the politicized American Center Book Club, and supported her leadership roles before, during, and after the 2007 Saffron protests.³⁸ During the 2008 Nargis Cyclone, Phyo Phyo Aung joined a volunteer group that her father, Dr. Nay Win, founded called The

³⁷ Dr. Nay Win was born in 1960. Phyo Phyo Aung was born in 1987.

³⁸ The American Center continues to be a cultural outpost of the U.S. State Department in Yangon that was "open to any Burmese citizen willing to brave the police spies who haunted the area." It has a library, meeting spaces, informal clubs, and classes for Burmese to take. It brought together "Burmese of different ages and backgrounds in a way that levelled their society's normally rigid hierarchies," and was a "crucial point of contact where monks, youths, and 88-ers could exchange messages that were otherwise too dangerous to transmit." The American Center Book Club was created by 88-ers who recruited trusted youths to meet, discuss, and debate issues focused on dissent (Packer 2008).

Group that Buries the Dead, an “initiative to collect the corpses of cyclone victims for burial” (Rogers 2012, p. 200). By ignoring the regime’s demand to leave the bodies as they were, they were both arrested for unlawful association and imprisoned for over two years. When I interviewed the daughter and father separately, they each exuded pride in “working for the country together.” It was evident that Phyo Phyo Aung had adopted her father’s spirit to dissent, and to “bear the responsibility of pursuing change for her generation” as he beseeched her to do.

A second way in which children in dissent households were sensitized to dissent and thus more likely to engage with dissent was that some children of dissenters also *gained a sense of moral duty and responsibility to create changes in their society, especially those who personalized the regime’s repression*. Far from being deterred from dissent, they were actively encouraged to participate and take risks. Similar to Phyo Phyo Aung, Honey Oo’s father was arrested for his political activities when she was two years old and was released when she was fourteen years old. She told me, “I always had this feeling that our family was separated due to this military dictatorship. Only when we would be able to abolish this system would other families not have to encounter the same thing that I had to . . . Also, my father knew [dissent] was dangerous for me. But he would always tell me that all of us have a responsibility to carry in our generations. We have this historical responsibility on our shoulders to carry out.”

Honey Oo, like other children of political prisoners, had developed a sense of responsibility to “abolish this system” because the regime’s oppressive measures were personal to her; they had caused her family to be separated throughout her entire childhood. Rather than being deterred from high-risk dissent, she was inspired to take on her responsibility that her father motivated her to fulfill.

One of Lawrence’s (2013, p. 5) finding in her study of first movers in Morocco’s 2011 protests applied to my case study, which was that “activism is passed down from one

generation to the next: the Moroccan first movers often came from families that suffered past human rights violations at the hands of the regime. A family history of regime repression increases a person's willingness to engage in risky collective action." The personalization of the Burmese regime's repression of family members played a role in creating an environment critical of the regime in the households of dissenters.

Sithu Maung likened the commitment to dissent to a "virus; dissenting was addictive and infectious, but only to those who want to be infected. To be infected, you have to have something to catch this disease. Just like to get a cold, you have to have a weak immune system. To get this special virus, you need to have a sense of duty to your country. For me, I got that duty from my parents," both of whom were veteran Muslim dissenters. Other interviewees drew analogies between viruses and individuals' commitment to dissent. In describing his and Wai Moe's interrogations, Lynn Wunna said that "when [the intelligence] reviewed our records, they found that we had some history in protesting. They said, "you guys have some virus and it must be killed."

A third way that dissent socialization sensitized the children to dissent and thus increased the likelihood of children engaging with dissent was that *their identity formation was largely defined by their parents' status as former political prisoners*. In a society where people's identities were chiefly defined by their families' lineage and reputations, the status of their parents as former political prisoners largely shaped the way society viewed the children and, in turn, the way the children viewed themselves. Interviewees often stated that when they were children, adults would try to identify them by asking "who is your father" rather than "what is your name"?

I witnessed firsthand this dynamic of a former political prisoner who created an environment that normalized dissent for his daughter. Cognizant of the fact that my project does not reflect a representative sample of Burmese dissidents, I purposefully sought out

Muslim interviewees to avoid interviewing solely Burman Buddhist dissidents.³⁹ I interviewed Tun Kyi, who articulated the grievances his family endured due to discrimination against their Muslim faith. Furthermore, he detailed the smells, sounds, and atrocities he was exposed to during his seven years in prison. During our conversation, I saw a young girl, probably eleven or twelve years old, shyly poke her head out from the hallway and inch her way towards her father, who gestured for her to come sit next to him while we continued with our interview.

For the next four hours, I witnessed what looked like an apprentice learning a craft from her master craftsman. I observed her appropriately respond to her father's recounting of his experiences in prison, grimacing and laughing at appropriate times. She told me she assists with English-Burmese translation assignments for her father's work at the NGO, Former Political Prisoners Society (FPPS).⁴⁰ She learned English at Sky Age, an alternative school founded by Saw Thet Tun, a former political prisoner, that educates refugees, internally-displaced persons, and children of political prisoners.⁴¹ This girl was a prime example of a young person being heavily socialized both at home and at school amongst former political prisoners, perhaps being groomed to be a dissident of her generation.

I was observing, in real time, a father socializing his daughter with his views and experiences as a dissenter. While the country has been making incremental liberal reforms since 2011, the society largely remains socially conservative, and girls in particular are

³⁹ For practical reasons, I was unable to interview a representative sample of the country's 135 ethnic and religious groups. Recognizing that the majority of the country comprises Burman Buddhists, I intentionally sought out interviewees who were Muslim, as Muslims comprise the third largest religious group in Myanmar according to the country's 2014 census.

⁴⁰ Former Political Prisoners Society (FPPS) was founded in December 2011 with the purpose of "reiterating the call for the release of all political prisoners in Burma, and to assist the rehabilitation of ex-political prisoners in their struggle to reintegrate into society following their release."

⁴¹ Sky Age was founded in 2012 by Saw Thet Tun soon after he was released from prison. The four other executive leaders of this alternative school are Ko Ye Mya Oo, Ko Aung Myo Latt, Ko Jimmy, and Ma Nilar Thein — all former political prisoners. Saw Thet Tun and Ko Jimmy were both interviewed for this dissertation.

expected to be modest and protected.⁴² But in this double minority household – a religious minority with a father who had a prison record –, the father invited his young daughter to join in a conversation normally deemed unfit for girls. Observing the father ‘teach’ his craft to his daughter brought to life the statements that Phyto Phyto Aung and Honey Oo made about their respective fathers’ influence on them.

5.1.2. Politicizing effects of morally shocking events

More often than not, morally shocking experiences stunned the conscience of individuals and consequently triggered their interest in politics and dissent. All forty-eight first movers and twelve other dissidents in my study recalled a specific incident that triggered their interest in politics.

When asked the question “when did you first participate in any dissent activity,” nearly every interviewee answered with a specific traumatic event that shocked and enraged them, triggering them into making a hot call decision to join in some kind of dissent event. Contrary to what I expected to hear, there was an absence of a reasoned risk calculation in the interviewees’ decisions to dissent for their first time. Emotion-fueled decisions usually pushed people into their first experiences with risky dissent.

A wide range of political incidental grievances caused by extensions of the regime prompted individuals to cultivate resentment towards the government. Often, witnessing or experiencing the government’s brutal backlash on vulnerable protesters – students, monks, and other unarmed civilians – was the momentously shocking event that inspired some individuals to unexpectedly pursue a path of dissent. In Burmese society, monks are generally considered sacred, and students are perceived to hold noble positions in society. Monks and students are idealized to a point that they are considered to be the sons of the

⁴² After each of my lectures at Yangon School of Political Science, I invited all my university-age students for dinner and tea to continue our discussions. When I asked the male students why only one or two female students showed up to my post-lecture dinners out of about two dozen students, they responded that the females were expected to return home by sundown.

country. Any public humiliation, much less violence, shown towards monks will almost guarantee to trigger an extremely emotional response from civilians.

Being politicized by an incidental grievance was especially rousing for people who were not raised in dissenter households, nor had much prior exposure to politics. Most interviewees emphasized that they were just “ordinary people,” “ordinary students,” or “ordinary Burmese citizens who [did] not know much about politics because [they] were under the socialist government and they were too busy trying to survive.”⁴³ This reality is the subject of Thawngmung’s recent book, which argues that most Burmese had little time, if at all, for civic engagement during the military era because they were so concerned with “eking out” a daily living (Thawngmung 2019, p. 46). The unexpected nature of “ordinary” people’s engagement with dissent for their first time is crucial to underscore because most first movers in the study expressed that they did not have any interest in politics or protest prior to embarking on what turned out to be long careers in dissent.

Mya Aye, who had become a lifelong dissenter, embodies the point that some first movers-to-be did not have political intentions, but were rather ordinary. He is an illustrative example of an individual who participated in risky dissent because of its novelty — and not because of one’s political grievances — and got swept up in a process that radicalized him into becoming a first mover. When describing his initial motivations of joining his first protest in the aftermath of the Ko Phone Maw teashop brawl incident in March 1988, Mya Aye said, “[t]hings like protest were totally new to me and I wanted to know about them and participate in them very much. But rather than protesting out of great disappointment in the government or having knowledge of politics, I was actually just doing it out of curiosity. It was because my friends were there and I was just doing it for the adventure. This is my honest answer and the truth.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Interview with Kyaw Soe Win.

⁴⁴ Mya Aye was 22 years old at the time of the 1988 Ko Phone Maw teashop brawl.

There were two mechanisms I observed that linked catalytic experiences to individuals becoming more likely to embark on a pathway of dissent. First, *morally shocking events triggered a deep, lasting sense of moral injustice*. Incidental grievances in which the powerful was bullying the powerless seemed to aggravate otherwise nonpolitical, ‘ordinary’ citizens. I inferred from my interviews that the population was generally quite sensitive to bullies because the military regime was perceived to tyrannize defenseless, vulnerable civilians. Visceral reactions to seemingly unjust situations would later evolve into a more sustained motivation for dissent in later stages in people’s dissent careers. Min Zeya, who is one of the archetypal first movers in my study, described his experience protesting for the first time because of the visceral anger and injustice he felt towards the military after witnessing the Red Bridge Massacre in March of 1988. His description of how these now-infamous events enraged him and thus inspired him to dissent for the first time captured a common experience among other first movers:

I had no experience [with protests] before. I had no communication with the dissenters at all. I was from a rural area who came to Yangon for university study. I had no connection with such kinds of people at all. I was not in their circle either. It’s only because of resentment that I first got involved and have remained involved. I personally witnessed the Red Bridge Massacre. That happened just in front of me. They blocked the student protesters and beat them. I was in that march. I felt it personally. They used tear gas. They dragged female students by their hair. They shoved students onto their trucks. I saw the injustice. They did wrong to the students who were protesting peacefully. It was because of this resentment that I became involved in this cause. . . . As a young student, I was short-tempered back then. Moreover, students cannot tolerate any assault on any other students. I personally didn’t know the victims. However, every time I heard that a student was beaten by police, I was extremely angry. That resentment got me involved. Between the police station and the Yamanya Hall, there was traffic police officers in the round space. At night, we gathered at that place and insulted the police. They came out and beat us. We ran away. Then, we came back. We shouted at them. As such, there were tension between the students and police.⁴⁵

For Htin Kyaw, catalytic experiences are what turned the “most ordinary small businessman” into an “enemy of the state.” Within the span of a year in 1987, Htin Kyaw helplessly watched as his father’s farm was confiscated by the military, his own company nationalized, and his family evicted from their home when their cash savings were deemed

⁴⁵ A few details to explain Min Zeya’s quote. Min Zeya is from Kamawet Village in Mu Don Township in Mon State. The Red Bridge Incident took place on March 16, 1988 in Yangon, three days after Ko Phone Maw’s death. Yamanya Hall is a constituent building of Yangon University.

worthless after the 1987 demonetization policy went into effect. Remembering these series of shocking events, Htin Kyaw recalled observing how the military personally benefited from land grabs while poor citizens resorted to scavenging. Consequently, this self-described “businessman without any interest in politics” developed an “allergy” to the military’s opportunistic, corrupt behavior at the expense of citizens, and over time, he decided to live a life of asceticism as a radical dissident.⁴⁶

Another mechanism through which incidental grievances made individuals more likely to engage with dissent was the *disillusionment of the military* that the civilians experienced. While most people had grievances against the party, many people had a positive view of the military, as they were the honorable entity in place to be defenders of the country.⁴⁷ But once they witnessed the military harming citizens, they were scandalized to learn that the entrusted military betrayed the citizens, and consequently became vehemently opposed to the military. Ko Nyunt Han articulated this sentiment that was widely shared among the interviewees:

Even though we didn’t like the party, we liked the army. Even for me, I wanted to go to the military academy. This type of thinking was shared by everybody. The military was a point of pride in the country. We thought the soldiers weren’t bad. Police were corrupt. After 88, everyone’s attitude towards the army completely changed.

And once people became cynical of the military, they were able to group the military and the party together and view the whole regime as the corrupt, unjust source of their grievances.

These mechanisms were not uniquely applicable to children of non-dissenters. While children of dissenters also experienced moral shock from catalytic events and disillusionment of the military, it was not uniquely these experiences that sensitized them to

⁴⁶ For local coverage of Htin Kyaw’s radical activism, including his several one-man protests, see (Kyaw Phone Kyaw 2016).

⁴⁷ It is important to note that different ethno-religious groups had differing attitudes towards the state’s military. The 1980s were when the army’s counterinsurgency campaigns against different ethnic groups’ armed militias were at their most violent, so it may be reasonable to claim that many non-Burman Buddhists may not have shared a positive attitude towards the military.

politics; they generally had a preexisting political awareness due to their socialization within the home.

The politicizing effects of catalytic experiences materialized in different ways. Some people developed a desire to learn about politics, to join underground activist cells or armed resistance groups. Some acted on a sense of “adventurism” and their “nature of youth” and went searching for a way to “do something against the cruel government,” like a “fly looking for a foul smell.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, once individuals were sensitized to dissent – whether by being socialized in a household with dissenters, or being exposed to a catalytic event that politicized the individual – they were primed to gain a heightened sense of political awareness through exposure to banned dissident literature and dissent social networks.

5.2. Political awakening

A condition that all first movers in my sample met was a political awakening that served as a launching pad for all future dissent activities. This political awakening was sparked by the consumption of banned dissident literature and media, and by associating with dissenters. This political awareness primed them to search for ways to take some type of action with their newfound knowledge.

5.2.1. Power of forbidden knowledge: banned dissident literature

Reading banned dissident literature was the most frequently stated motivating factor for dissent among first movers in my study and one that I did not expect to have such a significant impact. Regardless of gender, level of political activity in one’s household, or one’s religious status as a monk or lay person, all first movers emphasized the critical role that books played in their decisions to repeatedly engage in risky dissent.

The combination of severely restrictive censorship laws and the regime’s aversion to liberalization prevented access to literature about Burma’s social movements and any

⁴⁸ Interviews with Ko Ko Gyi and Swe Win.

sensitive material that would potentially make citizens critical of the government. Dissident literature often comprised relatively leftist works, including histories of pro-democracy movements, biographies of famous figures who fought for equal rights for oppressed groups, and writings about democratic values and human rights. Even discussions about such subject matters, or observing holidays that celebrated pro-democracy movement leaders, dissident authors, and people associated with General Aung San were criminalized. Therefore, the lack of exposure to such content prevented younger generations of Burmese people from knowing about such topics. So when they did gain access to these materials, their minds “burst open.”⁴⁹ I identified three mechanisms through which the consumption of banned literature helped spark a political awakening among individuals.

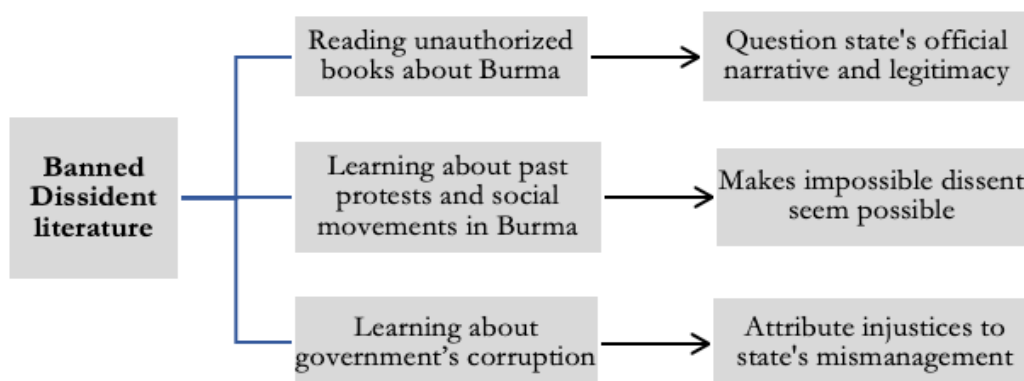


FIGURE 5. Exposure to dissident literature helped spark political awakening. *Note:* Arrows indicate causation

First, the content from *banned literature made the readers question the state's official narrative and legitimacy*. By reading books written by ethnic minority groups in Burma, Tin Maung Oo began to question the state's official narratives which had vilified some ethnic groups. Tin Maung Oo “[read] a variety of books, books about stories and ethnic traditional books when I was young, and then civic education books, religious books, translated stories, and philosophy books when I grew up. I learned from books about the stories to fight against

⁴⁹ Quote from Nay Chi's interview.

injustice and help and stand for those who are weak.” By learning that some ethnic groups should not be maligned — as the government propounded — but rather ought to be protected and defended, Tin Maung Oo started “pulling the thread” on the government’s other official messages, and he eventually became deeply disillusioned by the regime.

Readers also learned about past protests, social movements, and movement leaders in Burma’s history (both colonial and post-colonial histories) that were banned by the government. Through such content, readers gained exposure to new normative values, doctrines about basic human rights, and strategies for collective action. Learning about their country’s history of social movements opened up a new realm of possibilities for collective action against the government in contemporary times. For most Burmese, protests were simply unthinkable. *But learning about past protests encouraged people to believe that protest in the present was possible.*

Aung Htun, a dissident author, described the power that literature about past Burmese movements and leaders had on young people.⁵⁰ He explained how through books, his dissident contemporaries learned about how students and citizens who came before them were involved in movements aspiring to change their society, and how this content inspired Aung Htun and his colleagues to emulate their actions. “Books are generation carriers. My friends and I read books about the political protests in the past and the activities carried out by the senior students, which inspired younger generations. The history, days, and passion lived out by the senior students were passed down in words or in tales . . . [the books] helped me gain my political consciousness . . . there was no political force behind us

⁵⁰ Aung Htun was a student activist who had written a book on the history of student movements in Burma that landed him and at least twenty-two others in prison in 1998. While Aung Htun was in prison, his book was printed and circulated, winning him the Hellmand/Hammet grant, which is dedicated to writers oppressed around the world. An unknown entity feigning to represent the author stole the award and cash prize. During my interview with Aung Htun, he had mentioned this story. Afterwards, my interpreter and I contacted Human Rights Watch (HRW) in pursuit of Aung Htun receiving the recognition and ward. The HRW Burma team identified documents confirming that Aung Htun was indeed a 1999 award recipient. In early 2019, HRW agreed to distribute the award and cash prize to him in Yangon.

[students], contrary to what the government said. It was all based on the experiences passed down in the books that we read.”

In addition to learning about historical social movements, consumption of dissident literature also helped contextualize the contemporary political chaos that unfolded around them and framed contemporary events within a longer historical arc of protest movements in Burma. Dr. Kyi Min came from a non-political family and did not have any interest in politics. But the 1974 U Thant crisis sparked an interest in politics for Dr. Kyi Min when he was in the tenth grade. He started reading works by dissident authors such as Mya Than Tint and Lu Du Daw Amar, and then went off to college where he cautiously connected with upperclassmen over shared literary interests. These literary groups were repurposed into activist networks, unexpectedly propelling him into a career in dissent. Similar to Dr. Kyi Min, Kyaw Soe Win credits the many political and historical novels he read for providing a basic understanding of what democracy meant when the 1988 demonstrations erupted. It helped him “understand what was happening and what ought to happen” because his readings contextualized the events transpiring around him.

A third mechanism through which access to banned literature helped spark a political awakening among individuals is that first movers-to-be *came to view privations and injustices as a result of the state’s corruption and mismanagement, a phenomenon that needed reform*. The dissident literature they consumed illustrated the regime’s widespread corruption, which reframed their perception of grievances that afflicted their society. Rather than being resigned to their reality and viewing their social conditions as unchangeable, they felt that structural changes had to take place.

Ko Ko Hlaing’s reflections on his impoverished upbringing illustrates the point that consumption of banned literature could help people understand that their social conditions were indeed not immutable; in fact, social conditions ought to be changed for the improvement of people’s welfare. Ko Ko Hlaing had nine siblings, and his father’s income

– without drinking nor smoking, Ko Ko Hlaing was certain to point out – was insufficient in providing for the family. While others in similar situations may have pointed accusing fingers within the family to blame for hardships, Ko Ko Hlaing believed that the “the source of the sufferings, poverty, and business problems clearly was the dictatorship, and not my father, and I believed that we needed to change the system. My way of thinking was guided mostly by books as my teacher.”

5.2.2. Associating with like-minded individuals

Politically enlightened individuals tended to be drawn to each other, which produced effects that helped prompt a political awakening among them. By associating with like-minded people, *individuals had access to more banned literature and media that reinforced their interest and enhanced their political knowledge*. Politics was so risky to discuss that most parents forbade children from discussing it, even inside the home. So when like-minded people found each other, they clung to one another. Sithu Maung explained the deep satisfaction and instant familiarity that enveloped the experience of connecting with like-minded people: “It was like finally finding people who spoke the same language.”

Additionally, *novice dissenters were heavily influenced by veteran dissenters, adopting their views, language, and political values*. In fact, the socialization dynamics in dissent social networks were similar to those in dissent households. For first movers-to-be who were not raised in politicized families with exposure to political discussions, their political socialization was usually instigated and intensified outside of the home. Once they were sensitized to politics, they became intrigued by and, in turn, “hooked” to pursuing informal political education.⁵¹ This is partly because the novel content was extraordinarily different from the formal education that people received in schools and society at large.

⁵¹ Interview with Nay Chi.

Nay Chi described the impact of connecting with like-minded people as follows: “when I went to NLD book clubs, I met more people who were interested in politics. In the townships, only a handful of people dared to merely say the word ‘politics.’ But in the NLD, some were from this township and that township, people I would never have met otherwise. In a meeting, someone told me about a book on nonviolent resistance for democracy by Gene Sharp. My mind exploded open.”⁵² When I asked Nay Chi what motivated him to dedicate his life to dissent, he said:

I was motivated, in a word, by education. This is not formal education. It’s informal. Because of the reading circle, I understand the situation in our country, and then I read and I listen to the radio, and I start using the words that the NLD members used. Then I started to feel that this is my responsibility, like I have to do this . . . this (informal education) is the only motivation. But this motivation is actually very powerful. Because before you join the NLD, you don’t know the NLD is. But after you join, you sit down and the members say, ‘my country, my family,’ and then I start copying them by saying ‘my country, my people.’” Then we listen to the radio and realize, ‘oh, we have forced labor.’ There is this international labor organization with standards we need to follow.

Nay Chi’s statement points to the socialization effects of associating with like-minded people, as it evinces how some novice dissenters would imitate the language, and eventually adopt the principles and values beyond the face value of the spoken words.

5.3. Political awareness empowers high-risk dissent activities

Equipped with political awareness, nervous exhilaration, and a vague desire to “get involved,” individuals’ antennae for like-minded individuals went up and they tried to connect with people with similar interests, grievances and critiques of their societal challenges. All forty-eight first movers in my study had translated their political awakening and awareness into high-risk political activism, or dissent activities. This is because through their informal political education and socialization, they felt *empowered to participate in public-oriented collective action with their fellow dissenters*.

⁵² See (Sharp 1993). Sharp had originally written this book for Burmese activists in early 1990s. Since then, this book has been translated into over thirty languages. Per Dr. Sharp’s request, I personally managed the translation of this book into Korean as well as the electronic distribution of it among North Korean defectors.

Present-day journalist Kyaw Zwa Moe described the quintessential experience of how one's political awareness laid down the groundwork for one's subsequent participation in dissent activities. He, like many of his dissident colleagues, had learned about politics and Burma's history from various sources – literature, radio programs, listening to veteran dissidents – and such early political education prepared him for his political activism that became more radical over time.

One thing which really pushed me to get involved in political movements, anti-socialist regime movements, was my knowledge. I read many books, history books and political books of our country before 1988. My brother and I had many books at our house. We have gained the knowledge of our country and history and also the current situation at the time. We have knowingly absorbed how undemocratic that regime was at that time, how oppressive that regime was at the time, what kind of economic pressure everyone was facing at that time, including my parents. So, from my environment, I have been absorbing a lot of knowledge through my readings, through my parents, through my surrounding as well. I was definitely sure that the government was not a democratic government at all, very oppressive. And through the books, I found out that many political activists, freedom fighters were detained in prison as well since 1962. My grandfather and my father, they were also kept in jail. They did something wrong in the eyes of the government. I mean I have had enough angry sentiments against the government at that time. So, I was ready when 1988 uprising happened, and I joined it.⁵³

In this section, I identified three mechanisms that enabled novice dissenters to feel empowered to translate their political awareness and knowledge into participation in high-risk dissent activities.

5.3.1. Sensitization to structural grievances and empowerment

Political awareness sensitized novice dissenters to the structural problems in their society. Such structural grievances pertained to extreme inequality, relative deprivation, the exploitation of the have-nots of society, and the systematic discrimination against people who were not members of the military and political elite. Individuals with political awareness were furthermore sensitized to visible symbols that highlighted structural grievances that they were privy to due to their exposure to dissident literature and social networks. Individuals who were politically socialized came *to view chronic privations that people experienced as no longer fateful*. Rather, they came to view adversities that ordinary Burmese experienced

⁵³ Kyaw Zwa Moe was born in 1972, making him 16 years old in 1988.

as the consequences of political mismanagement and endemic corruption and *believed that they ought to be part of the process to upend and change the whole system.*

While many citizens had grievances but did not seek to create change, dissenters and particularly first movers-to-be came to view structural political change as necessary. Aung Thu Nyein was a student who became politicized by the 8888 demonstrations, went to the Thai-Burma border jungles to join the armed resistance, then eventually graduated from the Harvard Kennedy School. He reflected, “You know, I cried very often. I was driven by revenge, you know. I sought revenge. Another thing is, we need change. It was wrong for the one-party system to institute that kind of oppression. We needed to make change.” Through his experiences, Aung Thu Nyein came to believe that the country needed to undergo structural changes in order to achieve a less oppressive society.

In addition to absolute deprivations that the majority of civilians experienced, the relative deprivation between the elites and the rest of society further underscored dissenters’ belief that change was necessary. Through their dissent networks, they became very sensitized to information about the exploitative practices of the military and the lavish lifestyles of political elites, all the while students who were not members of the Burma Socialist Programme Party were ineligible to apply for scholarships, movie-goers were forcibly enlisted as military porters, farmers’ lands were confiscated, and bribery had become a second currency. One particular video footage that highlighted this extreme inequality between civilians and military/political elites was the leaked 2006 wedding video of General Than Shwe’s daughter who wore a wedding dress covered in diamonds and other precious gems. Gifts that were given to her and her husband by other Burmese elites totaled to an estimated \$50 million, when the GDP/capita in the same year was under \$300. Min Ko Naing described the poverty levels at the time.

The main thing is that everyone was suffocating under the dictatorship and there were piles and piles of growing anger and disappointment. Another main thing is that everything became rare. We had to wear the shirts that were three-times hand-me-downs, after the cyclone refugees in Bangladesh were finished with them. We went downtown and bought these used shirts and coats to wear as

“brand new.” Another good example, sometimes we could buy and eat a small sweet imported from Thailand and after eating the sweet, we always kept the candy wrappers in our notebooks in order to remember we had eaten such foreign sweets.

Visible symbols of such extreme inequality between the political-military elite and non-elites provided focal points for dissidents to become further cynical of the regime. D Nyein Lynn referred to this infamous video footage: “I saw this [wedding] movie, and I grew hateful of the regime. I had already been unsatisfied with this dictatorship because my grandfather was in prison for a long time. My father and younger uncle were also imprisoned during the 1999 movements, right before my birthday in primary school. And yet, the general’s daughter is wearing diamonds for a dress?”

The famous songwriter Naing Myanmar said:

We have a lot of poor people in this country. In 1987, we were labeled as the least developed country. No good reason; we are a resource-rich country. So the elites who extracted all these riches hid their gold in foreign banks. Dressed their daughters in diamonds. All the while, the working class mostly earned a living as sidewalk vendors. One day, some officials returned from an overseas trip and wanted downtown Yangon to look more modern. They thought the sidewalk vendors were making the city look ugly. So they just evicted all of them. How out of touch they were! My songs satirized such destruction of people’s livelihoods.

Naing Myanmar dropped out of high school because he claimed that he learned more from dissident literature and became sensitized to the structural problems behind uninformed policies with negative consequences on the livelihoods of his fellow citizens. He said he had drawn inspiration to write songs about social issues from the books that his politically active uncles gave him. Ironically, good books “were the reason why I dropped out of school . . . I thought that going to school was not going to help me in what I wanted to do. It was a waste of one’s time to go to university in Burma.”

For children of political prisoners like Honey Oo, seeking political reform was personal. When she was two or three years old, her father was arrested, “and he came back to us when I became a seventh grader — around thirteen or fourteen years old. So I have always had this feeling that our family was separated due to this military dictatorship. Only when we were able to abolish this system, other families will not have to encounter the same things that I had to.” For Honey Oo, the installation of a new government was a necessity

to prevent other families from undergoing the same tragic familial separation that her family experienced.

5.3.2. Role models inspired novice dissenters to take action

Through reading banned literature that was largely leftist, and by associating within dissent social networks, *first movers-to-be found role models to emulate in both the written word and in person.* Despite the ban on discussing or reading about General Aung San, the Thirty Comrades, past Burmese student leaders, and dissident authors, novice dissenters who read such material were empowered by their biographical stories. Beyond the Burmese context, novice dissenters found heroes and heroines in biographical narratives of American abolitionists and civil rights leaders, revolutionaries around the world across different time periods, as well as those of “ordinary people” who fought injustices and defended the powerless. When I asked Kyaw Ko Ko from where he derived his motivation for activism, the prominent student leader replied that he was inspired by revolutionaries from different countries. Kyaw Ko Ko said that he:

[R]ead biographies. Those of Bogyoke Aung San were rare or censored but I had access to some of them. I read profiles of student leaders, revolutionaries, or youths from around the world like Nguyen Van Troi, Joseph Fouche, etc. I read about those who fought against Nazis and other forms of oppression. I also read about Winston Churchill's youth. I read literature from both the left and the right. I started to look up to these subversive youth leaders. I would say I am motivated by these ideal person types through their biographies.

As the only child with a father who spent the first seventeen years of her life in prison, Phyto Phyto Aung turned to political books on her father's bookshelf starting at the age of eight because those were her “only comrades. They were my only friends. So I spent all my time with books.” Her mother worried that her daughter would also end up in prison, so she physically punished Phyto Phyto Aung as a deterrent from reading sensitive books. To evade her mother's beatings, Phyto Phyto Aung often feigned using the bathroom and spent over an hour secretly reading a book her mother disapproved of. “I was beaten all the time, but I couldn't honestly promise my mother that I wouldn't read them!”

During our interview, Phyo Phyo Aung grabbed my hand excitedly and said, “you’re my age! I want to mention my favorite book. It’s about a Chinese lady who is a revolutionary. She fought against foot binding and even joined the Chinese Army! She became my first hero, because she taught me what sacrificing yourself for your country means. She died during interrogation by the Japanese *Kenpeitai*. I cry every time I read that book . . . people in books taught me to be brave. To carry out my duty.”

5.3.3. Politically active monks

Some monks stated that they participated in political activism because the non-religious books they read helped them perceive their roles as monks differently than from the monks who read solely religious texts. While monks were instructed not to meddle in worldly affairs, the four monks in my sample did not view politics as worldly affairs. Rather, *they viewed participation in political activity as their duty as spiritual leaders to help improve the welfare of laypersons*. When I asked Ashin Kaw Thann Law what differentiated activist monks like him from other monks who did not engage in political activism, he answered that the main difference was in the types of books that monks read:

The difference would be books and your reading habit, which makes a significant difference. I read all different categories of literature including books on different religions and politics. The other monks solely focus on Buddhism and read only religious books, so they don’t see the way we do. There are too many ordinary monks who know only about religion even though they are the same age as I am. It’s like they are disconnected from the world. Having courage comes from good books as well. When you read a lot, it helps you to overcome the fear. . . . Aside from Buddha’s teachings, politics is my favorite genre to read.

Reading about politics and global affairs helped Ashin Kaw Thann Law and his colleagues to perceive their role as monks differently. He and other monks who were engaged in political dissent told me that monks usually had the most accurate gauge on laypeople’s financial situations because they would see how much people would donate when monks went on their daily alms rounds to collect offerings of food and cash. Furthermore, monks were intimately tied to the laypeople’s welfare because their meals and other provisions were wholly dependent on donations made by local laypersons. Monks

witnessed the devastating effects that superstition-inspired government policies, like the 1987 demonetization, had on citizens.

Ashin Sanda Thiri recalled: “Back then, the government had been in power for a long time, even before I was born. They lived very well. However, the rest of the nation was poor. The entire population unnecessarily had to suffer from poverty, and I thought a change in government might be the answer to the problem of such poverty. These are the main reasons why I got involved in demonstrations.”⁵⁴

5.4. Further socialization in exclusive dissent networks

There was a *strong positive feedback loop between dissent social networks and novice dissenters’ increasing levels of participation in dissent activities*. Generally, the more time novice dissenters spent with fellow dissenters, the more opportunities they had to participate in dissent activities.

5.4.1. Inclusion into highly exclusive dissent networks

After the initial politicization of an individual, s/he was usually incorporated into a social network of dissenters, whether the network was an underground association, or a loosely affiliated group of individuals.⁵⁵ But Burma’s political climate was not conducive to people trusting strangers on political issues, which generated high barriers to entry into dissent networks. Consequently, once people were considered insiders of a given dissent network, the levels of trust among one another were extraordinarily high.

Swe Win elucidates the extent to which people were distrustful of one another due to the dangers involved in accidentally trusting an informant or otherwise unreliable person:

It’s difficult to differentiate who you can trust . . . That’s why you always have a conspiracy theory, ‘maybe this guy might betray us, maybe that guy is a spy.’ We always had this problem. That problem

⁵⁴ The four monks I interviewed had organized multiple protests between 1988-2011 on issues including human rights, equality, peace, and democratic governance. They are not associated with the nationalist monks who have been closely aligned with the military.

⁵⁵ There were numerous anti-government entities, many of whom vehemently disagreed with each other’s goals, tactics, and strategies. While acknowledging that there were various rivalries and factions among dissident groups, this project will not detail the landscape of such organizations. For a discussion on Burmese dissident groups, see (Smith 1991; Fink 2001; Kyaw Zwa Moe 2018).

even followed us into prisons when we fought each other. Even after your friend had already done 5 or 10 years, you say, 'this man may be a spy.' So, whatever you do, you always start in a circle, a link through the nearest friends. Your nearest friend then another . . . So, nearest and dearest friends only. That's where you begin. In those days, we don't even have phones. Just physical contact.

Seeking out other individuals who were similarly critical of the government was itself a risky act due to the widespread presence of intelligence officers, informers, and spies. Intelligence agents closely tailed those who demonstrated interest in political activities and pressured them and their families to cease such activities.⁵⁶ For example, agents monitored Burmese civilians who visited the American Center or British Council, and then extracted information from them about other attendees. Nevertheless, despite risks, the individuals who were intent on connecting with like-minded people cautiously sought out such groups that comprised networks of upperclassmen activists, underground communist cells, informal book clubs, or groups of former political prisoners.

Another way to integrate into dissent networks was to be recruited by veteran dissenters. The high levels of suspicion of newcomers encouraged purposive and targeted recruitment. I asked one of the founders of the American Center book club, Thwin Linn Aung, how he recruited members for this group. Thwin Linn Aung, an activist from the 88 Generation, said that since the environment was so repressive, the only persons deemed trustworthy were children of former political prisoners and their friends:

Actually, that is very simple. Because this time was a very sensitive period for us, we cannot trust anybody. So, we started [recruiting] with the youths who are the kids of the political prisoners. Like Phyto Phyto Aung. Her father was a political prisoner. D Nyein Lynn's father was a political prisoner. Actually, Kyaw Ko Ko was not the first one we recruited, but we knew him. And Honey Oo, her father was a political prisoner. And other youths. Some of their fathers were not political prisoners but they are involved in the party and NLD and these kinds of things. We recruited them. And they started to recruit their friends who had potential. . . . The very core group were the kids of the political prisoners and the people who were involved in politics. Like Honey Oo, Phyto Phyto Aung and James. James is very close to one member of the 88 Generation group who is now an MP, Pyone Cho. . . . But we cannot recruit all the people. There were so many people [who were] undercover.

⁵⁶ Honey Oo: "While we were doing the [American Center] book club [in 2006-2007], we were summoned and interrogated by the authorities . . . they were trying to threaten us to discontinue going to the book club. After you have been interrogated, it is harder to go abroad. Even if you didn't do anything. They will not give you a passport or visa. So they were also watching to see if you would try to leave this country or not. Nay Chi: "The [the intelligence] would send local officers to visit my home and talk to my parents. This is very effective for the military in the past because parents worry after being ordered to tell their son he should stop going to NLD meetings. This pressure tactic worked very well."

In summary, there were two main ways in which individuals became part of highly exclusive dissent networks. One way was for individuals who had been politicized to seek out dissent networks to learn about politics and take some type of action. Another way was for veteran dissenters to purposefully recruit children of political prisoners and others deemed sufficiently trustworthy because of the assumption that such individuals would have been amply socialized to have a desire to participate. Then these networks expanded to trusted friends and colleagues who demonstrated sufficient commitment and trustworthiness. While reading and listening to banned political material was intriguing, connecting with like-minded individuals was what tangibly empowered newly politicized individuals to consider taking political actions beyond learning.

5.4.2. Socialization effects of dissent networks

There were pronounced effects of being socially immersed in activist networks, in which the novice dissenters adopted many of the values, norms, and the general dissent subculture of their networks. Firstly, novice dissenters were exposed to *liberal normative values that promoted rights for women, different religions and ethnic groups*. This is a significant point to make because the traditional and parochial lifestyles of the majority of lower/middle class Burmese were conducive to relatively siloed existences of people who had limited exposure to people different from them.

When I met Dr. Nay Win, he looked decades older than he actually was. His slim frame was worn down by three sentences to prison, the last of which he had spent with his daughter, Phyto Phyto Aung. When he was in his early twenties, he joined the underground Communist Party of Burma in the early 1980s, as he believed it was the sole political alternative to the military regime. He married in 1987, his daughter was born later that year, and he participated in the 8888 Uprising with his communist comrades. When his daughter was nine months old, Dr. Nay Win was arrested and was released in 2005. He continued to

participate and lead dissent activities, with his daughter by his side, no longer deterred by prison.

When I asked why he was first attracted to communism, he responded that reading leftist literature “opened up” his mind and those of his friends. It led him to study other religions, philosophies, ideologies, and opened up his mind to view all people as equal.

At the university tea shop, U Chit tea shop, my friends and I started to read political books together. This is the first step into politics. We were smart, and we didn’t like the government . . . books like Red Star over China, the Other Sides of the River, Edgar Snow’s books. Writings by Marx and Engel, Lenin, and Stalin . . . read many famous Burmese writers, for example Dagon Tar Yar, Bamaw Tin Aung, Thakin Mya Than, Khin Swe Oo, Tin Moe, Maung Swan Yee, they are pro-Communists, pro-socialists. We don’t like capitalism, we don’t like exploitation . . . we don’t like pressure. We need freedom. Human dignity. All people need human dignity. Food, shelter and clothes are not enough . . . and this knowledge, we learned from reading books, and books alone . . . we are all the same people. All the men and all the women are friends. I don’t like differentiating . . . he’s Muslim, and she’s Christian, she’s Buddhist. All the same. Ah, she’s Chinese born, he’s Burmese born, he’s American, no, no, no, we don’t like. We like international. There’s no country. I have no country. I have no race. All are the same. So this spirit, we learned from the books.⁵⁷

Given the high levels of restrictions and criminality of unapproved gatherings, it is surprising how frequently dissenters were able to meet to fraternize and plan for future activities. While no place was considered safe to discuss politics, there were relatively safer places in big cities and other urban areas at which people would *cautiously gather to discuss and plan dissent events*. Teashops were the most common gathering places for people of all ages and backgrounds to socialize in because they served free green tea and affordable snacks. Dissenters would hide in plain sight at crowded teashops, alongside plain-clothes intelligence officers and informers. It is essential to underscore that I am largely describing phenomena in big cities where universities are located. In remote areas, particularly in the ethnic states, quietly discussing sensitive issues at teashops would have been incredibly difficult. There was no “hiding in plain sight” in a village, or even in a small town, particularly in areas where informers were not only looking for links with the democracy movement, but also links with the rebel armies.

⁵⁷ Dr. Nay Win’s interview text was lightly edited for readability, as his health conditions led him to stutter and repeat himself. The meaning of his words has not been altered.

Since schools were frequently closed nationwide in the aftermath of protests for months or even years at a time, young people including student dissenters spent hours on end at packed teashops. Given the repressive environment of Burma, the riskiness of holding sensitive meetings cannot be overestimated. In describing how hidden transcripts mature, Scott (1992, p. 119) wrote that “social spaces where the hidden transcripts grow are themselves an achievement of resistance.”

Ant Bwe Kyaw, a well-known dissenter and author described the dynamics of disgruntled university students discussing politics at teashops:

We usually talked about political issues in tea shops in the university compound. We talked about CBP (Communist Party of Burma) and the books and publications we read were mostly leftist literature at that time. We discussed the issues informally among our friends. There were not many books and materials about democracy. We only had “Linn Yaung Che,” published by the American Embassy. The books about capitalism were rare back then. Most of the books were about left-wing literatures. We studied political science at the university. But it was Burma Socialist Programme Party’s propaganda and we studied Burmese law including the constitution as a part of political science. We didn’t like the subject. It seemed to be very good in the book. But the content of the book did not match with reality. So we tried to read books outside of the curriculum. We found books about communism, which are produced by the Burmese Communist Party and publications about democracy from the American embassy.

The American Center and the British Council, which were cultural and educational hubs supported by their respective governments, were heavily surveilled by authorities who monitored the citizens who frequented these places. The American Center and British Council provided meeting spaces and libraries for Burmese citizens to use, and circulated publications about democracy, human rights, and elections. Book vendors sold unapproved copies to interested customers, who would then circulate copies among friends.

For those who wanted to do more than read and listen to foreign news and literature, they joined secret book clubs, a longstanding tradition in Burma where colleagues would gather to read and discuss banned literature. These reading clubs often doubled as safer forums to discuss sensitive political matters. These book clubs were doubly illegal, as unapproved gatherings were forbidden, and book club members were congregating to discuss banned material. The American Center Book Club, which was formed in 2006,

exemplifies a seemingly innocuous book club created by 8888 Generation activists with the intention to recruit and train the next generation of activists.

For those who did not participate in existing book clubs because they were afraid of the “military intelligence knowing you,” as Kyaw Phone Kyaw described, they started their own secretive book clubs that met at a different activist’s home each time. They read “political books, sometimes Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s messages – she publicly recommended books that were good for young people. We took her recommendations. We met for the book club not in my house, it was too dangerous. We changed our locations all the time.” Under Burma’s dictatorship era, there was a trend of literary clubs that met in secret, serving as relatively safe forums for political discussion among groups of trusted friends and colleagues.

Activist monks allowed for them to congregate and sometimes hide in their monasteries. While monasteries were not immune from police raids, the authorities exercised some level of caution before entering monasteries. But during politically tense periods, even monasteries were subjected to unauthorized searches and lockdowns.⁵⁸

Lastly, events that celebrated political heroes and revered dissenters – alive or deceased – predictably served as focal points for dissenters. Funerals, memorials, birthdays, death anniversaries of activists and pro-democracy politicians of the past served as predictable gathering points for dissenters and activists. For example, on August 19, 2007, novice and veteran activists gathered for U Kyi Maung’s third death anniversary. U Kyi Maung was a Burmese Army officer and former politician under the military-backed Union Revolutionary Council. He resigned and later became one of the leaders of the National League for Democracy. It was at this memorial event that activists decided to march to

⁵⁸ For detailed accounts of the BSPP and SLORC regimes repressing monks for political activity, see (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners 2004).

protest the increase in petrol prices, and this march comprised the early rumblings of what escalated to become the 2007 Saffron protests.

If a culture is conceptualized as the ideas, values, customs, and the social behavior of a particular people or society, then dissenters certainly had their own culture. Through fraternizing with fellow dissenters, *novice dissenters became steeped into the dissent subculture, and adopted norms that were inverted from those in society at large.* For example, a protester was not considered a criminal; rather, she was a patriot. Having a prison record was not shameful; rather, it was worn as a badge of honor to signal one's sacrifices and commitment to a democratic future of her country. Opp and Roehl (1990, p. 521) wrote that "informal positive sanctions [from repression] (prestige, approval, or attention granted to persons who have been exposed to repressive acts) may be generated." A quote from Lynn Wanna's interview animates Opp and Roehl's theorization of how repression could generate positive sanctions: "[political prison] only encouraged my commitment to continue. It even gave me some wings. There is a tradition in our political activist arena; once you are arrested, you got a promotion."

Because they did not comprise a monolithic group, dissenters developed various subcultures within the groups in which they operated. There were many factions due to differing preferences of the processes and intended goals of dissent among dissenters: armed resistance versus nonviolent; regime change versus institutional subversion; and so on. But all of these factions were embedded within a larger culture of dissent.

Opp and Roehl (1990, p. 526) wrote that "persons integrated in protest-encouraging networks who are exposed to repression will also be faced with strong positive sanctions from their fellow members." I found this to be the case in my study; as dissenters repeatedly engaged in risky dissent, they were met with affirmation and praise among fellow dissenters. By becoming embedded in this dissent subculture, their identities were being reshaped

where the work of dissent – fighting injustice, serving society’s poor, and fighting the regime – became intrinsic to their identities and the purpose behind their existence.

5.4.3. Dissent social networks eclipse prior social networks

During the initial stages of connecting with dissenters, individuals merely added activists to their existing social networks. But over time, with the positive feedback loop that the dissenters’ social networks had on their commitment to dissent, their *prior ties to people who did not share their newfound ideological convictions were gradually replaced by dissent social networks.*

For first movers-to-be, politically active individuals with a shared interest in creating change for their society came to comprise the bulk of their social networks. By being immersed in activist networks, the newer dissenters became increasingly steeped in the values, activities, and subculture of dissent. Spending more time with dissenters and discussing the noble causes they were fighting for tended to make concerns of ‘ordinary life’ seem relatively insignificant, which motivated dissenters to spend even more time with fellow dissenters. As such individuals gained reputations as dissenters, non-dissenters tended to distance themselves from them whilst fellow dissenters and supporters drew closer to each other. For example, significant others often ended relationships with activists, and families were broken due to the pressures created by the imprisonment of dissenters. In his unpublished essay, Bo Kyi wrote, “Many former political prisoners find themselves without prospects for a happy future because they had to say goodbye to lovers, spouses, and families when they were put behind bars” (2017). These dynamics that unfolded in the dissenters’ social networks only reinforced their increased socialization among dissenters.

By becoming increasingly embedded in dissent networks and culture, novice dissenters participated in more dissent activities. As novice dissenters fraternized with fellow dissenters, they shared information about upcoming dissent events to assist with and participate in. In the absence of internet and cell phones, dissenters created elaborate offline

systems to quickly spread messages, especially in Yangon. Offline communication networks were critical to organizing events, and newly minted dissenters were often assigned the task of ‘runners,’ who would ‘run’ messages between specified individuals or places. These low-level risky activities embedded new recruits into such networks, and as new recruits repeatedly engaged in dissent activities, they were entrusted with riskier assignments.

Repeat participation in dissent activities was often coupled with repeat exposure to informal and formal sanctions on dissent. In addition to violence and physical repression, the authorities would harass family members or even take them hostage for negotiating leverage, spread libel about dissenters, and pressure their friends into disassociating with them. (For a full list of the risks involved in dissent, see Table 1.) Due to the fear of association with dissenters, colleagues and even some family members would distance themselves from them. For first movers-to-be, such repeat exposure to dissent and repression only hardened their resolve, furthering the likelihood of their becoming first movers. *The formal and informal sanctions placed on dissenters reinforced the message to dissenters that the military regime was truly unjust, and that they must be upended.*

Min Ko Naing, the most prominent dissident in Burma’s modern history after Aung San Suu Kyi, discussed how among dissenters, the more experienced ones with personal histories of state repression recognized and supported one another. And such individuals tended to be those who read banned literature widely. His comment emphasizes how exposure to literature and associating with fellow dissenters intensely socialized dissenters.

In our time, we were like the ones who climbed to a high place and looked at the surroundings very well. We read a lot and we studied what’s happening all over the world. The majority of the students who did not come forward to the front are not like us. Well, this is difficult to say. Those students who participated in the front, after being cracked down on, became a bit hesitant to start again. But we were different because we had good networks and we were focused on moving forward. And later there were two different groups. Those who recognized each other depending on how much they suffered or experienced repression and those who did not have such history. It is like leaders and followers who just know to lead or follow the crowd.

5.5. Drop-off points for dissenters who did not become first movers

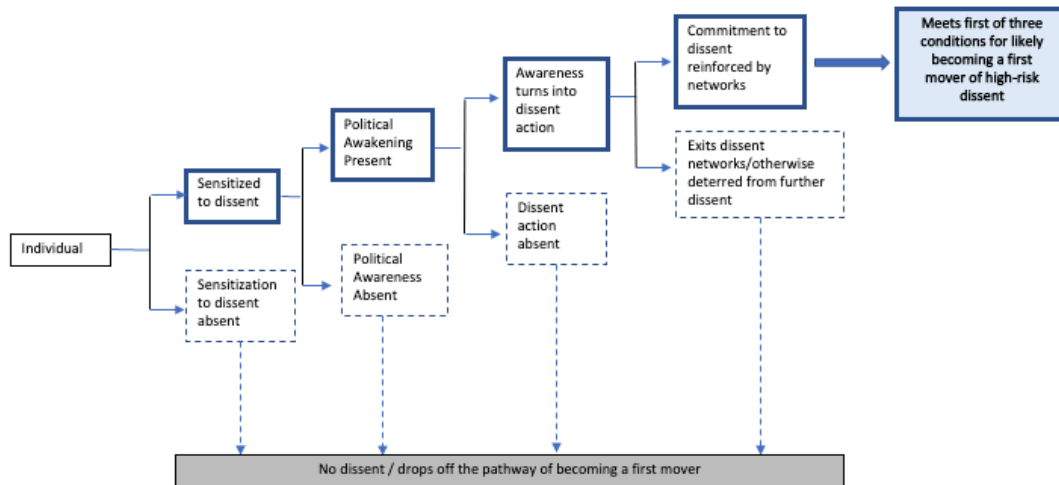


FIGURE 6. Drop-off points from pathway of becoming a first mover. *Note:* This diagram shows two pathways: the series of bolded boxes show the pathway for meeting one of the three theoretical conditions of becoming a first mover, as detailed in this chapter. The other pathway, indicated by a series of dotted boxes, show four drop-off points at which an individual can self-select out of the pathway of becoming a first mover.

This first empirical chapter has attempted to make the argument that early education and socialization was the critical first step for an individual to be more likely to become a first mover of high-risk dissent. This section will detail the four theorized drop-off points from which an individual can self-select out of the pathway of becoming a first mover of high-risk dissent.

The first theoretical drop-off point is when an individual does not develop a sensitization to dissent. The individual could be raised in a household with dissenters, in which high-risk dissent was normalized, and even encouraged. Alternatively, an individual could have been exposed to a morally shocking event, or another form of a politically catalytic event, and yet is not politicized. This could be because the individual was directly or indirectly deterred by state repression or did not perceive such events to be relevant to one's life.

An interviewee who spoke under anonymity stated that she wanted to protest when she was a medical school student because she witnessed structural injustices in the hospital

on a daily basis. As an orphan, she lived with her grandfather who gathered all of his savings to pay for his only grandchild's medical school tuition. She said that medical students were usually the last to protest, "even after the engineering students," because the tuition was so high, and they would be risking very prestigious careers. She participated in a "silent protest," where medical students refused to attend lectures. Three or four students out of 150 showed up at their lectures. Incensed, the administration sent letters to all of the students' parents, accusing the students of missing lectures because of "immoral activities, such as doing drugs, drinking, and gambling." All the parents and guardians were also summoned to meet the rector.

Her grandfather wept in his meeting with the rector. Knowing that protesting the government would get her expelled, the interviewee's grandfather pleaded with her not to protest. The interviewee told me, "I had the courage to protest the military dictatorship, but I did not have the courage to break my grandfather's heart. So I never missed another class. I never protested anything again." Her explanation for not protesting is one of many reasons for how an individual may be discouraged from protesting due to the government's deterrent mechanisms.

The second theoretical drop-off point is when an individual who had developed a sensitization to high-risk dissent does not experience a political awakening or develop political awareness. A morally shocking event could have triggered a deep sense of injustice, or resentment against the government, but once these visceral reactions dissipated, the individual no longer had a desire to learn more about politics and the structural conditions behind such catalytic events for several reasons. Alternatively, an individual could choose not to pursue a nascent interest in politics because the individual has overriding priorities that does not allow one to engage in politically risky behavior. Responsibilities such as providing for one's family or maintaining one's reputation in a profession that is tied to the

government's approval could be two utilitarian reasons for why an individual chooses not to pursue learning more about politics.

The third theoretical drop-off point is when an individual with a political awakening fails to transform that awareness into action. There could be several reasons for why an individual with political knowledge does not take risky dissent action. First, it could be because it *is* incredibly risky. Given the types of formal and informal sanctions against dissent, most people were deterred early on by the state's threats and deterrents against dissent activities. There was usually attrition in the membership of student movement groups and book clubs, which was mainly due to individuals being deterred from continuing with such activities.

Nay Chi described how intelligence officers followed people who attended NLD meetings in the late 1980s, and local officials would pay home visits to protesters, pressuring parents to stop their children's "unruly" behavior. Second, an individual with political knowledge may not have taken dissent action because s/he believed that dissent action was not the most effective way to create change in the system. Such an individual may have chosen a different method of creating scalable social change that posed fewer risks to oneself. Aung Kyaw Moe is a clear case of an individual who wanted to create change from within the system. Having never protested, he studied abroad in multiple countries, amassing political and social capital at home and overseas to build programs to create social change in Burma. In 2016, he founded the Center for Social Integrity, a nonprofit organization "with a focus on long-term peace building...that is dedicated to fostering pluralism, diversity and inclusion." He explained to me:

You cannot go against an elephant if you're an ant. For me, strategically they (the military) were too strong. They are inhuman. And I'm supposed to play fair with that? Do I have the capacity? I'm not talking ill of protesters; we need people like them. We need different kinds of people to move the society forward from different angles. So I wanted to put my hand on an angle where I am better positioned to serve; whereas others will take bigger risks and may end up in prison.

A fourth theoretical drop-off point is that an individual with political knowledge and some experience in dissent activity no longer continues with dissent. There are several reasons for why this could be the case. While exposure to dissent networks for first movers-to-be tended to intensify their commitment to dissent, such exposure could lead someone to disengage from dissent. Perhaps one grasped the true severity of state repression after witnessing or experiencing repression firsthand. Alternatively, one could have been co-opted by the military by being persuaded to become a paid informant against dissenters for the military. Economic incentives for military co-optation was a common and effective tactic particularly for dissenters from poor households. Along similar lines, the military could have offered enticing business opportunities to an individual in exchange for her discontinuation of dissent.

5.6. Limitations of the chapter

There are several theoretical and empirical limitations to this chapter, three of which I will address in this section. The first limitation of this chapter is its inability to answer the question of why some people, and not others, have the desire to turn their political awareness into political action. In other words, in a given pool of people who consumed banned literature and other forms of dissident media, why did some people search for ways to take action, whereas others did not?

I have some initial hypotheses for why some people with political awareness, and not others, had a desire and acted on the desire to take some form of action. They may have a higher risk tolerance, or a more pronounced penchant for adventurism and novelty. They may have psychological traits, such as higher levels of intrinsic motivation that make them more proactive than others. While this is a crucial question to answer in understanding the shaping of first movers in my theory, I was unable to adequately engage this question. This question would be a theoretically significant question for future research.

The second theoretical limitation is rooted in the question of why only some children, and not others, in the same dissent household became first movers, assuming that all the children in a given household had exposure to the same household environment. I attempted to address this question by planning to interview the non-dissenting siblings of first movers. Initially, the non-dissenting siblings of first movers were my negative cases. However, as stated in my methods chapter, I had a challenging time accessing these individuals. After every interview with a dissenter, I asked if I could call one's siblings who did not dissent. With the exception of two people, I was met with resistance. I was told that the siblings were too busy or too far away for an interview. Moreover, I was often told by the male interviewees that their sisters did not dissent because they were females, and protests were too dangerous for women to get involved in. While I was not entirely convinced by these second-hand explanations, I *was* convinced that I needed to target a different subgroup for my negative cases.

Of the two non-dissenting siblings of first movers I did interview, I sensed a hesitance, bordering embarrassment, for being interviewed about why they did not protest while their siblings did. Given that many of the pro-democracy activists and protesters are now viewed positively in the nascent democratic country of Burma, I could understand why their siblings may think that a researcher who studies high-risk dissenters may perceive their inaction negatively, even as cowardly. After being able to conduct only two interviews with non-dissenting siblings of first movers, I decided to change my negative cases to dissenters who did not become first movers. Consequently, I was unable to sufficiently address this question for why some siblings – and not others – who were socialized in the same households did not become first movers. This question remains to an empirically and theoretically significant question for future research.

The third limitation of this chapter is why some people from non-dissenting households, and not others, were catalyzed by morally shocking events to learn more about

politics and take some action. I tried to address this question during fieldwork, and also through archival research. However, I was unable to find surveys of any sort that captured baseline political attitudes or personalities of the population in order to measure any relevant differences between the population at large and the dissenters. I asked survey experts in Burma, and the five individuals I asked all confirmed that studies to capture such data before 2011 does not exist to their knowledge. The lack of available demographic and public information is most likely due to the military not having conducted such surveys, nor allowing outsiders to conduct such research during the time period under study. While this is a critical question to address for future research, this is not one that this project was able to sufficiently engage with.

5.7. Conclusion

This empirical chapter discussed the first of three steps of how first movers are made by detailing and analyzing the effects of early political education and dissent socialization that first movers-to-be experienced. To do so, I first described the two types of people who embarked on the pathway of becoming first movers: (1) some children raised in households with dissenters and (2) children from non-dissenting households who were politicized by morally shocking events. These individuals comprised the pool of people from which first movers emerged. I then detailed the early education and socialization that all first movers in the making in my study experienced through exposure to banned dissident literature and dissent social networks. Specifically, I detailed mechanisms for how such early education and socialization sparked a political awakening in all first movers in my study, and how they transformed their political awareness into high-risk dissent activities. For first movers-to-be who remained on the pathway of dissent, their commitment to high-risk dissent was reinforced by the dissent social networks in which they were embedded.

Through early political education and socialization among dissenters, novice dissenters developed new networks, ideologies, values and norms that started to transform

their motivation for dissent activities. Whereas the initial motivations to participate in dissent activities were usually some visceral reactions to shocking events (hot calls), those initial motivations over time evolved into more sustaining motivating factors such as loyalty to their colleagues, and dedication to new principles and values that became intrinsic to dissenters' identities.

Next, I discussed the four theoretical drop-off points for individuals who self-selected out of the pathway to becoming a first mover of dissent. Lastly, I raised three theoretical and empirical limitations to this chapter and discussed my limited and insufficient attempts to address them. These three questions remain as theoretically significant questions for future research.

This empirical chapter is the first of three chapters that draws from rich, qualitative data from the field to tell the story of how first movers are made, not born. After having specified the mechanisms for how informal political education and socialization made some individuals more likely to become first movers of high-risk dissent, the next chapter will discuss how state repression radicalized some dissenters into becoming “devoted dissenters.” Put differently, state repression failed to deter dissenters; rather, it continued to shape some of them into becoming radically committed dissenters, making them more likely to become first movers of high-risk dissent.

6. Repression and radicalization

*“While life in a cell is hell, it also has the power to turn passive resisters into activists
and activists into leaders and statesmen.”*

- *Kyaw Zwa Moe*⁵⁹

“The [prison] cell is a place where you go to be baptized to become a political activist or politician.”

- *Swe Win*⁶⁰

This second empirical chapter gets to the most physical, visceral aspects of my research question. The question that this chapter asks is, how did repression – specifically political imprisonment – make dissenters more likely to become first movers of high-risk dissent? The main *argument of this chapter is that the repression that first movers-to-be faced as political prisoners did not deter them from future dissent, as the regime intended. Rather, state repression in the form of political imprisonment ultimately radicalized them into becoming what I call “devoted dissenters.”* Devoted dissenters are radically committed dissenters who learned to value the causes behind their dissent so deeply that these “sacred values” became intrinsic to their fused identities as ardent dissenters against the state. In the case of the first movers in my sample, these sacred values revolved around the establishment of freedom and democracy for their country.

To make this argument, I draw heavily from interviews to describe and analyze mechanisms for how repression made dissenters more likely to become first movers of dissent. For first movers-to-be who were imprisoned, they forged intense bonds among other political prisoners through shared, painful experiences. The development of these

⁵⁹ (Kyaw Zwa Moe 2018, p. 5).

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

strong bonds had four strong implications on their pathways to becoming first movers. First, they *broadened their knowledge base that created the ideological foundations that would motivate their future dissent activities*. Second, political prisoners – once they were released – *developed uniquely helpful networks of hardened dissenters who supported one another emotionally, financially, and politically*. These informal networks of former political prisoners were valuable because hardships for political prisoners continued even after they were released. Third, the *bonds rooted in shared painful experiences produced “identity fusion” that made former political prisoners willing to die for their cause, making them what I call “devoted dissenters.”* Fourth, the intense bonds that political prisoners formed amongst one another were significant because they *allowed dissenters to channel their commitment, shared painful experiences, and a sense of oneness into practical planning and operational capabilities to organize dissent events together*.

This chapter will focus on political imprisonment as a sharp example of repression that tended to backfire on the state among first movers in the making. To be clear, the mechanisms that I identify and analyze to explain how repression radicalized dissenters into more likely becoming first movers apply to first movers only; I am not generalizing my statements to all former political prisoners.

While there were various forms of repression employed by the state to deter dissent, I decided to focus on political imprisonment as a specific example of repression for this chapter for two reasons. First, the conditions of political imprisonment in Burma, especially during the period that this project analyzes, were particularly harrowing when judged by international norms.⁶¹ The next section will briefly detail such conditions. Second, I found that 39 out of 48 first movers in my study (81% of first movers in my sample) were former political prisoners, most of them having been sentenced multiple times to prison. This was a surprising finding because my subject sampling was not based on their former political

⁶¹ See (Assistance Association of Political Prisoners 2001; Freedom House 2010; ‘In Insein’ 2003; Martin 2013).

prisoner status. As discussed in my Research Design and Methodology chapter, I employed a combination of purposive sampling and respondent-driven sampling (Tansey 2007). I employed this sampling strategy because my target population for my study comprised a hard-to-reach population that was difficult to randomly sample. Therefore, this shared experience among first movers in my study may have some explanatory power in individuals becoming first movers of high-risk dissent. Focusing on a widely feared sanction against dissent allowed me to distill the risk factor of my research question, and robustly investigate how this frightening deterrent failed to dissuade – but rather further motivated – the first movers in my study.

The high occurrence of having a personal history of political imprisonment among first movers in my study begs the question of how common political prisoners were in Burma between 1988-2011. To this day, there is an absence of publicly available comprehensive data on political prisoners in Burma produced by the government. In fact, the regime during the SLORC era repeatedly denied the existence of political prisoners in the country. But various sources revealed that there were thousands of political prisoners held during this time. While their data is incomplete because they are a civil society organization operating within political and resource constraints, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners estimates that there were approximately 1,100 – 3,000 political prisoners at any given time between 1988 and 2010.⁶²

Given the deterrence effect that the often life-threatening conditions of prison had, there was a high attrition rate among dissenters for future dissent participation. Inferences

⁶² Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) estimates that there were 3,000 political prisoners throughout the country by 1990. In 2000, there was an estimated 2,500. The figure dropped to 1,100 in 2005-2006, and then doubled after the 2007 Saffron protests. In 2008, there was an estimated 2,123. As of 2010, AAPP documented 2,193 political prisoners. AAPP states that they are unable to document in ethnic areas and does not claim comprehensiveness in their research or statistics because of the challenges they face in documenting such sensitive information. See (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners 2016, p. 23). AAPP's estimates are widely cited in reports on Burmese political prisoners produced by international NGOs and foreign government agencies.

have been drawn on prisoners' repeat dissent participation from the data that is available. For example, a 2016 AAPP report found that at least one-fifth of former political prisoners they interviewed continued with political activities after their first imprisonment.⁶³ They found that:

The experiences of abuse and unjust detention spurred many of the ex-PPs further in their commitment to ensuring a free and democratic Burma . . . the ex-PPs' continuation of political activities has acted as a barrier to reintegration, creating family tensions if the family did not wish the ex-pp to continue with his/her political actions. In addition, continued political activism has also exacerbated social exclusion; interfered with employment; and ultimately led to re-arrest and imprisonment. These are risks the ex-PPs have been willing to take in order to realize their goals, as one ex-political prisoner described: 'the goal is to achieve real democracy, to keep fighting until we get it.' (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners 2016)

At the heart of this chapter is this quote above: after having experienced what had been described as "hell on earth" for dissenters, why did former political prisoners continue with risky dissent, only to exacerbate the extremely challenging barriers to reintegration into society upon release from prison?

More likely than not, we will not know anytime soon the actual percentage of political prisoners upon release who continued with political dissent. But what is important to know is that political imprisonment deterred the vast majority of political prisoners from publicly dissenting after their first sentence. However, a small percentage of people were not only undeterred but were further motivated to become even more committed to future dissent activities, to the extent of even organizing public dissent events, making them first movers. Most of the first movers in my sample fell into this category.

⁶³ I must underscore a caveat behind this statistic. There is certainly a sampling bias in interviews conducted by the AAPP, or any other entity that interviews surviving political prisoners in Burma with the intent to draw generalizations of the overall political prisoner population. The interviewees must be alive, identifiable, accessible, mentally coherent, and willing to be interviewed.

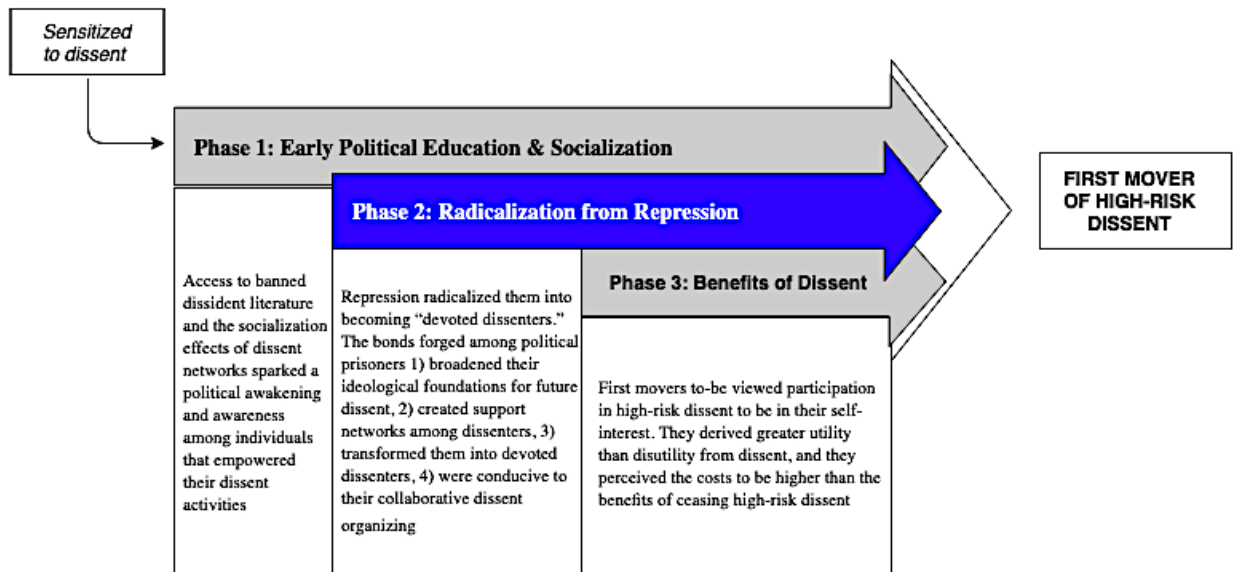


FIGURE 7. This chapter discusses the second phase of the theory

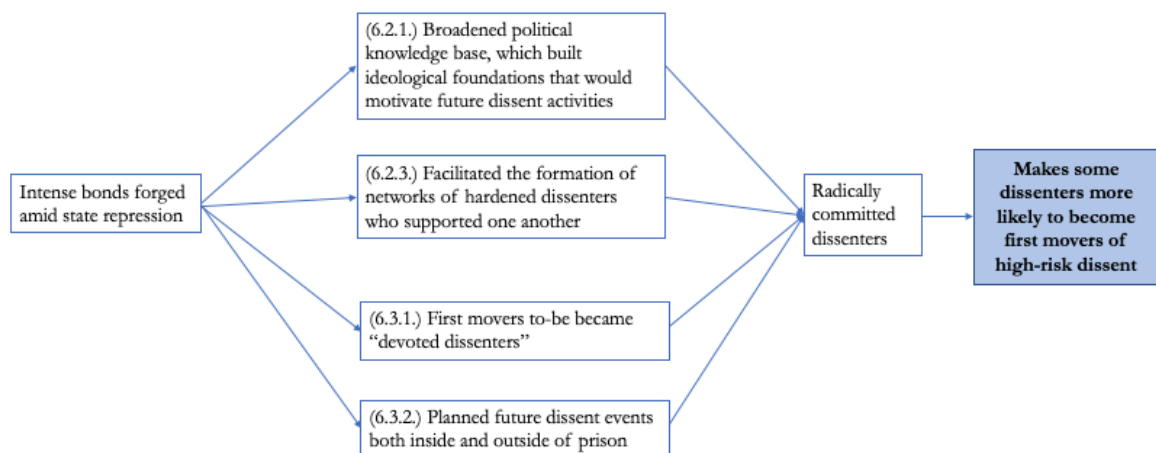


FIGURE 8. Argument of the chapter. *Note:* The numbers correspond to the sections below.

6.1. Hell on earth: prisons in Burma

This section will provide a brief overview of the terrible conditions of Burma's prisons between 1988-2011. The purpose of doing so is to clearly describe the risks that the first movers in my study knowingly took when participating in and organizing political dissent activities.

As of 2009, Burma had 43 prisons, an unknown number of interrogation centers, and over 50 labor camps. Among them, Insein prison in Yangon was the most infamous

one, also known as the “darkest hell-hole in Burma.”⁶⁴ Their detention and incarceration facilities have been notorious for exceptionally poor conditions. Extremely poor hygiene, sanitation, healthcare, insufficient provision of clean food and water, overcrowding, and the widespread mistreatment of political prisoners created very challenging environments for political prisoners.

Political prisoners were sent to the same prisons as common criminals but were usually kept in separate cellblocks, and treated as traitors; there were no separate political prisons in Burma. Through ‘special treatment’ that was reserved for political prisoners, the dissidents were reminded on a daily basis that they were not only prisoners, but *political* prisoners. They were different. For first movers-to-be, such targeted and unfair repression hardened their resolve to change the regime that operated such an unjust and repressive system, punishing those who yearned to bring positive change to the country.

In the 2012 documentary titled “Into the Current: Burma’s Political Prisoners,” Bo Kyi reflects on the horrors imposed onto political prisoners by stating that “the military regime want[ed] political prisoners to be useless after they are released.” While in prison, the state tried to disable the prisoners’ physical, mental, and psychological strength. Physically, they tried to break them through hard labor and torture. Psychologically, they tried to make prisoners lose all sense of humanity, dignity, and mental stability by caging them in dog kennels (sometimes alongside vicious, starved dogs), placing them in solitary confinement for years, and using a variety of sadistic measures to drive them to a point of insanity and even suicide.

The state also punished families in various ways. For instance, they would transfer political prisoners to prisons that were hundreds of miles away from their families to make family visits nearly impossible, especially for poor families. If the prisoner was the

⁶⁴ See (‘Inside Burma’s Insein Prison’ 2009).

breadwinner, then his/her family would be deprived of an income. Family members were often terminated by their employers due to the fear of reprisal for employing family members of political prisoners. A combination of all these strategic tactics led to the disintegration of many families of political prisoners due to the consequent financial and psychological burdens of the family member's imprisonment.

The regime used torture as a widespread and systematic tool to punish and extract information from political prisoners.

Almost all political prisoners are beaten during interrogation. Some are subject to extreme physical assaults resulting in internal bleeding, unconsciousness and sometimes death. Beatings include being punched in the face, kicked in the head, beaten with rifles, sticks, and iron bars . . . electric shocks, burning . . . sexual abuse . . . those who survive the beatings are often left permanently maimed. Injuries sustained from torture include paralysis, partial and full hearing loss, fractures and brain damage. (Bo Kyi & Scott 2011, p. 13)

In addition to physical punishment, prisoners were subject to deprivation of food, water and sleep; various forms of psychological torture including threats of harm or assassination of family members, and solitary confinement. Min Ko Naing, the most prominent democracy activist after Aung San Suu Kyi, was kept in solitary confinement for nearly 16 years.⁶⁵ During our several conversations, Min Ko Naing shared stories of how he used to talk to insects and ants that crawled through his cell in order to prevent himself from going insane and to remind himself that he still had a voice, quite literally. He became so attached to a cat that used to move around the prison that upon learning that it died one day, he wept alone in his cell. Political prisoners in solitary confinement were kept in their cells from 22 to 24 hours a day, often shackled while in their own cell to prevent them from physical exercise and to keep them in stress positions.

In addition to dissidents who were imprisoned, countless people were detained for short periods of time and tortured. Those who were detained and tortured but were not imprisoned are not included in political prisoner estimates by AAPP. The effect of these

⁶⁵ For more details on the torture methods and other forms of punishment that the prisons employed on political prisoners, see (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners 2005).

short, at times arbitrary, detentions was the instillation of a deep, widespread fear among the civilian population as a whole, reinforcing the warning message that anyone can be arrested at any time (Bo Kyi & Scott 2011).

Political prisoners were also sent to labor camps to carry out hard labor for various state development projects. Conditions for labor camps were “harsh and life threatening,” due to the lack of sufficient food, water, healthcare, extreme weather, and dangerous working conditions. A notoriously dangerous assignment for prisoners was to work as human shields for government soldiers and as human mine sweepers.

6.2. Membership-only: political prisoners ‘club’

Political prisoner status gained dissenters “membership” into an exclusive network of some of the most radicalized dissenters in the country. Once a dissenter was arrested and imprisoned, s/he “got a promotion” in the eyes of activists because imprisonment signaled one’s serious commitment to dissent. It was through these concentrated networks of “promoted” dissenters that political prisoners learned from, taught, and deepened one another’s commitment to dissent. Some interviewees likened the networks of political prisoners to university alumni networks; once two strangers learned they were both political prisoners at some point in Burma, they instantly developed a bond between one another.

Whitehouse et al. (2017, p. 44292)⁶⁶ found that:

[S]haring painful experiences produces ‘identity fusion’ – a visceral sense of oneness – which in turn can motivate self-sacrifice, including willingness to fight and die for the group...Identity fusion (can stem from) sharing experiences, especially dysphoric (painful and frightening) ones, with group members . . . Dysphoric experiences may become entrenched as self-defining memories that similarly define fellow group members. . . . This mechanism of group solidarity is inherently more extreme, and powerful, than oft-cited forms of group commitment such as identification, which have been reliably associated with collective euphoria and group performance. (Whitehouse et al. 2017, p. 44292)

Political imprisonment tended to create this “sense of oneness” among Burmese political prisoners. Ironically, the very experience that was supposed to break dissenters and

⁶⁶ The psychological concept of identity fusion was coined by William Swann and his co-authors (Swann et al 2009).

deter them from ever considering dissent again was the very reason behind reinforcing political commitments among hardened dissenters.

Bo Kyi (2010) captured the effect that “dysphoric experiences” had on cementing permanent bonds among prisoners. “For those of us who share that experience, it creates an unbreakable bond between us . . . we heard each other’s screams under torture . . . we will never turn our backs on each other, or our friends and colleagues in prison” (Rogers 2012, p. 171).⁶⁷ While the “dysphoric experiences” from prison did fuse their identities, this fusion mechanism did not materialize by motivating the first movers-to-be to take individually costly actions only for their group members. Rather, the *first movers-to-be in prison with fused identities became what I call “devoted dissenters” whose sacred values of freedom and democracy became intrinsic to their identities and motivated them to fight for a freer country for all Burmese — and not just on behalf of former political prisoners — at high personal costs.*

Strong bonds, or comradeship as many interviewees described, within political prisoner networks had a positive impact on individuals’ likelihood to become first movers of dissent through two specific mechanisms. First, they *broadened their knowledge base for developing the ideological foundations that would motivate their future dissent activities.* Second, political prisoners – once they were released – *formed uniquely helpful networks of hardened dissenters who supported one another emotionally, financially, and politically.* Such networks, given the absence of state rehabilitation services, were significant because hardships for political prisoners continued after they were released from prison.

6.2.1. Political imprisonment: the education of a lifetime

Informal political education inside prison gave people an ideological foundation for their future dissent activities. Many first movers’ first experience in protesting was often motivated by ‘hot call decisions’; they were emotionally driven and triggered by incidental

⁶⁷ Bo Kyi’s quote was cited in “Lifting Burma sanctions will not silence the screams,” in *The Nation*, October 31, 2009. But the online link is defunct, so I am citing Ben Rogers’ book, which also cited the primary source.

grievances. But the political education gained inside prison provided robust and lasting ideological foundations for future dissent. Put differently, *first movers-to-be were no longer driven primarily by emotion, but by ideology and lived experiences*. This effect was particularly significant for some people whom I refer to as accidental activists. Accidental activists are those without strong political leanings who were swept up in mass arrests during protests and ended up becoming devoted dissenters due to their exposure to state repression and networks of political prisoners.

All the first movers in my study who had spent time in prison emphasized how much they learned during their imprisonment. This was a counterintuitive finding for me because as described earlier, Burmese prisons were likened to a hell on earth, where prison authorities were intent on incapacitating the prisoners' intellectual capacities and "destroying their souls."⁶⁸ Tun Kyi stated, "Information was our soul to survive in the hostile environment. They did not allow us to read in the prison with the intention to numb our logical thinking and put us in isolation. To make us feel even more isolated, we had to sit with our backs to the cell doors when they checked the cells so we would not be able to make eye contact with the guards." Therefore, I did not expect so many former political prisoners in my sample to say that they gained so much knowledge while in prison.

The first movers in my study stated that they continued with their informal political education and socialization in prison among other political prisoners. Some of the same people who described the horrors of political imprisonment shared positive reflections such as the following: "During my first arrest, I learned many great things in prison, and it was like going to a great school. For example, something that is not taught anywhere is the sense of comradeship. I came to understand why it is important to fight for the one beside me and how to develop a sense of strong comradeship. The senior politicians in the prison also

⁶⁸ Quote from interview with Bo Kyi.

taught me and guided me towards the right path. They helped me to develop the right attitude.”⁶⁹

In their attempt to break dissenters emotionally and intellectually, prison authorities forbade any exposure to reading or writing. “The prison authorities brutally beat and put them in the solitary confinement for many days even if they hold a small piece of paper or pen” (Assistance Association of Political Prisoners, Burma 2001). Kyaw Thiha said, “Political prisoners were not allowed to read — not even the paper on a cigar! They beat us if they found out that we were writing on the wall to study. They prohibited all the rights to study. We had to learn by heart the lessons on humanism, relativity theory, and revolutions.”

Despite such harsh penalties, some prisoners arranged for overseas publications like Time, Newsweek, and newspapers to be smuggled into prison and distributed them amongst themselves. Supporters outside of prison would transcribe news from the BBC, Democratic Voice of Burma, and the Voice of America and smuggle these transcriptions into prison. Some prisoners also produced handwritten magazines with “poems, articles, illustrations, and cartoons” and secretly circulated them in prison (Amnesty International 2005). When caught, the prisoners were severely punished and often had their sentences extended.

Despite the prison authorities’ best efforts to isolate political prisoners, especially the prominent leaders, political prisoners inevitably networked, socialized, and learned from one another throughout their prison sentences. While common criminals comprised thieves, rapists, and murderers, political prisoners comprised students, activists, professors, poets, and politicians. In prison, veteran dissenters — especially the professors and politicians — had the ideal captive audience of junior dissenters with whom to share their experiences,

⁶⁹ This quote is from my interview with Mya Aye, a Muslim-Burmese dissenter who was first arrested in 1989. He is considered to be one of the prominent student organizers among the 88-Generation activists. He was arrested a second time in August, 2007 and was sentenced to 65 years in prison. He was released in January, 2012.

lessons, and reflections. Political philosophy, politics, political science and comparative politics were popular subject matters that were informally whispered about throughout prison cells.

Most of the first movers in my study stated that they learned English in prison from fellow political prisoners. Bo Kyi shared, “I was very lucky that the military regime arrested not only students, but also professors and teachers. Therefore, I had the chance to study my English lessons in prison.” Kyaw Thiha, a dissenter from Pakokku who spent nine years and six months in prison, said that he “learned public speaking in prison. Ten years in prison was like studying and learning from other experienced politicians and scholars. Some of the prisoners had even worked as advisors to Aung San Suu Kyi.”

After the International Committee of the Red Cross started to visit prisons in 1999, some political prisoners gained access – albeit uneven access – to reading materials inside prison (Amnesty International 2005). The ICRC’s visits to Burma’s prisons were not continuous because the ICRC would suspend their independent visits when the military government would not meet the ICRC’s requirements to permit confidential visits to prisoners without the presence of government officials. In spite of the various restrictions on reading, some prisoners read widely throughout their imprisonment. This was especially the case for those who were imprisoned in 1999 and afterwards. For example, Lin Htet Naing (James) shared that, “in addition to meeting a lot of politicians [in prison], I studied and read books every day. I gained a lot of knowledge about politics and how we could become effective activists. I thought about and discussed protest techniques with other prisoners. So, this was great! Prison life provided the motivation for me to continuously participate in politics for the rest of my life.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Note that Lin Htet Naing (James) is younger than 88 Generation activists. He was born in 1987 and by the time he was imprisoned, the restrictions on reading had become relatively more lax in the late 2000s as compared to those in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Among first movers-to-be, the *belief that they had to reform the government was reinforced by their prison experience*. Every beating and every comrade who died in prison only strengthened their resolve to upend the regime. Furthermore, first movers-to-be developed extraordinarily strong willpower and self-control that was channeled into becoming more committed dissenters. Wai Moe shared that “After I was released, my commitment for this kind of political contributions to society became more solid. After prison, I felt I had no choice but to change the system.”

Ko Ko Gyi, an 88-Generation student activist who is a present-day politician, shared anecdotes that emphasized the mental strength he developed that assisted his survival during his seventeen years in prison over multiple sentences. When I asked how he was able to mentally survive those years, he said he had convinced himself of three things. First, his political conviction cemented in his mind over the years: “never regret what we did; be proud of our political activities.” Second, he developed a sense of humor about his circumstances. “I made jokes about whatever, despite the bitterness and hardship. To release stress, you had to poke fun at one another.” Third, and most importantly, he added, was his dependence on Buddhist philosophy. He said:

Many, many times, we were thinking about our situation; we were in prison cells that were about eight feet by ten feet, or so. But actually, if we can imagine, every human being was a former prisoner. Yes! When every baby is in their mother’s womb, he is in a tiny space. He can’t stretch his feet or legs for nine or ten months. But in our prison cells, we can walk about seven steps, then walk back another seven steps. So compared to our mothers’ wombs, we had a lot of space. Also, every human being faces a death sentence. Everybody has to die. We don’t know when, how, or where. But surely, we will all die. So, why should political prisoners be scared of death? So, we had to convince ourselves that we did not have to be scared of death, try to have a sense of humor, and we just had to keep going.

Ko Ko Gyi had convinced himself over his seventeen years in prison that he was on the “right path” with his political activities, and that he should not be afraid of dying. In other words, through sheer willpower, he was able to neutralize for himself the state’s most effective deterrent against dissenters, which was the fear of physical harm and death.

6.2.2. Hardship after prison

Once political prisoners were released, they faced many barriers to reintegration into society. Release from prison certainly did not mean that the suffering ended. While regular beatings and torture may have stopped, there were many informal sanctions placed on former political prisoners, as well as continued pressure and harassment from the government to cease dissent activities. State repression was designed to make life for former political prisoners so utterly miserable that they — and anyone who witnessed their challenges upon release — would never want to dissent again. Government-imposed restrictions on former political prisoners included those on travel; they were routinely refused passports to travel abroad. For example, Thwin Linn Aung, who had spent six years in prison, was arrested at the Yangon International Airport right before boarding his flight to Washington D.C. The authorities were well-aware of his one-month long American scholarship program, so they released him from prison one month later, right when the program had ended. Arresting him right before he excitedly boarded his flight was just another act of the junta's gratuitous cruelty.⁷¹

Many political prisoners' releases were conditional, especially those who were released under amnesty, and faced the risk of re-arrest.⁷² They were kept under close surveillance, subjected to frequent harassment by authorities, and were often re-arrested if merely suspected of organizing dissent activities. Lynn Wunna described the state of precariousness former political prisoners lived in:

After you were arrested, the state had your complete information. You could be chased anytime, and you were followed all the time. They wanted to know everything about you; even the videos you rented at the shop. They so obviously sat next to us at the teashops to listen to our conversation. Some intelligence officers didn't even pretend to be inconspicuous.

⁷¹ Thwin Linn Aung was arrested at the Yangon International Airport on March 5, 2007 and was released on April 2, 2007. For more details on Thwin Linn Aung and others' re-arrests, see (National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, Human Rights Documentation Unit 2007).

⁷² Political prisoners who are released conditionally under article 401 of the Code of Criminal procedure.

Well-known dissenters were often *preemptively* arrested when the authorities simply anticipated that a protest would take place on an auspicious or a commemorative day. This was the case when well-known activists were arrested in the weeks leading up to September 9, 1999, because the authorities believed that activists would organize a protest on 9-9-99 as they did on 8-8-88. Mya Aye was one of the activists who fled the country to avoid a preemptive arrest: “The government identified the whereabouts of opposition groups and underground dissidents with great momentum when it was close to September 9, 1999. As a result, many of us fled to foreign countries.” They wanted to confine leaders to prevent as many dissident leaders as possible from organizing mass demonstrations. This was the reason why the authorities were intent on arresting Bo Kyi two weeks before September 9, 1999. He happened to be away from his residence when the authorities came to “pay a visit.” This information was passed along to him, so he hid for a few weeks and on September 29, 1999, he fled to the Thailand-Burma border and returned to Burma in 2013.

For reasons including travel restrictions and conditional release, many dissidents were forced into exile – often self-imposed – due to the fear of re-arrest, or if they were blacklisted because the state deemed them as a national security threat and were barred from leaving or entering the country. When blacklisted, many fled to other countries, often to Thailand, especially in Thailand’s refugee camps for Burmese refugees.⁷³

In addition to travel restrictions, constant surveillance, and the threat of re-arrest, former political prisoners were also frequently denied educational and vocational opportunities. Professional licenses to practice law and medicine, for example, were not available to those with a prison record. If the prisoners already had such licenses before

⁷³ Since 1984, there have been hundreds of thousands of Burmese who have been living in Thailand as refugees, and dissidents in exile. There are various estimates of how many refugees are living in Thailand both inside and outside of the nine officially recognized refugee camps. As of 2012, Human Rights Watch estimated that there were 140,000 Burmese refugees in the Thai-Burma border refugee camps as well as surrounding villages (Human Rights Watch 2012). The Border Consortium estimated the number of Burmese refugees in Thailand as of December 2018 to be 138,000 (The Border Consortium 2018).

their arrest, those licenses were revoked. But even for those seeking non-white collared professions, it was very difficult to find gainful employment due to legal, social, and political barriers, which consequently created additional financial hardships for former political prisoners and their families.

In addition to some of the formal restrictions imposed by the government, former political prisoners faced many social challenges. A common challenge was the family's financial deterioration.⁷⁴ Family members were routinely dismissed from jobs after employers learned that they had political prisoners in their households. Children of prisoners were often unable to attend school because of their households' inability to pay tuition.⁷⁵ An AAPP survey-based report summarized some of the pressing challenges that many ex-political prisoners ("ex-pp") face:

Ex-PPs continue to suffer mentally and physically after they are released from prison. They have urgent needs in education, health care and livelihood. At the same time, their financial situation and their family's education, health and social standing deteriorate as a result of imprisonment. With these consequences, former political prisoners and their families face difficulties with subsistence and significant barriers to reintegration. In many cases, this has led to family breakdown. (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners 2016)

The social challenges that impeded former political prisoners' reintegration into society augmented their physical and mental health complications. The majority of political prisoners were routinely physically and psychologically tortured and denied sufficient medical treatment while in prison. Subsequently, they suffered from lasting or permanent physical ailments and mental illnesses. Upon release, they faced social exclusion and heightened feelings of mistrust and anger, detachment, marginalization, and guilt over their respective poor family situations as a result of their political imprisonment. The

⁷⁴ Prior to the data collected from 1,621 former political prisoners for AAPP's 2016 report, there was minimal public data on the socioeconomic status of former political prisoners in Burma aside from anecdotal narratives and estimates. While this report does not capture the comprehensive experiences of all former political prisoners, it does provide a clear and robust story of shared experiences among many.

⁷⁵ The common hardships that children of political prisoners face are the main reasons why there are specialized schools, scholarships, and services for these children of political prisoners. These services and schools are provided by local NGOs and foreign organizations, not the Burmese government. An example of such a school is Sky Age, a school that provides free education for children and other family members of political prisoners. Sky Age was founded by Saw Thet Tun (a former political prisoner whom I interviewed).

combination of all these difficulties upon release often led to substance abuse, depression, and suicide (Aung Zaw 2007).

The burden and consequences of the isolation that former political prisoners felt cannot be overestimated. People largely disassociated with former political prisoners because they were (rightfully) afraid that mere association with such individuals would mark them as potential targets for reprisal from the state. “Mere association with members, rather than actual membership, of an outlawed group can land someone in considerable trouble. . . . What defines association with an organization is subjective and routinely used by the authorities in an arbitrary manner” (Bo Kyi & Scott 2011, p. 6).

When the ‘sticks’ to dissuade former political prisoners from repeat dissenting were proven ineffective, the authorities would at times turn to ‘carrots.’ Some former political prisoners were offered economic incentives in exchange for ceasing future dissent activities. For example, Lynn Wunna shared that the authorities offered him and his colleagues managerial positions at a popular beer pub if only they promised to cease with dissent activities. Others were offered handsome sums of money, or the promise that the authorities would stop harassing family members in exchange for becoming informants on fellow dissenters.

The multifaceted challenges that political prisoners faced upon release were effective in dissuading most of them from dissenting again. But for a small, unknown number of former political prisoners, they continued to congregate with their comrades and deepened their dedication to dissent activities.

6.2.3. Bonding continues after prison

The combination of the absence of state rehabilitation support and the presence of numerous challenges to reintegration into society *drew some former political prisoners even closer together. Ironically, the very experience that was supposed to break dissenters and deter them from ever considering dissent again was precisely the reason why these hardened dissenters deepened their shared*

commitment to dissent. For many, it felt like “being illegal immigrants in your own country.”⁷⁶

Myo Htun, a former political prisoner turned movie director, put it simply: “These terrible experiences [in prison] gave me stronger political motivation because I had to use all my energy to get along with all the other inmates, read a lot, and practice meditation.”

Kyaw Phone Kyaw, a journalist and former dissenter, said in our interview that most former political prisoners are poor because “their lives are ruined. For example, there was one member of parliament who ran in the 1990 election. He was very rich – he owned three rice mills in Pyay in the Bago region. But the military intelligence people took many photos of his home, his family, and his rice mills. Even after he was released from prison, nobody came to his house, nor bought rice from him so his business collapsed, and he is very poor. It’s interesting – poor people become activists, and activism makes people poor.”

First movers-to-be in my study – and others who survived prison – were usually in a horrific physical state upon release from prison, only to face more social and familial stresses due to the stigma of having a record as a former political prisoner. *With nowhere else to turn to, former political prisoners supported one another and their families by holding gatherings, providing resources to one another, and discussing things that only other political prisoners would understand.* These social support networks, some more organized than others, initiated and sustained by former political prisoners further strengthened their bonds. This is significant because upon release, former political prisoners became embedded in networks of arguably the most hardened and committed dissenters. The shared adversities that fostered very strong bonds among political prisoners inside prison proved useful after they were released back into society.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Interview with Wai Moe.

⁷⁷ There is substantial literature in psychology and sociology of the role that shared experiences play in forging strong, supportive bonds among members. Shared powerful experiences can also serve “a broad affiliative function, enabling bonding and the creation of social relationships across group boundaries” (Bastian et al.

By meeting, learning from, and forging intense bonds through shared repressive experiences with fellow dissenters in prison that they otherwise would not have met, *some political prisoners became extremely tightknit inside and outside of prison that reinforced their identity, commitment to, and continued efforts to dissent against the government.* The lasting impact of forming such intense bonds with fellow political prisoners was that some people, including first movers-to-be, *further strengthened their devotion to the cause of changing their regime to create a democratic Burma.*

One example of an informal support group created by a former political prisoner is the “Self-Help Group” that Myo Aung Htwe formed at the American Center in Yangon. Myo Aung Htwe was one of the youngest prisoners to be sentenced to death at the age of eighteen for his dissent activities in 1988, but was eventually released in 2009. After having spent eighteen years in prison, his isolation and suffering from prison motivated him to start the club to provide a forum for fellow former political prisoners to discuss “awkward topics” that no one else would understand. Bo Kyi and colleagues founded the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (AAPP) in 2000 while in exile in Thailand upon release from prison. AAPP continues to provide support, including counseling and other mental health services for former political prisoners. It also conducts research, surveys, and advocacy projects for political prisoners.

Former Political Prisoners Society (FPPS) was founded in 2012 by NLD co-founder and former political prisoner U Win Tin. The FPPS assists former political prisoners by helping them find medical treatment for their physical ailments resulting from their incarceration. The FPPS, like AAPP, also provides mental health treatment for former

2018, p. 3). Shared negative experiences can also “serve a boundary demarcation function, alerting group members to possible threats and emphasizing distinctions between in-group and out-group members” (Bastian et al. 2018, p. 3). This is significant, especially for former political prisoners because these shared experiences did promote an exclusive focus on “the in-group and foster selective social integration and support” (Bastian et al. 2018, p. 3). Furthermore, experiences that involve challenging or adverse conditions may promote greater interdependency between in-group members.” For more, see (Bastian Brock et al. 2018).

political prisoners. This is particularly important in a society like Burma where mental health challenges are widely stigmatized.

In addition to support networks, the bonds between some political prisoners grew stronger through marriages within political prisoner networks. Many interviewees shared stories of how they knew other former political prisoners through various types of relationships: prisoner cellmates, or the brother of a prisoner, for example. Six former political prisoners shared how they married a fellow political prisoner – and four of them comprised two couples in my sample set!

Ko Jimmy met a young woman in prison and felt compelled to take care of her. After Ko Jimmy's sixteen years and Nilar Thein's nine years in prison, they were released and got married. When their daughter, named White, was only four months old, they both got involved in the 2007 Saffron protests and had to leave their little girl in the care of Jimmy's younger sister. They both spent five more years in prison, and currently lead lives as "democracy activists" under Burma's civilian-led government.⁷⁸

Honey Oo and Thiha Win Tin are from a younger generation – they were both arrested during the 2007 Saffron protests when they were both law students.⁷⁹ Honey Oo shared with me that "we met when we were trying to organize the student union. When we did fundraising for [the student union] after 2012, we got much closer at the time." Similarly, Phyo Phyo Aung and Lin Htet Naing (James) met through the American Center Book Club, were both arrested in the aftermath of the 2007 Saffron protests, and got married soon after they were released.⁸⁰

Saw Thet Thun is a Karen-Burman Buddhist, and a former political prisoner. He was memorably expressive and emotional in our interview, weeping several times when

⁷⁸ See (*The Story of Ko Jimmy* 2014).

⁷⁹ Honey Oo was born in 1987; Thiha Win Tin was born in 1985.

⁸⁰ Note that Phyo Phyo Aung and Lin Htet Naing live with Phyo Phyo Aung's mother and father. Her father is Dr. Nay Win, who spent 18 years in prison.

reminiscing of his “fallen comrades” as well as tearing up when sharing about his “loving mother’s huge heart as a Christian woman.” Saw Thet Tun said he has three hearts: the organ in his body, his wife, and their young daughter. When I asked how he met his wife, he responded:

The story is very romantic. When I was in prison, she visited to see her younger brother, who was my cellmate. He and I ate together, slept next to each other, and lived together. At that time, my mom was not in good health, so she couldn’t visit me monthly. I read a lot of books in prison. So, my cellmate’s sister bought many books and gave them to me as presents. This was in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. I had a chance for four years. When she came, I followed her brother and saw her with guard barriers. My (now) wife, her brother and I, we talked about books. I wrote some poems and gave them to her as a birthday present. At first, I didn’t know I fell in love with her. One year before I was released, I realized I loved her. She realized she liked me too. I was released on October 12. The next day was October 13, when she came and met me. After twenty days, I told her that I loved her. She responded and told me she loved me too. We got married in 2014, after two and a half years.

First movers-to-be who were married couples, as well as friends who met in prison, continued to meet with fellow former political prisoners who continued to think of, plan, and organize future dissent events. They discussed creative dissent campaigns, protests, and marches that publicly criticized the government.

I gained a glimpse into how tightknit the bonds remained between some political prisoners. Throughout my several rounds of fieldwork, I developed strong friendships with some of my interviewees. I frequented teashops and local bars with my new friends to listen to local bands and chat about the latest political developments in Yangon. On nearly every one of these social outings, we would run into other former political prisoners – some who I had already interviewed, and others whom I had not met before.

On a recent trip to Yangon in late 2019, I was near the Secretariat in downtown Yangon at a restaurant where many dissidents and activists socialize. I was meeting a group of friends, including Wai Moe who had spent many years in prison and is currently a journalist. While chatting over beer and snacks in the busy bar, a group of customers streamed in. Recognizing one of them, Wai Moe jumped up, and gleefully greeted a young man. With one arm respectfully around his friend’s shoulder, Wai Moe steered his friend towards me, and introduced him to me by saying “this is another former political prisoner!”

and started to state details about the various prisons he was imprisoned in over the years. The friend joined us, and the group spent the next few hours listening to and asking questions about this man's experiences in prison.

On a separate occasion, Wai Moe and I, along with several Burmese professionals, met at a restaurant in Yangon during the Christmas holiday season to listen to live music. My friend leaned over and asked, "Isn't that Htun Myint Aung?" We started waving across the room, and Htun Myint Aung, along with his colleague, excitedly walked over to our table as we greeted one another.

As I sat at the outdoors bar, seated next to Wai Moe and just having greeted Htun Myint Aung, listening to a local pop band singing Burmese renditions of Mariah Carey's Christmas songs, I thought about the horrific stories that Wai Moe, Htun Myint Aung, and thousands of others like them hold in their minds and on their bodies, but will never reveal. I also thought about how inexplicably resilient these individuals sitting next to me must be. How they were able to protest and organize dissent over and over again, only to be arrested and then re-arrested, then released on the condition that they never dissent . . . only to do it again? As we chatted over the music, their big grins belied the unspeakable crimes committed onto them by their own government, but also were a testament to their dedication to achieving a better society for all Burmese people.

6.3. How comradeship materialized in dissent activities

"My imprisonment only encouraged my commitment to continue with political activities. Going to prison gave me wings! There is a tradition in our political activist arena: once you are arrested, you are promoted. You get a promotion." Lynn Wunna captured a common sentiment among first movers-to-be that *prison had radicalized them into cementing their dedication to dissent*, which was evident through their continued dissent efforts after they were released from prison. In this section, I describe how former political prisoners became

devoted dissenters and how their radical devotion to their cause of changing the regime materialized in dissent activities in their lives after prison.

6.3.1. Devoted dissenters, sacred values, and radical commitment

A former political prisoner told me that his “naïve” protesting that was inspired by “youthful adventurism” landed him in prison for seven years. He entered prison as a “scared, trembling student” and was released as a stoic dissident who had grown to despise his government with each passing day during his sentence. He left prison with an iron will to continue with his dissent work and prepared to be rearrested at some point. So he told his long-term girlfriend of many years that if he were to get arrested again, she should feel free to marry someone else. He also practiced fasting and deliberately ate “poor curries with insects in them” to prepare himself for the poor conditions he would inevitably face during his next incarceration. He gave up love, personal security, and the safety of his family in pursuit to fight for a free Burma.

As the identities of first movers-to-be fused with political prisoners and other extremely committed dissenters, they grew to become what I call ‘devoted dissenters.’ I borrow from the “devoted actor” theoretical framework from the Artis International group and customize it to my first mover theory to describe the first movers-to-be whose commitment to dissent was solidified in prison as “devoted dissenters.” The scholars at Artis, including Scott Atran, state that “when people act as ‘devoted actors,’ they are deontic (e.g., duty-based) agents who mobilize for collective action to protect cherished values in ways that are dissociated from likely risks or rewards” (Atran 2016, p. S192).⁸¹

Throughout my interviews, I came across countless stories that demonstrated the extreme commitment to dissent of first movers in the making. In part, people experienced what Swann and Gomez coined to be “identity fusion,” where individuals’ identities and a

⁸¹ See Theory chapter for more on devoted dissenters.

social group's identity "becomes porous, producing a visceral sense of oneness with the group" (Swann Jr. et al. 2009, p. 995). The oft repeated sentiment such as "once a political prisoner, always a political prisoner" and "I will not rest in my grave until Burma is free" suggested that the identity of many first movers-to-be became fused with those of political prisoners and other committed dissenters.

Throughout their experience in prison, *first movers-to-be came to view challenging their regime as a duty, and not just acts of risky adventurism*. Ko Kyaw Thiha shared, "In prison, my fear transformed into duties that our generation must carry on doing and cannot deny. Fear didn't really matter anymore." They came to cherish and protect values of freedom and democracy more than they valued their own lives.

The following are choice examples of former political prisoners who exhibited their extreme commitment to challenging and dissenting against their government.

- After his release in 1995, a dissenter from Pakokku and his colleague secretly met at a monastery, used razors to make deep cuts on their hands and took blood oaths "to become united comrades and work together until we got democracy." When I interviewed this dissenter in 2017, he referred to himself and his colleagues with whom he made the blood oath as "blood oath brothers." He and his "blood oath brothers" all have remained activists to this day.
- Some individuals marched straight into hubs of dissenters upon release. For example, upon her release from her first imprisonment in 2006, Su Su Nway quite literally walked straight from prison to the NLD headquarters "instead of [her] home" to learn how she could return to political activities to promote change. She immediately began organizing public prayers for Aung San Suu Kyi's release. Fifteen days later, she and thirty others were re-arrested. During their detention, she and her colleagues continued to hold prayers and went on a hunger strike. When she came deathly ill, the Minister of Home

Affairs decided to release her, but she refused to be released until she and all her thirty colleagues were released and charges against them were dropped. She succeeded in having these demands met. This was only the beginning of the cycle between Su Su Nway's future imprisonments and what became increasingly bolder acts of public dissent.

- Others, upon release, joined secretive groups that served as safe forums for discussions about books and dissent methods. Wai Moe and others euphemistically called these “secret student study groups.” These study groups doubled as political discussion forums where members could brainstorm their next moves.
- For Ant Bwe Kyaw, he felt that “we didn’t get justice and the revolution was not finished yet. So after we were released, fourteen of us went to get robed (join the monkhood). My mom gave me permission to robe and made me promise not to get involved with any political dissent activities. So, we all were in monk robes, and were in a good place to gather and discuss our next moves.”
- In 2004, Naw Ohn Hla, a Karen women’s rights activist, started the first Tuesday prayer group in Yangon. To the ire of the government, she and her group gathered weekly at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda to pray for the release and good health for Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners in Burma.

6.3.2. Devotion to dissent channeled into practical action

Similar to how prisons are often seen as “breeding grounds” for terrorists, prisons in Burma were also “breeding grounds” for highly committed individuals dedicated to achieving a democratic society at high personal costs (Waller 2005, p. 30). The *high concentration of dissenters in prison created favorable conditions for dissenters to discuss and plan ideas for future dissent activities, events and campaigns*. Upon release, some regrouped and planned dissent activities together.

Aung Htun, the famous dissident author, had developed the idea to write a book on the history of Burma's student movements while he was in prison. On one of their walks in Thayarwaddy prison, the notable journalist Thakin Ohn Myint gave Aung Htun "the idea of writing a book about the Student Union and student movement leaders including Ko Ba Hein and Ko Aung San. . . . I was in prison for being part of the Student Union, so he thought that naturally, I should write this book. . . . I was of course aware of the risks."⁸² After spending five years in prison, he was released on September 29, 1995.

Fully "aware of the risks," Aung Htun immediately set to researching and writing his book on the country's past student movements. When *88 Years History of Burmese Students' Movements* was finished and printed in 1998, he and over twenty-five other students who helped distribute copies were arrested and imprisoned. He was sentenced to seventeen years in prison, but eventually had his sentence reduced and was released in 2010. For the crime of writing about the country's past student movements, Aung Htun had suffered unspeakable torture, and spent a total of seventeen years in prison.

Another vivid example of a political prisoner devising a plan for future dissent while in prison is of Myat Thu who thought of launching the country's first political science school once he was released from prison. As the beneficiary of the ICRC's persuasions of the Burmese authorities to permit some reading material to political prisoners, Myat Thu devoured books – especially social science books. Since he was in prison for so many years, the warden became a bit more relaxed with the formal restrictions on reading for Myat Thu. His fellow prisoners even made him a bookshelf of bamboo sticks for his books that he had acquired through various means. He taught others political science and philosophy from the books he had read on a daily basis in his "prison library."

⁸² Thakin Ohn Myint was a renowned Burmese journalist who joined the Dobama Asiayone in the early 1930s, which was an anti-colonial group formed to protest the British presence and reign over Burma. As part of this movement, members took on the honorific term "Thakin," which means master and was reserved for British leaders, to refer to themselves and each other as a symbolic act of self-determination.

Myat Thu developed a plan, along with his brothers and colleagues who were also political prisoners, to launch the first political science school in the country. Upon his release, Yangon School of Political Science (YSPS) was founded in September of 2011. Not without harassment and pressure from the government, YSPS continues to teach social sciences to former political prisoners and their children as well as activists as of 2020.

Some ideas were *implemented inside* prison, as illustrated by Ko Jimmy and his colleagues' operation of smuggling a prison shirt to the UN. Ko Jimmy and others had written the demands of prisoners onto a prison uniform shirt and managed to smuggle out the shirt and have it shown at the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. According to eyewitness accounts, the shirt reportedly had written on it that “political prisoners welcome the Vienna Conference . . . the rays of hope for human rights will be brightened in Burma” and that “we are still under detention in the SLORC prison where no human rights are practiced” (Amnesty International 2005).⁸³ While the prison shirt smuggling operation was conducted in secret, one prisoner later snitched and consequently Ko Jimmy and twenty other prisoners were given additional prison terms.⁸⁴

Ko Jimmy also thought of another idea while in prison — the Signature Campaign — that was launched outside of prison in 2006. Ko Jimmy observed that fear of punishment is what prevented most people from voicing their grievances and participating in risky political activities. So he thought of a signature campaign with the goal of incrementally encouraging people to become more “courageous” in the face of the government. He

⁸³ The authorities accused Phyo Min Thein of translating the text from Burmese into English, and Ko Jimmy of signing the shirt. “Prisoners gathered information on human rights violations in prison, including inadequate access to medical treatment, torture and ill-treatment, and poor conditions. They intended to send this information to the United Nations Secretary General. Prison authorities found the document hidden in the handle of a bucket in a prison cell.” (Amnesty International 2005).

⁸⁴ According to the Amnesty International report, Ko Jimmy and other prisoners were “reported to have formed committees to gather information on human rights violations in the [Insein] prison, to circulate news among prisoners, and to prepare special commemorative magazines with articles, poems, and cartoons. Prisoners were not allowed access to writing or reading materials, so any such activity had to be carried out in secrecy” (Amnesty International 2005).

believed that a signature campaign would provide safety in numbers for people who wanted to express their discontent towards the government in a safe and even anonymous way, if they chose to do so. He believed that “people would participate if there was a guarantee that they will not be arrested and their family’s daily routine will not be disrupted.” He ruminated for years inside prison on these understandable conditions that constrained ordinary people from participating in public dissent.

In 2005, a wave of dissenters who were imprisoned in the wake of the 8888 Uprising were released, many having spent over sixteen years in prison. Many were jailed as youthful college or high school students, only to be released as hardened dissidents against the state. They “regrouped and called themselves the 88 Generation students, and started their movement again, in a more organized fashion.”⁸⁵ Among those released in 2005 were Ko Jimmy, Mya Aye, Ko Ko Gyi, Min Ko Naing, and Ant Bwe Kyaw. These former political prisoners and their colleagues met, and tried to engage the public for dissent activities through creative, inclusive and symbolic means. Many of the 88 Generation students who were released in 2005 helped organize dissent events that culminated in the 2007 Saffron protests, for which many were rearrested in 2007 and sentenced to 65 years. But many political prisoners in this cohort were released in 2012 under an amnesty negotiated between Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Thein Sein.

The detainment of five 88 Generation leaders soon after their 2005 release was the impetus for Ko Jimmy, Ant Bwe Kyaw, and Mya Aye to launch a nationwide signature campaign on October 2, 2006. The five detained were Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Min Zeya, Htay Kywe and Pyone Cho. On the signature collection forms, there were four columns for people to fill out if they agreed with any of the statements that the signatures were being collected for: the person’s name, national registration card number, address, and

⁸⁵ Interview with Ko Jimmy.

signature. The collective demands were the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, including the five detained 88 Generation leaders; and to organize a political dialogue to move towards national reconciliation.

The group announced that the nationwide signature campaign would take place over fourteen days. Due to the immense popularity, the group had to extend the campaign for seven additional days because people from remote areas also wanted to participate in the campaign, so the group had to arrange for logistics to allow for their participation. The campaign's goal was to foster public participation, and to signal to both the government and the people that there was widespread agreement about these specific issues.

Some people were fearful of writing down all their personal information, so they filled out only a few columns. Others were more afraid, but also willing to participate that they put a checkmark in lieu of their signature, and nothing else. Ko Jimmy said that “for some people, they were very angry with the government and they said all they wanted to do was to punch their fists through the paper.” Over three weeks, Ko Jimmy and his fellow 88 Generation activists collected over 573,580 signatures, and they sent these signatures to the Burmese government and the UN Headquarters in New York. The BBC and VOA had announced that these signatures had been sent to the UN, which infuriated the Burmese government. Ko Jimmy said, “The public gained inspiration and encouragement from these events, and they continued to participate in public campaigns, such as the white shirt campaigns. I believed this momentum helped make the 2007 Saffron Revolution possible.”

The Open Heart Campaign was another public campaign initiated by the 88 Generation leaders who encouraged the public to write letters addressing the government to express their everyday grievances. The month-long campaign started on January 4, 2007, the 59th anniversary of Burma's independence from Britain (Yeni 2007, Shah Paung 2007). The group collected over 25,000 letters and sent them to General Than Shwe, the country's dictator at the time. In March 2007, the group organized the White Sunday Campaign,

which comprised former political prisoners and their supporters wearing white shirts every Sunday and going to the homes of families whose members were still imprisoned. During these home visits, former political prisoners offered small sums of money, food, prayers and other words of encouragement to the families.

The White Expression Campaign encouraged people to wear white shirts to honor fallen activists and other martyrs, and as a general expression of protest against the government. Next, 88 Generation leaders organized the Multi-Religious Prayer Campaign, which called on people of all faiths in Burma to wear white clothing, hold candlelight vigils, and to pray in their places of worship for the release of political prisoners and for national reconciliation. This encouraged Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Hindus to engage in a unified act of protest in a relatively safe manner.

These are only a small number of examples of the public acts of dissent that former political prisoners organized after they were released. There were also many covert acts that this project did not capture, such as documenting human rights abuses – as Myat Thu did – or communicating with exiled activists or foreign journalists to expose human rights abuses, and other crimes of the government.

6.4. Drop-off points for political prisoners who did not become first movers

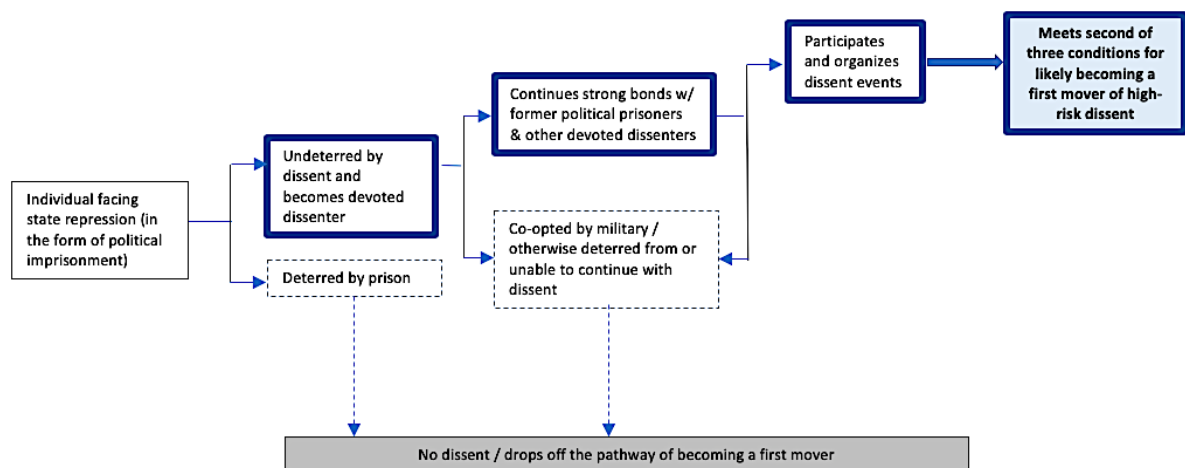


FIGURE 9. Drop-off points from the pathway of becoming a first mover. *Note:* This diagram shows two pathways: the series of bolded boxes show the pathway for meeting the second of the three theoretical conditions of becoming a first mover, as detailed in this chapter. The other pathway, indicated by a series of dotted boxes, show the three theorized drop-off points at which an individual can self-select out of the pathway of becoming a first mover.

This second empirical chapter has attempted to make the argument that state repression actually *motivated* dissenters to be more likely to become first movers. This section will detail the three theorized drop-off points where an individual self-selects out of the pathway of becoming a first mover of high-risk dissent. These three drop-off points are not necessarily in sequential order.

The first theoretical drop-off point is when an individual avoids socializing, networking, and learning from other political prisoners inside prison. While complete avoidance may not have been possible, there were many people who were intent on never pursuing dissent activities again and therefore avoided the whispering conversations and coded language inside prison to swap lessons, stories, and updates. By doing so, an individual was much less likely to become radically committed to dissent because s/he intentionally self-selected out of an immersive social experience with highly dedicated dissenters in prison that would have likely created the ideological foundations for future dissent.

The second theoretical drop-off point is when an individual disengaged, or un-fused, with her identity as a political prisoner. This could have happened in prison, or at some point after prison. And while it was difficult to completely erase one's political past, many people went to great lengths to avoid revisiting that sphere of political activities, networks, and risks.

The third theoretical drop-off point is when an individual ceased to engage with dissent networks and activities upon release from prison at some point. Min Zeya describes the general environment within which most former political prisoners lived in, which helps to contextualize the empirical reasons for why most political prisoners did not continue with dissent after prison. "Back in the 1990s, if you were a former political prisoner, you could not do any business. You could not work in any company or go to any party or celebration.

They were really screwed. So they had to find a release. Some became alcoholics, some became drug addicts, others committed actual crimes. Their lives were destroyed. They could never get married. Those who went to other countries or the border areas faced even more difficulties. It took almost a decade for them to settle down in new places.”

There were many empirical reasons why political prisoners self-selected out of the pathway of becoming first movers of dissent. First and foremost was that many were sufficiently deterred from future dissent because of the dysphoric experiences in prison, and the other forms of sanctions that the state placed on dissenters. Simply put, most people “never, *ever* wanted to be a political prisoner again” as an interviewee summarized. The sheer fear that political imprisonment imposed on prisoners cannot be overestimated.

Second was that upon release, the former political prisoner and/or the family were too impoverished for the prisoner to continue with risky activities. Even if the individual had the desire to continue with dissent work, the repercussions of having a deteriorated family situation was that s/he often felt the familial obligation to assist with one’s family’s financial and other practical needs, especially after having put them through the emotional trauma of one’s imprisonment.

A dissenter from Insein township was imprisoned for ten years for helping to organize the December 10, 1991 marches in support of Aung Sang Suu Kyi’s winning the Nobel Peace Prize. He told me that after a decade of imprisonment, he was shocked to find his family utterly impoverished. Like “taking off a heavy coat,” he had to shed his activist desires to reconnect with activists and instead sold slippers and sandals under the Insein bridge because his family needed the income. He tried making money by teaching private English lessons based on the English he learned in prison, but his students’ parents immediately ceased sending their children to him upon learning that he was a former political prisoner. He tried to volunteer at a school for the blind but was expelled from that school as well. He roamed around Yangon, trying to volunteer and make some cash by teaching

English and selling odd goods to support his family. Despite his passion for political activism, he has not reengaged with such activities because of the overwhelming guilt he still feels for putting his family through such difficulties because of his imprisonment and its stigmatizing record.

A third reason for why a political prisoner did not continue with dissent after being released was that some people were mentally or physically too weak to do so. As a journalist in exile put it, “They were too broken to fight anymore.” Many former political prisoners sadly suffered from mental illnesses due to their experiences in prison, including depression, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse disorders to cope with their pain.

A fourth reason for why a political prisoner did not continue with dissent after prison was due to economic cooptation, or a form of coercive deals made with the authorities. The military intelligence or other branches of the government offered economic opportunities to dissenters under the condition that they cease their activities. “I have a friend who received two tons of teak from the military when he was in jail and he dropped politics immediately. Bribe. Some people dropped out this way.”⁸⁶ Another deal that authorities often made with people leaving prison was the promise to cease harassment of family members if the former political prisoner would stop her dissent activities.

6.5. Limitations of the chapter

There are several theoretical and empirical limitations to this chapter, three of which I will address in this section.

The first theoretical limitation of this chapter is its insufficient engagement of the question of how some prisoners, and not others, were able to not only survive political imprisonment, but also were able to strengthen their will power to become devoted

⁸⁶ Quote from interview with Kyaw Phone Kyaw.

dissenters. I have several hypotheses for why some prisoners, including first movers-to-be in my sample, were able to emerge from prison as devoted dissenters. First, some prisoners may have been from relatively rich and/or politically connected households whose families were able to bribe prison authorities, military intelligence, and others in the security services to lessen the burden on their imprisoned family members. Such families would have been able to frequently provide food, medicines, and other essential provisions to their imprisoned family members, which would have provided tremendous physical and emotional support for the imprisoned family members.

A second hypothesis for why some individuals were able to survive prison and emerge as devoted dissenters was that they were psychologically and emotionally more capable to survive their years in prison. A third hypothesis is that such individuals had better survival skills to navigate prison life – the prison authorities, the prison turf wars, and the difficult conditions – that were conducive to better surviving prison. The question about who survived prison, as well as how they survived and emerged as hardened dissenters is a crucial point in understanding who eventually becomes first movers. There is a growing body of literature of the resilience of prisoners, especially in Burma, which can serve as a basis for future research on this question.⁸⁷ But this chapter and thesis does not delve deeply into this question.

A second theoretical limitation of this chapter is its insufficient engagement of the question of why some former political prisoners, and not others, were successfully co-opted by the military. How and why did the first movers in my sample resist the temptations of comfort promised by the military through economic co-optation? This is another question that stands to be a significant research question for the future.

⁸⁷ See (Stoltze 2019).

An empirical limitation in this chapter is my inadequate handling of accusations or deductions of some interviewees being coopted by the military regime. There were several individuals who had claimed that they were leaders in mobilizing township members during the 8888 uprising. Then they shared with me various national awards and recognitions they received from the SLORC and SPDC leadership, which I knew to be reserved for those with very close ties to the military regime. Two individuals owned thousands of acres of land and had accrued immense wealth from trading companies that have been known to be managed by powerful military families.

Two individuals from Pakokku even denied the existence of the 2007 Saffron protests and when asked about this again, they had claimed that they had “forgotten” about “this exaggerated riot orchestrated by hooligans and false monks.” The signs of immense wealth accrued through businesses in industries owned by the military, and the convenient forgetfulness of one of the two mass protests in the country’s recent history point to the possibility of the military’s cooptation of my interviewees.

Despite these textbook signals of these former protestors being co-opted, I was unable to verify their military connections. And while such interviewees insisted that their interviews to be on the record and encouraged me to use their names in my dissertation, I decided to refrain from doing so out of respect for their families. This is because even if these individuals in fact had been coopted by the military, having this fact written in a published dissertation may bring humiliation and shame to their families. In most of my interviews, including with those who I guessed were coopted or those who were accused of being coopted, the interviewees’ families and often neighbors were present in the interviews. I did not find theoretical value in naming and shaming individuals who may have been coopted by the military in my dissertation.

6.6. Conclusion

This empirical chapter discussed the second of three conditions for how first movers are made by detailing and analyzing the effects that state repression – specifically, political imprisonment – had on first movers. The main argument of this chapter was that for first movers in the making, state repression did not deter them, but rather motivated them into becoming devoted dissenters. These are radically committed dissenters who learned to value the causes behind their dissent so deeply that these sacred values became intrinsic to their fused identities as ardent dissenters against the state. In the case of the first movers in my sample, these sacred values revolved around the establishment of freedom and democracy for their country.

To make this argument, I briefly described how political imprisonment in Burma was widely feared and thus was an effective deterrent for most dissidents. Most political prisoners did not re-engage with political dissent upon their release from their first imprisonment. But for a select few, including the first movers in my sample, the dysphoric experiences from prison created the basis for intense bonds with other political prisoners. The shared, painful experiences from prison created strong bonds that allowed political prisoners to learn a wide array of subjects from fellow prisoners that created the ideological foundations that would motivate their future dissent.

Second, these intense bonds forged among political prisoners continued to strengthen in their lives after prison because former political prisoners supported one another as they faced tremendous hardships as heavily stigmatized individuals. Third, these bonds rooted in shared painful experiences produced identity fusion that made former political prisoners willing to die for their cause of achieving a free society, making them what I call devoted dissenters. Fourth, the intense bonds among political prisoners were significant because they allowed the former prisoners to channel their commitment, shared

painful experiences, and a sense of visceral oneness (fused identities) into practical planning and operational capabilities to organize dissent events together.

The first empirical chapter argued how early political education and socialization heavily shaped some individuals to engage with political dissent activities. This empirical chapter attempted to make the case that state repression motivated and hardened – rather than deterred – some political prisoners to become even more committed to changing their regime in pursuit of forming a democratic country. In the next and final empirical chapter, I will describe the third phase of my theory of how first movers are made, which is that for first movers in the making, they ultimately came to view high-risk dissent to be in their self-interest and were unable to reverse course with their dissent activities.

7. The benefits of high-risk dissent

“You want to be the master of yourself at all times.”

- Swe Win

The question that this third and final empirical chapter asks is, how did first movers-to-be come to desire exercising self-determination in such a repressive environment as Burma’s military dictatorship? How did their willingness to enjoy non-instrumental, expressive benefits link to their potential to organize high-risk dissent in an attempt to mobilize others to dissent? This chapter makes the counterintuitive argument that *first movers in the making ultimately came to view participation in high-risk dissent to be in their self-interest*. To make this argument, this chapter unpacks two constituent claims. First, some first movers-to-be at this advanced point in the theory *derived greater utility from participating in high-risk dissent than the disutility from the threatened sanctions against dissent*. Second, for some first movers-to-be who have arrived at this advanced point in the theory (and in their dissent careers), the *costs were higher than the benefits of ceasing high-risk dissent*.

The cumulative effects of the first two factors of the theory – (1) the effects of acquiring informal political education and undergoing socialization among dissenters, and (2) the unintended effects of state repression inspiring dissenters to become ‘devoted dissenters’ – led individuals ultimately to derive greater utility from participating in high-risk dissent than the disutility of threatened sanctions against dissent. This chapter illuminates the third and final phase of my theory of how first movers are made by identifying and analyzing mechanisms that changed the cost-benefit analysis of individuals in a way that seemed to be counterintuitive. It attempts to explain how participating and organizing dissent against an authoritarian regime at a high personal cost can be in a dissenter’s self-interest.

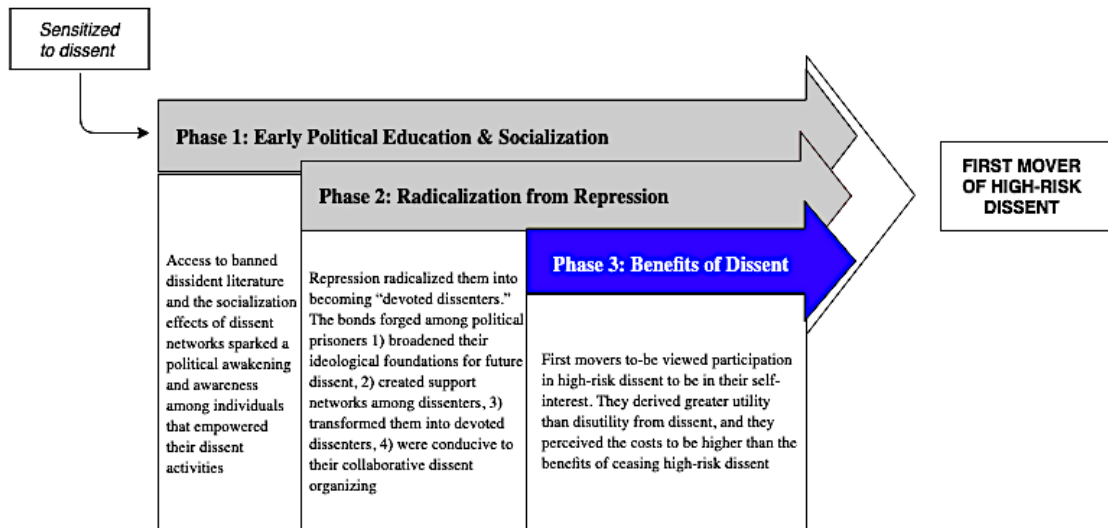


FIGURE 10. This chapter discusses the third phase of the theory

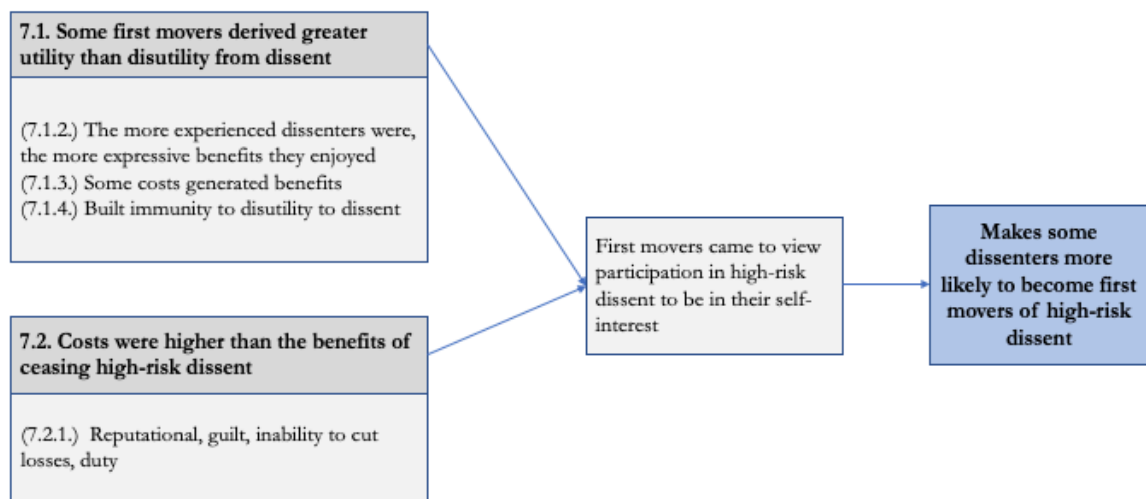


FIGURE 11. Argument of the chapter. *Note:* The numbers correspond to the sections below.

7.1. Utility of dissent outweighs disutility of sanctions against dissent

I found first movers to have a different cost-benefit calculation for risky collective action as compared to the average population. In his discussion of how rare first movers are — who he refers to as ‘self-starters’ or ‘gamblers’ — Chong (1991, p. 140) points to Hirschmann’s description of such initiators, “who equate the costs of participation with its benefits.”

The problem [of collective action] is that every potential activist may be . . . waiting for others to build up collective action to the point where he is willing to contribute. What is needed under the circumstances are some highly dedicated, morally committed activists who will contribute to collective action when few others are willing to do. These might be the people Hirschmann referred to — *who equate the costs of participation with its benefits* (emphasis added). They provide the leadership in the movement and constitute its critical mass. However, such self-starters — gamblers, really — who are willing to support collective action in its earliest, least promising stages are relatively rare, I suspect. And, I would argue, it is because they are a rare breed that public-spirited collective action is uncommon.

I make the qualitative claim in this section *that first movers-to-be derived more utility than disutility from high-risk dissent*. Based on my sample, I assume that first movers are non-instrumentalists who derive primarily non-instrumental utility from their high-risk dissent behavior.

7.1.1. Devoted dissenters

For first movers-to-be who were at this advanced point of the theory (and in their dissent careers), they were what I described previously as devoted dissenters. Political imprisonment was not a necessary condition for becoming a devoted dissenter, although most of the first movers in my sample who were devoted dissenters had been imprisoned.

For first movers-to-be, their sacred values revolved around the establishment of freedom and democracy for their country. They may have been motivated by other values but by the time they became very experienced, most of their motivating sacred values were funneled and distilled into achieving freedom and democracy for their country and these values became intrinsic to their identity. The adoption of these values into their lives were evident in my interviewees' determination to continue fighting until "their work is done," and until "true democracy is achieved." Tin Maung Oo said that "even in my blood, there is a sense to fight injustice." References to blood — blood oaths, having a desire for justice in one's blood — were made frequently throughout my interviews, from which I could infer that people were communicating that these values were metaphorically pulsing through them; these values were intrinsic to their identities.

I met Ko Ko Hlaing, who was an active organizer in Pakokku during the 8888 Uprising. My interpreter and I met him at his teashop in Pakokku. During our interview, a few employees helped him bring out a very large wooden chest, brimming with memorabilia

from the 8888 Uprising and subsequent protests. He said this was his personal “archive of 88 Uprising documents, original pamphlets, newsletters, security arm badges, photos, flags of the socialist government, items that were about the restoration of democracy, election of the student union president, student union members, and students’ activities.” He took out dozens of photos and wrinkled pamphlets from 1988 that were carefully wrapped in old plastic bags. He said, “My belief in our country’s democratic future would remain the same even if I die. I chose this path from the very start because I deeply believe in the freedom of my people.” At the end of our interview with him, we learned that he had advanced cancer, and he said he knew he did not have many months to live. But his schedule was still filled with organizing political activities in Pakokku, even postponing oncology appointments to attend meetings with fellow activists.

Children of political prisoners, like Honey Oo, were often raised in households where they were taught that achieving democracy was their personal duty and responsibility. Honey Oo’s father was arrested for his political activities when she was two years old and released when she was around thirteen years old. She told me that “as a father, my father knew that [political activism] was dangerous. He would always tell me that all of us had a responsibility to carry out in our generation. We had this *historical responsibility on our shoulders to carry out* (emphasis added).” The fight to achieve a democratic future was often felt as a personal responsibility that became core to some people’s identities since childhood.

Sithu Maung, a son of two Muslim political activists, was a prominent student organizer during the 2007 Saffron protests. When asked about the significance of students raising the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF) flag during the 2007 Saffron protests, Sithu Maung responded, “it is the symbol of freedom and the democratic movement . . . it means sovereignty. It was raised among bullets and dead bodies. By raising the flag, it shows that students are leading this movement. . . . Everybody knows that you will be jailed if you raise the flag. You will be arrested, killed. But we did it because we

believed that it is time to *carry out this responsibility for our generation* (emphasis added).” This reference to a personal as well as generational duty to pursue this fight for democracy was a common theme throughout my interviews and underscored this sense of duty that motivated first movers-to-be, which corroborates my description of them as devoted dissenters.

While some people were politically socialized in households in which they learned to adopt values like democracy and freedom as part of their identities, others adopted these as sacred values through their dissent experiences. Especially for former political prisoners, their whole identities were distilled into being a former political prisoner. I often heard the saying, “once a political prisoner, always a political prisoner.” What I inferred from this motto was that for first movers, the identity of being a former political prisoner did not connote victimhood, but rather, it was linked to having an elevated status as a freedom fighter, a seasoned dissenter. The life-changing and life-defining experience of being imprisoned for political “crimes” shaped their worldview and their place in it. Their lives were forever politicized. Everything in their lives became political.

Many former political prisoners were pulled back into dissident networks and activities because their colleagues were the only people who understood their plight and motivations as fellow political prisoners. Others returned to dissident activities after a hiatus because they met and socialized with former political prisoners at gatherings, memorials, birthdays, and death anniversaries. Their lives were filtered and seen through a lens of contentious politics.

Repression’s effect of transforming people into devoted dissenters was particularly poignant for those who I refer to as accidental activists. Imprisonment and other forms of repression shaped some nonpolitical, youthful, adventurous activists into hardened dissidents. Put differently, prison made them political. A quote from an AAPP report epitomizes this oft repeated sentiment clearly: “I never considered myself political before

my arrest, but now the regime has made me political through my imprisonment” (Bo Kyi & Scott 2011, p. 6). While there were individuals with ideological convictions prior to arrest, there were many others without any political beliefs who got swept up in mass arrests and were put in prison.

People like Mya Aye participated in protests because it was adventurous and rebellious. Mya Aye is a prime example of an individual who “rather than having serious grievances against the government at the time, I was just joining the protests with my friends on March 16, 1988 out of curiosity. It was because my friends were there and I was just doing it for fun. This is my honest answer and the truth for why I first got involved with protests.” By attending the series of protest events in 1988, he became deeply involved with the Graduate School’s Student Union, and the Yangon Basic Education School’s Student Union. He became the vice president of his group and travelled across the country to recruit new members. On June 20, 1989, he was arrested and released on April 1, 1996. He reconnected with 88 Generation activists and was re-arrested on August 21, 2007, sentenced to 65.5 years, and was released on January 13, 2012. He continues with political activism to this day.⁸⁸

7.1.2. Expressive benefits

In the context of slavery, Scott (1992, p. 37) wrote that “the cruelest result of human bondage is that it transforms the assertion of personal dignity into a mortal risk.” While the Burmese population was not enslaved, they were living in an incredibly repressive environment and I believe Scott’s powerful insight applies to the Burmese context. Their repressive environment transformed the “assertion of their personal dignity into a mortal

⁸⁸ Mya Aye’s daughter, Wai Hnin Pwint Thon, was born in 1989 and first met her father through prison bars. Based in London as a refugee, she has been an outspoken political activist for political reform and the release of political prisoners. See (Wai Hnin Pwint Thon 2010).

risk.” So when some people did assert their dignity, they often felt an indescribable elation that accompanied the act of publicly claiming their humanity for the first time.

Given the absence of a widely accepted classification for loosely-defined soft incentives, I will take the liberty to borrow from Chong’s (1991, p. 74) broad use of expressive benefits to “encompass the variety of non-instrumental benefits that one might receive from political participation.” Expressive benefits can stem from voicing one’s opinion, “our pursuit of novelty and our need for stimulating activity” (Scitovsky 1976), “extrarational motivations, which includes both moral and participatory goals” (Hardin 1982), and “process-oriented motivations for participation” (Elster 1986). “Much of risky political activism is often driven by the desire for self-respect and personal empowerment” (Chong 1991, p. 75).

The more experienced dissenters were, the more expressive benefits they seemed to gain and enjoy. The goal of expressing one’s voice was not outcome-oriented in the case of first movers in Burma. The repressive environment of the society that punished and silenced any outliers made it such that the act of expressing one’s voice was *itself* a benefit. From my analysis of my interviews, I gathered that people sometimes protested to demonstrate to *themselves* and each other that they were human. “Expressive behavior is so-called ‘because its importance to the actor is in expressing support for the cause, regardless of whether it produces the desired visible consequences. The question is not one of acting rationally or irrationally; the advocate wants to ‘do something,’ to ‘go on record,’ to ‘strike a blow for the cause’” (Turner, 1981, p. 11 as cited in Chong’s 1991 book).

Swe Win shared a metaphor that reflected his desire to publicly convey his discontent. “I was like a fly looking for a foul smell. As soon as I became physically strong enough and old enough to look around, I felt myself like a fly looking for a cause, any cause. I just needed the light to start the explosion. Actually, we were all looking – many young people were looking for all these small causes, reasons to go against the military. You need

to find a cause which is necessary to mobilize a group or rally.” In his analogy of a fly looking for a foul smell so that it could land, Swe Win was describing how he and other young people during Burma’s military era were looking for an excuse, a trigger, to release their pent up grievances. And once people found and reacted to a cause, they experienced an explosive, cathartic emotion that was a byproduct of the release of bridled discontent. “The intoxicating feeling that comes from the first public expression of a long-suppressed response to authorities” is a feeling that many experienced dissenters became “addicted” to (Scott 1992, p. 209). The jubilant feeling of expressing one’s voice against a long oppressive government is an expressive benefit that seemed to be a through line in dissenters’ experiences.

Scott (1992, pp. 207-208) wrote that “the moment when the dissent of the hidden transcript crosses the threshold to open resistance is always a politically charged occasion. The sense of personal release, satisfaction, pride and elation — despite the actual risks often run — is an unmistakable part of how this first open declaration is experienced.” The “personal release, satisfaction, pride and elation” that Scott refers to are precisely the expressive benefits that first movers enjoyed when engaging with overt dissent activities.

In addition to the joy, jubilation, and intoxication that people felt when engaging in expressive behavior, there were other significant expressive benefits, including maintaining one’s pride, honor, and dignity.

In response to the question of how he became more committed to dissent while in prison, Thiha Win Tin said, “I will never kneel down in front of them (military).” He was, of course, motivated by fighting for a democratic country, but he repeated various permutations of this statement in our interview of refusing to bend to the will of the military. This made me infer that part of his iron will to keep fighting was derived from his desire to maintain his pride, perhaps bordering machismo, in front of the military, even if he was “an ant fighting an elephant.”

Among dissent organizers I interviewed, I sensed a profound yearning to affirm their human dignity as a motivation for risky dissent behavior. State repression elicited widespread fear and obedience, but also anger, desire for revenge, and a longing to be recognized as human beings. Experienced dissenters were often driven by a sense of moral justice coupled with a desire to seek revenge for the regime's oppressive tactics on dissenters and the population at large. Moore (1978, p. 17) wrote that "vengeance means retaliation. It also means a reassertion of human dignity or worth, after injury or damage. Both are basic sentiments behind moral anger and the sense of injustice."

Until Burma opened up in 2011, the country was effectively sealed off from the outside world. And while the majority of the impoverished citizens lived to survive another day in this conflict-ridden country that still hosts some of the world's longest civil wars, ordinary people who were in positions of subordination found their voice to resist the source of their unjust existences in their small ways. Interviewees underwent iterative processes of testing their own boundaries and risk tolerance in pursuit of finding and exercising their voice and autonomy. For example, twenty-one first movers stated that they hand-copied and distributed anti-government pamphlets to the public. Many students, including Myat Thu, organized peaceful marches inside their school compounds where the audience would merely be other students and teachers. Through their low-level dissent activities, high-risk dissenters developed a stronger appetite for expressive benefits.

In describing how he felt when fighting his slave master, Frederick Douglass, a black slave in the United States in the early 1830s who eventually became an abolitionist and a renowned orator, wrote, "I was nothing before; I was a man now . . . after resisting him, I felt as I had never felt before. It was a resurrection . . . I had reached the point where I was not afraid to die. This spirit made me a freeman in fact, while I remained a slave in form" (Scott 1992, p. 208). Douglass' moving account of the freedom he felt in the very act of resisting his slave master – even while he remained a slave — is a prime example of the

expressive benefits that oppressed individuals may enjoy when resisting a powerful authority, where the odds of winning are nearly impossible. The resurrective power that Douglass felt in his spirit as an enslaved man was not a result of an instrumental outcome — say, in overpowering his slave master, or by legally gaining his freedom — but was a result from the very act of resisting his oppressor.

This is the type of non-measurable, non-categorizable, non-instrumental expressive benefits that first movers in my study experienced and enjoyed in their risky dissent actions. Chong (1991, p. 74) wrote that “Political activists, it appears, not only wish to achieve particular political objectives, such as a change in government policy, and to fulfill their obligations, but also to voice their convictions, affirm their efficacy, share in the excitement of a group effort, and take part in the larger currents of history.” He also recognized that some political activists are not always driven by instrumental, external outcomes, but are driven by non-instrumental, expressive benefits such as “voice,” “excitement,” and participating in something larger than oneself.

7.1.3. Some costs generated benefits

Hirschmann wrote that “for non-instrumentalists, some costs transform into benefits.” Specific to my study, I found Opp and Roehl’s (1990, p. 521) statement that “Repression may generate . . . (i)nformal positive sanctions (prestige, approval, attention)” to be accurate for many first movers in my study. There was a social instrumentality in being known as an experienced dissenter, which carried associations of being a sacrificial patriot, activist, and freedom fighter. Such actors, especially those who suffered significant losses, eventually came to be perceived as being honorable and noble.

Goode (cited in Chong 1991, p. 124) suggested the rule that “greater the potential loss . . . and the more successful the exploit, the greater the honor.” For this reason, he explains, “a member of the upper class who risks his life for the benefit of the group will be more highly praised and rewarded than a member of the lower class who acts in the same

way: a person's social status is a measure of his worth and therefore of the risk he takes when he places his life on the line to aid others" (Goode, cited in Chong 1991, p. 124).

This "rule" that Goode suggests was certainly applicable to the context of Burmese dissenters. Part of the reason why Aung San Suu Kyi was so widely esteemed in Burma since her political ascent in August 1988 was that she had so much to lose — her family, a prestigious life in Oxford, UK, and her freedom. But she left all of that to return to Burma to help lead the democratic movement.⁸⁹ Another illustration of this 'rule' is the case of Former Brigadier Aung Gyi, who, in the early 1960s, had been one of dictator Ne Win's closest allies. But after traveling abroad and seeing just how devastatingly poor Ne Win's economic policies were making Burma, Aung Gyi wrote several open letters to Ne Win explicitly criticizing his policies. He eventually co-founded the National League for Democracy with Aung San Suu Kyi.

I also want to apply a variation of this "rule" of "higher the risk and the more successful the exploit, the greater the honor" to people who risked severe repression and other sanctions imposed by the state against dissenters. Most dissenters I interviewed were from some variant of a middle-class background; very few were from politically or economically upper class households. But individuals who were known to have suffered extensively for their activism were generally *perceived to be more authentic in their commitment to free Burma than those dissenters who did not suffer as much at the hands of the regime*. So for dissenters whose sufferings and losses were publicly known, they gained reputations as patriotic freedom fighters. This reputation of patriotism was also linked to their perceived morality; *they were perceived to be morally good people*, which held significant social cache in a conservative

⁸⁹ Aung San Suu Kyi has been subject to considerable criticism for several policy failures. Most notably at the time of writing is the international community's criticism of her handling of her military's campaigns against the Rohingya community in Burma. Their campaigns to clear Rohingyas from their communities in the Rakhine state have been considered a genocide. She has been accused of complicity by not only abstaining from intervening in her military's actions, but also by defending their actions.

society like Burma where one's reputation as a morally good person was a form of social currency.

The stories of hardship that dissenters endured strongly signaled their credibility and commitment.

There were different narrative levers that dissenters could pull to signal different aspects of their backgrounds. This was evident in the way that interviewees spoke of their repressive experiences. There seemed to be an air of pride, even a sense of authority that enveloped their storytelling. For example, a former female political prisoner said, "You know that sense or feeling when someone is following you? So after I was released from prison, around 2011, I still had those boys follow me. So we had a joke; rather than calling the man who follows me a spy, I joked that he was my bodyguard. Others called them their male suitors! (*laughter*)."

By blithely telling me this, she seemed to be signaling her status as an established dissenter who was threatening enough to the military regime to be assigned an intelligence tail. But rather than explicitly stating that she was an important activist, she shared with me an insider joke that communicated the same message to me, but just less boastfully.

Some others talked about how horribly they were beaten with some humor. Bo Kyi said, "I remember I was beaten brutally for two weeks in prison. The first day was with an iron chain. My back looks like there are Chinese characters written on it, given how many scars I have on my back. And I don't even speak Chinese!" Min Zeya, in sharing about his prison life, said "we screamed when we were beaten. Later, we would smile at each other, rubbing our asses. These were the things we remember and were happy about, to bond over these memories."

The mere retelling of the repression to signal their sacrifices was not what made me think that the activists were boasting of how committed they were. But the ways in which these facts were communicated made me intuit that these experiences comprised a source of pride; these experiences served as strong signaling devices to their peers and their fellow citizens that they were true patriots because they risked their own lives to fight for freedom.

They had the scars, the stories, and the intelligence agents following them to prove their sacrificial patriotism. And this was how such a brutal cost generated benefits.

Another cost that generated a benefit was how *a dissenter's imprisonment created a platform for her to develop international fame and foreign contacts*. Given how isolated this regime was until 2011, it was quite rare to have foreign contacts, much less a reputation in other countries. As Burma's poor treatment of political prisoners gained attention in the 1980s and afterwards, foreign newspapers and international organizations such as Amnesty International and ICRC published profiles of individual Burmese political prisoners, garnering global attention and support for prisoners who were otherwise unknown citizens before their political activities. For example, when student activists were sentenced to years in solitary confinement or to death, the names and profiles of these self-described "ordinary" students were printed in major newspapers, magazines, human rights reports, and Western government country reports.

In addition to gaining international reputations as Burmese political prisoners, some dissenters also developed connections with foreigners inside Burma. Foreign journalists, NGO workers, and embassy personnel from different countries, especially Western nations, often made contact with dissenters to assist them in quiet ways, or to help cover their stories for international audiences. Linkages with foreign journalists greatly benefited activists in the lead up to the 1988 Uprising and subsequent protests.

In August 1988, a BBC journalist named Christopher Gunness who was sent by the BBC to Yangon for a week secretly met with scared but impassioned student activists.⁹⁰ Gunness told me that he remembered the students and other people that he met with being "absolutely, absolutely terrified" to speak with him. They were "absolutely terrified of arrest,"

⁹⁰ I interviewed Christopher Gunness via Skype on 6 December 2018.

but some of them still agreed to speak with him knowing that he was a BBC journalist and that he could broadcast their stories.

Nay Min (the lawyer) had used his connections to arrange several secret meetings with student activists and Guinness. Guinness refers to Nay Min as the “architect of the revolution” (Slater 2018) and believes that “Nay Min’s eyes and ears on the ground in Rangoon a quarter-century ago were ‘pivotal’ to the BBC reports closely followed by the Burmese audience in 1988.”⁹¹ This relationship between a foreign journalist and a Burmese human rights lawyer proved to be vital to the successful mass mobilization of people in August 1988.⁹²

Nay Min had arranged for Guinness to meet with four students: Ko Ko Latt, Ko Htay Kywe, Arnold, and a fourth unnamed person who had since died. “Arnold was his nickname. He was the son of a diplomat and a bodybuilder, so he nicknamed himself Arnold after Arnold Schwarzenegger.” Ko Htay Kywe and friends told Guinness to announce over BBC radio programs in Burma that there will be a nationwide strike at 8:08AM on August 8, 1988. The BBC broadcast this time and date nationwide, informing people of a leaderless protest that would take place. Min Zeya told me that when he heard the BBC broadcast on August 6th about the nationwide protest on August 8th, he told me he was “shocked. Guinness had reported it to the world that there would a national protest in Burma. If it did not happen, we will be damned. We had to plan urgently. So various activist cells sprung into motion. . . . Ultimately, we had to bring 8.8.88!”

This time and date was precisely the focal point that this nation had been waiting for. This was possible in part because activists had the necessary reputation and linkages with foreigners to set this plan into motion.

⁹¹ For recent local coverage of U Nay Min’s activism, see (Kyaw Phyo Tha 2018b).

⁹² As part of the widespread recognition that U Nay Min has received in Burma and beyond for his pivotal role in the 1988 revolution, a theater play was recently produced to describe the relationship between Christopher Guinness and U Nay Min (Slater 2018).

Interestingly, Guinness noted that there was quite a bit of exaggerated post hoc recollection. Many people went on the record or have told him in person many years after the revolution that they were one of the students who had secretly met with him in the lead up to shaping the revolution's date, but Guinness told me that he did not meet them. He told me he was not even in Burma at the times that people say they met with him. This statement, which is unsurprising to me given how critical of a role he played as the linkage between Burmese activists and foreign audiences, underscored the importance of triangulating data sources as a qualitative researcher.

7.1.4. Building immunity to disutility of dissent

Every first mover in my study shared thoughts about how they developed motivations over time that were rooted in fierce patriotism and sacred values, and how they learned to desensitize themselves to the costs of dissent. As previous chapters have described, there were many formal sanctions against dissent, such as arrest, imprisonment, torture, and the lack of educational and professional experiences. There were also many informal sanctions placed against dissent including the disintegration of family units, the decline of financial stability, social ostracism, the seemingly omnipresent surveillance by intelligence services, and the perpetual threat of re-arrest.

But as repeat dissenters developed stronger immunity to the various sources of disutility that stemmed from dissent, some of them placed higher value on the utility rather than the disutility derived from dissent. Put differently, for first movers-to-be, they gained more utility than disutility from dissent. Saw Thet Tun shared a quote that was commonly echoed among the first movers in my sample. “We are human beings; of course, we were afraid of arrest and being separated from our families. But my love for my country helped me overcome my fear.”

7.2. Too costly to quit: costs outweigh benefits of quitting dissent

In addition to valuing utility more than disutility derived from dissent, *some first movers found it too costly to quit once they had accrued significant experiences in both dissent and repression due to their dissent.* The benefits of quitting dissent were clear: the costs attached with dissent activities would almost immediately become moot. Moreover, the authorities could have even provided rewards for ceasing dissent and informing on fellow dissenters. But for all of the first movers in my sample, they ultimately did not cease with dissent activity before 2011. Most of the first movers in my sample have remained operational in their political activism at the time of writing this dissertation.

7.2.1. Costs of quitting as an experienced dissenter

Continuing with high-risk dissent activities was, in part, due to maintaining one's reputation as a committed patriot. Put differently, the cost of reputational damage for quitting dissent once somebody had developed a robust reputation as a sacrificial patriot was not worth the comforting benefits of quitting dissent.

In a closed and conservative society like Burma, people's reputation held significant social currency. Keeping one's word, integrity and honor were some of the values that were highly cherished in this society. As stated in the chapter on Burma's background, most neighbors knew one another very well. Therefore, one's reputation as an experienced dissenter and especially as someone perceived to be a leader was a considerable factor in her calculation to continue or discontinue with dissent activities. Chong's (1991, p. 51) statement that "reputational concerns will often motivate people to follow a consistent line of action" aptly supports this argument. Reputational concerns proved to be an effective commitment device to Burmese dissenters' continuation of dissent activities. To further quote Chong:

The perpetrators of violence want to deter the activists by magnifying the costs of participation. But although violence frightens, terrorizes, and deters, it also challenges the pride, honor, and courage of the activists, and often times these intangible and emotional factors will cancel out the dampening effects of violence. *The fear of being known as a coward, a quitter, or a person who cannot be depended on in a*

crisis can counteract the fear of being physically harmed (emphasis added). Therefore, if free ridership is associated with shame, disgrace, dishonor, and other reputational damage, individuals may continue to prefer participation to nonparticipation irrespective of the rising cost of participation. (Chong 1991, p. 65)

This passage written by Chong accurately described the experiences of the first movers in my sample. For the dissenters who had spent time in prison, or who had otherwise experienced sanctions placed on dissenters, there was a strong hesitation to quit dissent because their reputations and identities had become inextricably linked with their dissent activities.

Another reason for why quitting dissent was considered to be too costly to do was rooted in *individual guilt*. I had a very strong intuition about this point when I was interviewing Bo Kyi my second time. When I pressed him on what his motivation was for protesting every day during the 8888 Uprising, Bo Kyi responded “at the time, people had very high expectations from students. Students were very powerful. But of course individually, I could have retreated. But I never thought to retreat back from the struggle.” When I asked him why, he wept and said “because, on behalf of me, students were killed.” He was referring to the young students he had recruited to join the 8888 protests who had been killed by soldiers. My voice recorder captured the shaking of his teacup on his saucer as his hand and lips trembled. My voice recorder also captured his shaky attempt at trying to light his cigarette. He was clearly overwhelmed with guilty emotions as he recounted a memory from 30 years prior to our interview.

Guilt was a curious theme that emerged throughout my interviews. There was a type of guilt due to inadvertently causing the death of young and innocent protesters, like the guilt that Bo Kyi had expressed to me. There was another type of guilt, similar to a survivor's guilt, that also prevented dissenters from quitting dissent. There was often a sense of guilt expressed for not going insane or not committing suicide or otherwise not becoming incapacitated by state repression. This type of a survivor's guilt for dissenters seemed to prevent them from quitting because if they did quit, their survival would have been in vain.

Another factor that seemed to prevent first movers-to-be from quitting dissent was their *inability to cut losses*. They did not want their imprisonment or for their comrades' deaths to be in vain; they were fervently motivated for all of these losses to have meaning. In some cases, these costs were not seen as losses or sunk costs. On the contrary, some viewed these sacrifices as the necessary price to pay to move towards achieving a freer, more democratic nation.

Reputational concerns, guilt, and an inability to cut losses were very strong factors that prevented first movers-to-be from quitting their dissent activities. But what I found to be *the most powerful reason for first movers-to-be from quitting their dissent activities was a seasoned understanding of their duty and obligation*. Min Ko Naing, the most renowned democracy activist in Burma, told me “I don’t want to do these things anymore. I am quite tired of these things. *I would have stopped if I could. But I feel like I have obligation to stay involved* (emphasis added).” As the nation’s most visible and reputable democracy activist, he had been longing to quit dissent activities and instead become a full-time painter, but he still feels obliged to stay in the field. And this personal obligation he feels to fight for a better country overpowers his desire for a more comfortable, quiet life.

7.2.2. Benefits of quitting dissent

The benefits of quitting dissent as an experienced dissenter were substantial. First and foremost, one would be guaranteed security and safety for oneself and one's family. After years of repression, harassment, insecurity, and surveillance, freedom from targeted state repression would have been a tremendous benefit. Other instrumental benefits from quitting dissent were economic in nature. As stated previously, the military co-opted some dissenters by offering substantial economic opportunities in exchange for stopping their activities. Some dissenters indeed sought out these benefits. But for the first movers in my sample, the costs of quitting dissent outweighed the benefits of doing so.

7.3. How the three cumulative factors of the theory fit together

The combination of (1) acquiring informal political education, undergoing socialization among dissenters, and being (2) radicalized by state repression into becoming a “devoted dissenter” may push an individual to ultimately (3) view participation in high-risk dissent to be in her self-interest.

The theory is activated by a catalytic event that sparks an individual's preliminary interest in political dissent. An individual who was socialized in a household with dissenters may have been more primed to react to a morally shocking event than an individual raised in a nonpolitical household. But for both types of individuals, a shock that catalyzes one's politicization is necessary to kickstart this theory.

Informal political education and socialization among dissenters is the first of the three phases in this sequential and cumulative process. Triggered by a catalytic event, one's nascent political consciousness heightened one's sensitivity to perceived injustices and may have encouraged a curiosity in acquiring informal political education. The individual may have secretly sought out unauthorized literature on politics, political philosophy, democracy, human rights, and protest histories of her country, as well as connect with veteran dissenters who fostered this newfound interest. She may also have started associating with dissenters and other like-minded people who have shared grievances against the state.

One's political awakening could have served as a signaling device to veteran dissenters, who may have invited her to join dissent activities and underground dissent networks. Without having demonstrated one's level of risk appetite, a new recruit would have unlikely been tasked with consequential organizing assignments. But by repeatedly participating in dissent events, an individual's risk appetite may have grown more robust for riskier dissent activities, and this increased risk tolerance and commitment to dissent may have been clearly exhibited to fellow dissenters.

Her deepened socialization in exclusive dissent networks may have reinforced her political awareness and empowered her to engage with increasingly riskier dissent activities. Common experiences among dissenters drew novice dissenters closer to one another, further entrenching them in their dissent networks. Repeatedly participating in dissent activities also exposed an individual to formal and informal sanctions against dissent. The more sanctions a dissenter was subjected to, the more committed to dissent she may have become, and perceived to be. She may have experienced significant validation from fellow dissenters for her risky actions, which may have encouraged her to take even riskier actions.

The individual is now in phase two of the theory. *State repression, especially in the form of political imprisonment, had the unintended effect of radicalizing her to become what I call a devoted dissenter.* A devoted dissenter is someone who is a radically committed dissenter who learned to value the causes behind her dissent so deeply that these “sacred values” became intrinsic to her fused identity as a dissenter against the state. In the case of the first movers in my sample, these sacred values revolved around the establishment of freedom and democracy for their country. Other values may have motivated them, but by the time they became very experienced, most of their motivating sacred values were funneled and distilled into achieving freedom and democracy for their country.

In prison, intense bonds were forged among first movers-to-be. These bonds were used to broaden the dissenter’s political knowledge base, which built her ideological foundation that motivated her future dissent activities. These bonds also facilitated the formations of networks of hardened dissenters who supported one another inside and outside of prison. Upon release, these dissenters reconnected to plan future dissent events together.

The individual is now in phase three of the theory. The components and effects of acquiring informal political education, undergoing socialization among dissenters, and being radicalized by state repression *ultimately shaped the dissenter to view participation in high-risk dissent*

to be in her self-interest. Due to the extensive experiences that the dissenter amassed up until this point in the theory and in her dissent career, she derived greater utility from dissent than disutility from sanctions threatened against her. The more experienced the dissenter was, the more expressive benefits she enjoyed. The act of dissenting allowed for an individual to use her voice, express her autonomy, her opinion, and to assert her dignity as a person in fighting the source of repression. Also, a dissenter at this point viewed the costs to be higher than the benefits of ceasing high-risk dissent because of reputational concerns, guilt, inability to cut losses, and a deep sense of duty and responsibility. It was also at this point where an individual was likely to experience an inability to reverse course. Quitting dissent at this point usually invited immense shame and criticism, which was particularly poignant in an honor-based society.

If an individual was exposed to these experiences, then she most likely was a “devoted dissenter” willing to risk her own life for her political cause, derived immense utility from high-risk dissent and led a highly politicized existence. It was at this point when an individual most likely had initiated and organized high-risk dissent activities, making her a first mover of high-risk dissent.

7.4. Drop-off points for dissenters who did not become first movers

For experienced dissenters who were this advanced in their dissent careers, there was only one clear reason I identified for why some people dropped off the pathway of becoming first movers: *they could not bear continuing to hurt their family members and other loved ones.*

I spent several afternoons with an activist who volunteered his legal services to advocate for people who were persecuted by the government in the late 1980s, including Muslims and other ethno-religious minorities. U Nay Min “The Lawyer” is short in stature and soft spoken, but continues to have a passion for legal and social justice for his countrymen. He also served as the “unofficial stringer supplying information about the ongoing protests and government crackdowns to Christopher Gunness from the BBC

World Service, who was based in neighboring Bangladesh as an international correspondent” (Kyaw Phyo Tha 2018b). Because of his unofficial reporting to foreign journalists and for his legal activism, he was arrested twice, spending over sixteen years in prison, mostly in solitary confinement.

Over many cups of tea, my interpreter and I listened to his numerous stories from his years of activism and imprisonment. Because he was quite elderly, we wanted to be respectful by picking him up from his apartment that he shares with his sister and escorting him back to his apartment after our conversation for the day was over. But he always asked that we pick him up and drop him off several blocks away from his apartment, because he did not want to have his sister (who was also in her seventies) suspect that he was still involved or even speaking about his political activities. One afternoon, a monsoon shower hit and yet he still insisted that we pick him up several blocks away from his apartment to avoid worrying his sister.

We soon realized that the reason for the lawyer’s request of meeting him several blocks away from his apartment was not because he found his sister’s questioning to be a nuisance. Rather, it was because he did not want for her to relive the pain that she and the rest of his family felt every day throughout his years of imprisonment. He simply did not want to worry his elderly sister. While he continued to be supportive and quietly involved in various political activities after he was released from prison, he no longer remained an outspoken organizer. One quote from his interview captured the essence of why he stopped with his overt dissent activities, and why he self-selected out from the pathway of becoming a first mover of dissent. “The fact that I had to stay in prison was something that broke their (his family’s) heart, and I was not cruel nor selfish enough to break their heart again.”

7.5. Limitations to the chapter

This chapter’s findings, more than the other two empirical chapters, depended heavily on my researcher’s intuition. This is not to say that the findings were based solely

on my interpersonal skills and instincts; far from it. Given my extensive interviewing experience among politically sensitive populations (e.g. North Korean defectors and Syrian refugees), I have developed a keen ability to ask follow-up questions to potentially unpack hidden gems in my interviewees' responses. As stated in my methods chapter, I spent substantial time building relationships and fostering a level of trust between myself and my interviewees before and after my interviews. I view this project's research question not merely as a doctoral research question, but one that animates more personal motivations, which is why I invested so much emotional and personal energy into the data collection and analysis of this, rather than approaching this project from a purely clinical perspective.

I found that this substantial investment in building rapport with interviewees was essential for gathering rich qualitative data. This was particularly instrumental in my interviews of several high-profile first movers who were accustomed to interviews with foreign journalists and researchers. I was able to discern when some of them were reciting memorized talking points with buzz phrases. For people who I suspected were simply regurgitating talking points, I requested follow up interviews in less formal settings. I am not faulting anyone for providing a performative, memorized interview. In fact, I am pleased that some interviewees were in positions that necessitated memorizing talking points because they had built careers around their dissent experiences. Simultaneously, I was not content with canned responses for my research purposes that attempted to arrive at the essence of what motivated some individuals to initiate high-risk dissent.

While this approach of building strong rapport with interviewees had its strengths in collecting rich qualitative data, I believe it may have had a potential methodological shortcoming in that, at times, I may have lost my ability to sharply distinguish my roles as a friend and researcher. This shortcoming may have manifested in my potential projection onto my interviewees. I may have projected my personal assumptions onto my interviewees' statements when I interacted with them, and when I analyzed the transcripts of my

interviews. I tried my best to guard against assuming that every person was “the good guy” by reviewing every interview at the end of each day of fieldwork with my interpreter. In analyzing my interview transcripts, I guarded against projecting onto my interviewees by systematically asking myself the assumptions I was making throughout the analysis process. But given the intensely interpersonal nature of data collection of this project, a slight doubt remains of whether or not I projected myself onto my interviewees in this project at times.

There is another, sharper theoretical limitation to this chapter. Olson argued “it is not possible to get empirical proof of the motivation behind any person’s actions; it is not possible definitely to say whether a given individual acted for moral reasons or for other reasons in some particular case. A reliance on moral explanations could thus make the theory untestable” (Olson 1965, p. 61). Given that he is renowned for his work on incentives as a stimulus for collective action, I was compelled to incorporate his criticism of theories that depend on “moral explanations” or other “selective incentives” that he found to be impossible to verify.

I must attempt to rebut this by stating that while moral explanations or other qualitative explanations are challenging to test, they are not impossible to test. There is a wide range of mixed methodologies, psychological tests and behavioral games that researchers could employ to test theories based on moral or selective incentives. Furthermore, just because an explanation is challenging to test is not a sufficient reason to abstain from developing and testing a theory centered on the given explanation. As argued extensively in my methods chapter, I opted to conduct a micro-level study because this approach allowed me to concentrate on individuals and their motivations to become first movers, which is critical to better understand the early stages of risky collective action.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter’s main argument was that first movers-to-be ultimately came to view participation in high-risk dissent to be in their self-interest. To make this argument, I first

unpacked the claim that some first movers-to-be derived greater utility from participating in high-risk dissent than the disutility from the threatened sanctions against dissent. This is because the more experienced dissenters were, the more expressive benefits they seemed to gain and enjoy. In addition to the joy, jubilation, and “intoxication” that people felt when engaging in expressive behavior, there were other significant expressive benefits, including affirming one’s pride, honor, and dignity. Furthermore, some first movers-to-be seemed to derive more utility than disutility from dissent because some of the incurred costs generated benefits. There was social instrumentality in being known as a dissenter who had experienced repression because their commitment to a free Burma was perceived to be more authentic, and they were perceived to be morally good people.

The second constituent claim of this chapter was that for first movers-to-be, the costs were higher than the benefits of ceasing high-risk dissent as an experienced and publicly known dissenter. First movers found it too costly to quit once they had accrued significant experiences in both dissent and repression due to their dissent for four reasons: reputational concerns, guilt, inability to cut losses, and a deep sense of duty.

After laying out the case for the third factor of my theory, I integrated all three factors of my theory to illustrate how all the factors interacted with one another to respond to this dissertation’s research question: “what motivates some individuals to become first movers of high-risk dissent in an authoritarian country?”

8. Conclusion

This study is the first to undertake analysis of first mover motivations and dynamics in a single country across multiple dissent events and over many years. Since the literature on mobilization, collective action, and movement leaders has acknowledged the importance of first movers but has overlooked them, my theory and data present a novel narrative about first movers, suggesting that first movers are *made*, not born. They are more likely than not to be *constructed* through social processes that my theory attempts to capture. While not everyone can or will become an initiator of high-risk dissent, anyone could theoretically become a first mover.

8.1. Main findings

By studying first movers over many dissent events across twenty-three years, I found that first movers often operate in small groups of fiercely determined, veteran dissenters who are instrumental in maintaining the structural possibility to spark mass protests. These risk-tolerant individuals are especially important over time because once they become first movers, they *repeatedly initiate public dissent events, increasing the possibility of mass mobilization simply because they contribute to creating a larger pool of dissent events that all have the potential to escalate*. Metaphorically, they repeatedly strike matches with the hopes that one of these attempts could light the proverbial fire. These first movers are essential for creating and maintaining the possibility for structural change in repressive environments.

Each of the three empirical chapters expanded on my theory with rich interview content and narrative. If the theory chapter were a closed accordion, then the empirical chapters serve as the bellows of an opened accordion. In the first empirical chapter, I argued that the access to banned dissident literature and the socialization effects of dissent networks sparked a political awakening and awareness among individuals that empowered their dissent activities. I was surprised to find that all of the dissenters in my study – both first movers and non-first movers – were profoundly impacted by dissident literature, which politicized

their worldview and empowered them to believe that they could play a role in changing their surrounding circumstances. Furthermore, I found that socialization among dissenters in networks that had high barriers to entry had strong effects on shaping novice dissenters into thinking, acting, and adopting risk-tolerant behaviors of veteran dissenters.

In the second empirical chapter, I argued that repression in the form of political imprisonment unintentionally radicalized dissenters into becoming devoted dissenters. The finding that state repression motivated a subset of dissenters into becoming more committed to their cause is not an original one. But the novel argument within this finding is that the intense bonds that were forged among political prisoners had four strong implications on their increased likelihood of eventually becoming first movers.

First, their intense bonds in prison broadened their knowledge base that created the ideological foundations that motivated their future dissent activities. Second, once prisoners were released, the bonds that were formed inside prison were used to form helpful support networks for former political prisoners who were not provided with any rehabilitation support, but instead faced extreme stigmatism and continuous harassment by the state. These support networks doubled as spaces for these devoted dissenters to regroup, discuss, and plan future dissent activities. Ironically, the very experience that was supposed to break dissenters and deter them from ever considering dissent again was the very reason for reinforcing political commitments among hardened dissenters.

In the last empirical chapter, I shared my counterintuitive finding that first movers in the making who were advanced in their careers ultimately came to view participation in high-risk dissent to be in their self-interest. To corroborate this finding, I argued that first movers-to-be derived greater utility from participating in high-risk dissent than the threatened sanctions against dissent. I found that the more experienced dissenters were, the more non-instrumental expressive benefits they seemed to gain and enjoy. The repressive environment of the society that punished and silenced any outliers made it such that the

mere act of expressing one's voice was *itself* a benefit. The jubilant feeling that stemmed from expressing one's voice against a long oppressive government is an expressive benefit that seemed to be a through line in dissenters' experiences. In addition to non-instrumental, expressive benefits, I found that some costs that dissenters incurred also generated instrumental benefits. I found that dissenters whose sufferings were known by the public were generally perceived to be more authentic in their commitment to a free Burma than those who did not suffer. This generally positive public perception of their suffering fostered reputations for their being sacrificial patriots.

Furthermore, for veteran dissenters, the costs were higher than the benefits of ceasing high-risk dissent. There were four reasons I found for why veteran dissenters found it challenging to quit dissent. First, the cost of reputational damage for quitting as a dissenter who had accrued sufficient experiences and a reputation as a sacrificial patriot was not worth the comforting benefits of quitting dissent. Another reason for why quitting dissent was considered to be too costly to do was rooted in individual guilt.

Another factor that seemed to prevent first movers-to-be from quitting dissent was their inability to cut losses. They did not want their time in prison nor the deaths of their comrades to be in vain; they were fervently intent on all of these losses to have meaning. In some cases, these costs were not seen as losses, or sunk costs. On the contrary, these costs were often viewed as the necessary sacrifices made to move towards achieving a freer, more democratic nation. Reputational concerns, guilt, and an inability to cut losses were very strong factors that prevented first movers-to-be from quitting their dissent activities. But what I found to be the most powerful reason that prevented first movers-to-be from quitting their dissent activities was a seasoned understanding of their duty and obligation to their country's future.

8.2. Project contributions

This project makes contributions to our knowledge of first movers who initiated numerous dissent activities under Burma's military regime. Furthermore, this project makes theoretical contributions to the study of first movers in high risk environments. This project draws on new and rich qualitative data on the micro-processes and decisions that dissenters described of events and behaviors that spanned across twenty-three years (1988-2011).

The primary theoretical contribution of this project is that it presents a narrative-driven, grounded theory about initiators of dissent, given their important role in potential dissent escalation and mass mobilization. Unlike the earlier and limited scholarship on this topic, this study is the first to undertake analysis of first mover dynamics in a single country across multiple dissent events and over many years.

In particular, I have a strong interest in testing and refining this theory in the context of North Korea. Arguably the most brutal, totalitarian regime in modern times, the North Korean state is notorious for punishing at least three generations of relatives of an individual who has simply expressed critical opinions of the Kim dynasty. The widespread implementation of the guilt-by-association policy, along with a zero tolerance ethos for any dissenting views, comprises in part the societal infrastructure to deter dissent.

While there have not been any known cases of mass mobilization against the regime, there are a handful of known cases of individuals since the state's inception in 1948 who have openly criticized the regime. There has even been at least one failed military coup attempt. If this theory is tested in the North Korean context, it will most likely have to sample among North Korean defectors as interviewees, rather than current North Korean citizens. There will be other challenges in testing this theory using North Korea as a country case study, but such a case study would undoubtedly make an interesting contribution to the study of first movers of high-risk dissent.

This project's *second* contribution is having brought a richer understanding of first movers in Burma. Currently transitioning into a democracy, this former military dictatorship and its rich history of dissent is understudied. By applying qualitative research methods to analyze first movers in Burma, I hope to have uncovered some of the dynamism, energy and motivations of citizens who have been living in a closed dictatorship since 1962. The accumulation of all the risk-tolerant acts of first movers – including students distributing pamphlets about past student movements, monks refusing to accept donations from the military, and convincing friends to help start street protests – ultimately culminated in the upending of one of the most oppressive, insular authoritarian regimes. The national, regional, and international implications of a new, democratic Burma all stemmed back to the acts of first movers, so I hope this project provided both theoretical and empirical understanding of these risk-tolerant actors in Burma.

This project's *third* contribution is a theory on first movers that can inform policy in the future. Beyond the theoretical realm, first movers must actually be present to catalyze any act of dissent that may ultimately result in regime liberalization or another type of regime change. In other words, our hopes for a freer, more democratic world reside in large part with the individuals who take extraordinary risks to catalyze the dissent events that sometimes cascade into consequential movements. According to Freedom House, 61% of the world's population were deemed to be living in either "partly free" or "not free" countries as of 2018. In other words, 4.5 billion people as of 2018 are living in circumstances that are deemed not free or partly free.

Over the past decade, dissent events have unfolded in authoritarian regimes around the globe where the prospect of dissent was hitherto considered impossible, from Syria and Algeria to Sudan. Longstanding grievances against Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and the Ba'athist regime culminated in civil unrest in March 2011 when fifteen young students were arrested and tortured for writing anti-government graffiti in the southern city of Dara'a

(Fahim & Saad 2012). The capture and torture of these teenagers served as a catalyst for protests that quickly escalated into a full-blown civil war with competing militias, rebel groups, and proxy armed groups funded by other nations continuing to wage war against one another.

After nine years of civil war, an estimated half-million casualties, 7.6 million internally displaced persons, and over 5 million refugees, Assad firmly remains in power. News coverage of the regime's brutalization of anti-regime activists reveals the particular focus that the regime placed on the capture and torture of protest organizers, as they were seen as a significant source of regime instability (Barnard 2019). Consequently, pro-government authorities tortured these people, and those affiliated with them, to such an extent that the UN labeled the regime's actions as 'extermination' (United Nations' Human Rights Council 2016, p. 17).

In contrast to the Syrian demonstrations that have not led to significant changes in the government nor the resignation of the dictator, Algeria and Sudan experienced mass demonstrations that led to the ouster of both of the nation's longstanding dictators. After ruling for twenty years, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was ousted in April 2019 after three months of mass demonstrations. Sudan's dictator Omar al-Bashir, after leading his country for thirty years with an iron fist and having been charged with a series of war crimes and acts of genocide, resigned also in April 2019 after protestors took to the streets across the country. Both countries' removal of their respective longstanding dictators was the result of mass demonstrations that were sparked by first movers, whom the respective militaries severely repressed.

Numerous other examples of anti-authoritarian and pro-democratic efforts of dissent — including those silenced by brutal crackdowns, and those that escalated to the point of unseating authoritarian leaders — transpired across the world, and they will continue to materialize. And first movers will continue to be present at each dissent event.

In the absence of first movers, the world would be devoid of all dissent activities, a subset of which escalate to mass demonstrations that upend undesirable regimes or incrementally transform segments of governments. A richer understanding of first movers will contribute to a stronger grasp of the initial stages of dissent and revolutions, and perhaps enable policymakers to embolden certain dissent acts by better identifying and supporting first movers.

8.3. Project limitations

This project's research design and employed methods, while offering many advantages as discussed in the research design and methodology chapter, also imposed several limitations, which emerged from the project stages of data collection and analysis. The end of each empirical chapter has outlined the theoretical and empirical limitations, so rather than summarizing all of them, I will discuss the most pressing limitations in this section.

First, the project focused on understanding mechanisms at a fine-grained level of detail among individuals within one country, and so it prioritized accuracy among individuals and a granular investigation into mechanisms among my sample at the expense of easy generalizability. Generalizing the grounded theory advanced in this project will require detailed knowledge of many country cases. This is certainly possible, though it will require a significant amount of resources and research time because of the difficulty in locating and gaining the trust of former dissenters. Understanding the mechanisms through which low-level attempts at initiating dissent is institutionalized, especially over long periods of time within a country, can be done only through the kind of intensive qualitative research that this project employed.

Second, there were both physical and data-related restrictions imposed on me as a foreign researcher who was studying the country's authoritarian era that formally ended less than a decade ago. I was unable to conduct a number of interviews because the interviewees

lived in areas where the government restricted access for foreigners. I also failed to locate seemingly simple data points. For example, I made numerous requests to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, asking for the number of monasteries in cities across the country. Such requests made between 2017 – 2020 remain pending at the time of writing this conclusion chapter. Acquiring basic population-level data for the time period I researched was nearly impossible, given that the government at the time did not invest resources to collect accurate, comprehensive data of the entire population. These are only select examples of many more barriers that I encountered while conducting fieldwork in Burma. I could only infer that such obstacles impeded what would have been more wide ranging data and analysis.

Third, the language barrier was a limitation that most likely provided a less robust understanding of the country and interviewees on my part as the researcher. While I did my best to hire talented interpreters and devoted maximum personal energy into bridging cultural barriers, I recognize that such efforts cannot compensate for a researcher's inability to speak the language of the interviewees. However, given the empirical significance of studying a recently liberalized country, I made the calculated trade-off to investigate first movers in a country where I do not speak the language.

8.4. Directions for future research

First, I do hope that this grounded theory will be of interest within and beyond the scholarly community to be tested and refined in other country contexts. While the theory emerged from data collected in a country with unique conditions, I believe that human beings living in repressive environments generally share similar motivations and aspirations. While they may not communicate in the same language, worship the same deity, or share the same cultural norms, I believe that all humans have an innate desire to be free. This core assumption that underpins my personal worldview of the human race leads me to believe that my theory can be generalizable in other contexts.

Second, a limitation that emerged from the first empirical chapter lends itself to be a question for future research. Why do some people, and not others, convert their political awareness into political action? A different version of this question could be why are some people, and not others, politicized by catalytic events to the extent of engaging in contentious political activity?

Lastly, I hope this project creates an agenda for future research on Burma's dissent history based on my collection of observable dissent events. I was incredibly fortunate to be welcomed into the homes, offices, and classrooms of Burmese activists and dissenters – some who were younger than me, and others who were older than my grandfathers – and entrusted with people's memories and experiences of their small attempts at eroding the edges of their authoritarian regime.

My interviewees, for the most part, were extraordinarily humble in their claims of the role that they individually played in upending Burma's military dictatorship. What they do not realize is that their small acts as first movers accumulated over time and contributed to ushering in a new era of a nascent democracy into their country. While they were extraordinary moments of mass demonstrations in Burma's history, the 1988 Uprising and 2007 Saffron protests are not the only protests that warrant scholarly and mainstream attention. This project has endeavored to peel back the layers of initial stages of dissent and I hope it can be the springboard for further research on Burma's vibrant history of political dissent against military dictatorship.

I was fortunate to interview 68 people in Yangon and Pakokku, most of whom were not high-profile or otherwise known figures. There are thousands more, scattered across the whole country, and I know that their experiences and their motivations will help construct a much richer understanding of first movers of dissent in Burma and beyond. There is much more work to be done.

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Appendix A: Map of Myanmar



MAP 1: Map of Burma/Myanmar in 2012. Source: United Nation's Geospatial Information Section. Author highlighted Yangon and Pakokku in red to notate the two cities that were researched for this project.

Appendix B: Terminology

This list contains the terms used in my project, which captures a Burman Buddhist majority sample. Most other ethnic groups use different terms for honorifics.

- 88-ers / 88 Generation = reference to activists who participated/helped organize the August 8, 1988 demonstrations
- 8888 = Shorthand reference to the nation-wide demonstrations that started on August 8, 1988
- Ashin = 'Lord' especially used as a title for monks
- Bo = military officer; also used to refer to those who has distinguished himself in Burma's independence and pro-democracy movements
- Bogyoke = military general
- Daw and U = female/male honorifics for those who are older/married as well has achieved a level of status ('auntie' and 'uncle')
- Ko / Ma = female / female honorifics that means brother / sister
- Sangha = monkhood
- Sayadaw = honorific for senior monk

A note on the names of administrative divisions

On May 26, 1989, the military regime changed the name of the country, along with the names of many cities, divisions, and provinces. For example, 'Burma' was changed to 'Myanmar,' and 'Rangoon' was changed to 'Yangon.' Many activists, especially those who were active in the 1988 protests and in ethnic rights organizations, continue to refer to their country as Burma because they believe that the regime's illegitimate authority did not have the power to change the names of various levels of administration of the country, much less the name of the country itself. Most countries have accepted the country's name change. However, the United States, United Kingdom, and several others continues to officially refer to the country as Burma (U.S. Department of State 2020). Some of my interviewees used exclusively Burma, and others used Burma and Myanmar interchangeably. In my dissertation, I decided to use Burma to refer to the country, unless I am directly quoting someone or another source. I use Yangon and Rangoon interchangeably.

A note on the demonyms of Burma and Myanmar

The term “Burmese” is used to refer to the citizens of Burma as well as the majority language spoken in Burma. The term “Burman” or “Bamar” is used to refer to the majority ethnic group of Burman/Bamar people. For example, an ethnic Shan person could be referenced as a “Shan-Burmese” person. The term Myanmar is used to refer to the country, the citizens, as well as the language. For example, the sentence “a Burmese person speaks Burmese” is identical in meaning to the sentence “a Myanmar person speaks Myanmar.”

A note on Burmese names

People generally have only their given names; there are no family surnames. For more on Burmese (Burman and non-Burman) names, see (Daw Mi Mi Khaing 1958).

Appendix C: Interviewee descriptive statistics

68 Total Interviewees	
48 First movers	71%
12 Dissenters (non-first movers)	18%
8 Non-dissenters	12%
60 Males	88%
8 Females	12%
39 Yangon-natives	57%
7 Pakokku-natives	10%
21 Natives of other towns	31%
1 Outside Burma	1%
55 Buddhists	81%
6 Muslims	9%
7 No religion/unknown	10%
45 Former political prisoners	66%
20 Has 1+ political prisoner in family	29%
37 Has 1+ dissenter in family	54%
2 Elite class	3%
6 Upper middle class	9%
33 Middle class	49%
20 Lower class / poor	29%
3 Unknown	4%
4 NA	6%

48 First movers	
43 Males	90%
5 Females	10%
39 Former political prisoners	81%
14 Has 1+ political prisoners in family	29%
25 Has 1+ dissenter in family	52%
20 Had parents supportive of dissent	42%
5 Upper-middle class	10%
23 Middle class	48%
17 Lower class/poor	35%
3 Unknown class	6%
34 University	71%
7 High school	15%
1 Middle school	2%
1 Primary school	2%
4 Monastic education	8%
31 Yangon natives	65%
5 Pakokku natives	10%
12 From other villages	25%
40 Buddhists	83%
3 Muslims	6%
5 No religions/unknown	10%
42 Burmese	88%
2 Mon	4%
1 Karen-Burmese	2%
1 Burmese-Pakistani	2%
1 Karen	2%
1 Burmese-Rakhine	2%

20 = Average age of first time dissenting

12 = Youngest age of an interviewee's first time dissenting

30 = Oldest age of an interviewee's first time dissenting

Appendix D: Interview consent form (English and Burmese)

Blavatnik School of Government



Supervisor: Dr. Maya Tudor
Researcher: Ji Baek (Doctoral Student)
Oxford email: Ji.baek@bsg.ox.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project Name: A micro-level study of the first movers of dissent between 1988-2011.

Ethics Approval Reference: BSG-C1A-18-004

Please read this document, and sign the consent form right before the interview with the researcher present.

1. What is the purpose of this study?

This doctoral dissertation research project hopes to answer the research question of why some people become the first movers of dissent in authoritarian countries. The project's country case study is Myanmar. This study is funded by Oxford University.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to be interviewed because you fit one of the following interview categories: (1) you are/were an early dissenter; (2) you are/were a dissenter; (3) you are knowledgeable about dissent in Myanmar.

You must be 18 years of age or older to be interviewed.

3. Do I have to take part?

No. You can ask questions about the study before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do agree to participate, you may withdraw yourself and your interview data from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without penalty, by advising the researchers of this decision. If you decide to withdraw, the data collected will be destroyed. If you decide to withdraw, please be sure to inform the doctoral student, Ji Baek, within four weeks after your interview takes place.

4. What can I expect if I take part in the study?

If you are happy to take part in the study, you will be asked to verbally answer questions that doctoral student Ji will ask. This should take approximately 60-90 minutes.

The study will take place at a date and location in Yangon that you find convenient. If you are not in Yangon, we could have the interview in a different city in Myanmar (if Ji could safely reach the location), or have an interview over videoconference. If Ji has more questions to ask after your interview, she will email or call you and ask if she could follow up with one more interview.

If you consent, your interview will be audio-recorded and Ji will take hand-written notes during the interview. The transcripts and audio recording of the interviews will be confidential and only Ji and other researchers will have private access to the data. If Ji would like to publish any part of your interview that identifies you, she will contact you and seek your explicit consent.

5. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

There are no known potential risks in taking part of the interview. There are no specific tasks that you need to do to prepare for the interview.

6. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There are no material benefits from taking part in the interview.

7. Expenses and payments

There will be no compensation for the interview. However, you will be reimbursed for travel expenses to reach the interview location and to return to your post-interview location. Tea and a meal will also be provided if desired.

8. What happens to the data provided?

The research data will be stored confidentially using an encrypted hard drive, and backed up in Ji's academic department storage. **Your responses will be anonymized, unless you would like your identity to be revealed.**

Personal / sensitive data will be stored confidentially using encrypted hard drive, and by using numerical identities for each interview subject.

The researcher (Ji), supervisor, research assistants and Burmese translators, and transcribers will have access to personal/sensitive data / research data. They will be required to sign confidentiality agreements before they work on this project.

All research data and records will be stored for a minimum retention period of 3 years after publication or public release of the research.

9. Will the research be published?

The research will be published as a dissertation, and may be published as academic articles, and may be published as a book.

The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. This archive includes digital copies of student theses successfully submitted as part of a University of Oxford postgraduate degree programme. Holding the archive online gives easy access for researchers to the full text of freely available theses, thereby increasing the likely impact and use of that research.

If you agree to participate in this study, the research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access.

10. Who is organising and funding the research?

Ji will receive funding from Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government, and Oxford's St. Cross College to conduct this research.

11. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: BSG-C1A-18-004).

12. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?

a) For studies reviewed by a University research ethics committee only:

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to the relevant researcher, Ji [+44 07908-151692] or her supervisor, Dr. Maya Tudor [+44 01865-614343], who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the relevant chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner.

b) Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

13. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Ethics Approval Reference: BSG-C1A-18-004

Project Name: A micro-level study of the first movers of dissent between 1988-2011.

Please initial each box. Boxes for items 8-11 are optional.

- | | | |
|-----------|--|--------------------------|
| 1 | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by designated individuals from the University of Oxford where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to access my data. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 | I understand how this research will be written up and published. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 | I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 | I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 | I consent to being audio recorded. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9 | I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication with my name. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 | I would like my interview to be fully anonymized. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11 | I would like my identity and my identifiable characteristics to be recorded in the interview, the researcher's findings, and in the final publications of the research. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12 | I agree to take part in the study. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature



သုတေသနကြီးကြပ်သူ - Dr. Maya Tudor

သုတေသနစာတမ်းပြုစုသူ - Ji Baek (Doctoral Student)

အောက်စဖို့ဒ်တက္ကသိုလ်အီးမေးလ် - ji.baek@bsg.ox.ac.uk

အင်တာဗျူးတွင်ပါဝင်ဖြေကြားသူ သိရှိရန်အချက်များ

စာတမ်းအမည် - ၁၉၈၈ မှ ၂၀၁၁ ခုနှစ်အတွင်း အစိုးရအားဆန့်ကျင်ရေး လှုပ်ရှားမှုများတွင် အဦးဆုံး ရှေ့ဆောင်ရှေ့ရွက် ပြုခဲ့သူများအား အသေးစိတ်လေ့လာချက်

ကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ အတည်ပြုချက် ရည်ညွှန်းအမှတ်စဉ် : BSG-C1A-18-004

အောက်ပါအချက်အလက်များအား သေချာစွာဖတ်ရှုပြီး၊ သုတေသီနှင့် အင်တာဗျူးမပြုလုပ်မီ ၎င်းရှေ့တွင် လက်မှတ်ရေးထိုးပါ။

(၁) ဒီစာတမ်းရဲ့ ရည်ရွယ်ချက်ကဘာလဲ။

အာဏာရှင်စနစ်ကျင့်သုံးတဲ့နိုင်ငံတွေကလူတစ်ချို့ဟာ ဘာကြောင့် ပထမဆုံး အစိုးရဆန့်ကျင် လှုပ်ရှားသူတွေဖြစ်လာလဲဆိုတဲ့ သုတေသနမေးခွန်းအတွက်အဖြေရှာနိုင်မယ်လို့ ဒီပါရဂူဘွဲ့စာတမ်းက မျှော်လင့်ပါတယ်။ ဒီစာတမ်းအတွက် အထူးပြုလေ့လာတဲ့နိုင်ငံကတော့ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ဒီစာတမ်းကို အောက်စဖို့ဒ်တက္ကသိုလ်က ငွေကြေးအထောက်အပံ့ပေးပါတယ်။

(၂) ဘာလို့ ဒီအင်တာဗျူးမှာပါဝင်ပေးဖို့ ကမ်းလှမ်းခံခဲ့ရတာလဲ။

မိတ်ဆွေ ဟာ အောက်ပါအချက်တွေထဲက တစ်ချက်ချက်နဲ့ကိုက်ညီနေတာကြောင့် ဒီအင်တာဗျူးမှာ ပါဝင်ပေးဖို့ ဖိတ်ကြားခံရတာပါ။ (၁) မိတ်ဆွေဟာ အစိုးရဆန့်ကျင်ရေးအတွက် စတင်လှုပ်ရှားသူ ဖြစ်နေ (သို့) ဖြစ်ခဲ့ဖူးလို့၊ (၂) မိတ်ဆွေဟာ အစိုးရဆန့်ကျင်သူဖြစ်နေ (သို့) ဖြစ်ခဲ့ဖူးလို့၊ (၃) မိတ်ဆွေဟာ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံက အစိုးရဆန့်ကျင်ရေးတွေနဲ့ပတ်သက်ပြီး ဗဟုသုတရှိသူဖြစ်နေလို့။

အင်တာဗျူးဖြေကြားရန်အတွက် မိတ်ဆွေသည် ၁၈ နှစ်ပြည့်ပြီးသူဖြစ်ရပါမယ်။

(၃) ဒီအင်တာဗျူးမှာ မဖြစ်မနေငါဝင်ရမှာလား။

မဟုတ်ပါဘူး။ မိတ်ဆွေ ဒီအင်တာဗျူးမှာပါဝင်ဖို့ဆုံးဖြတ်ခင်မှာ ဒီစာတမ်း သုတေသနအကြောင်း သိလိုသည်များကို မေးမြန်းနိုင်ပါတယ်။ အကယ်၍ မိတ်ဆွေဟာ ပါဝင်ဖို့ဆန္ဒမရှိတော့ဘူးဆိုရင်တော့ ဘာအကြောင်းပြချက်မှမလိုပဲ သုတေသီကို အကြောင်းကြားပြီး အချိန်မရွေး လွတ်လပ်စွာ ပြန်ထွက်နိုင်ပါတယ်။ မိတ်ဆွေ မပါတော့ဘူးလို့ဆုံးဖြတ်ပြီးတာနဲ့ မိတ်ဆွေဆီကရထားတဲ့ အချက်အလက်တွေအားလုံးကို ပျောက်ပျက်လိုက်မှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ တကယ်လို့ မပါတော့ဘူးဆိုရင် မိတ်ဆွေအင်တာဗျူးဖြေပြီးတဲ့နောက်စလို့လေးပတ်အတွင်းမှာ ငါရူကွဲ့ ကျောင်းသူ ဂျီဘက်ကို အကြောင်းကြားပေးဖို့တော့လိုပါတယ်။

(၄) ဒီအင်တာဗျူးမှာ ငါဝင်မယ်ဆိုရင် ဘာတွေမျှော်လင့်ထားရမလဲ။

ဒီအင်တာဗျူးမှာ မိတ်ဆွေငါမယ်ဆိုရင် ငါရူကွဲ့ကျောင်းသူ ဂျီ မေးတဲ့မေးခွန်းတွေကို နှုတ်နဲ့ဖြေကြားပေးရမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ အချိန်အားဖြင့်တော့ မိနစ် ၆၀ မှ ၉၀ အတွင်းလောက်ပဲကြာမှာပါ။

အင်တာဗျူးကတော့ ရန်ကုန်က မိတ်ဆွေအဆင်ပြေတဲ့နေရာနှင့်နေ့မှာ ပြုလုပ်ပေးမှာပါ။ မိတ်ဆွေက ရန်ကုန်မှာမဟုတ်ဘူးဆိုရင်လည်း မြန်မာနိုင်ငံအတွင်းမှာရှိတဲ့ တစ်ခြားမြို့တစ်မြို့မြို့မှာ အင်တာဗျူးလုပ်ပေးလို့ရပါတယ်။ (အဲဒီနေရာကို ဂျီ ဘေးကင်းလုံခြုံစွာနဲ့ ရောက်နိုင်ဖို့တော့လိုပါတယ်။) တကယ်လို့ အင်တာဗျူးပြီးသွားတော့မှ ဂျီက မေးစရာထပ်ရှိလာမယ်ဆိုရင်တော့ သူမက မိတ်ဆွေကိုအီးမေးလ် (သို့မဟုတ်) ဖုန်းနဲ့ဆက်သွယ်ပြီးတော့ နောက်အင်တာဗျူးတစ်ခုလောက်လုပ်ဖို့ မိတ်ဆွေအဆင်ပြေ၊ မပြေမေးမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

မိတ်ဆွေလက်ခံတယ်ဆိုရင် အင်တာဗျူးလုပ်နေတဲ့အချိန်မှာ အသံသွင်းထားပြီး ဂျီကလည်း လက်နဲ့မှတ်စုလေးတွေချရေးမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ မိတ်ဆွေ အင်တာဗျူးမှာဖြေကြားခဲ့တဲ့အချက်အလက်တွေနဲ့ အသံသွင်းထားတဲ့မိုင်တွေက ငျို့ငှက်မှတ်တမ်းတွေအဖြစ်သိမ်းဆည်းထားမှာဖြစ်ပြီး ဂျီနှင့်အခြားသုတေသီတွေပဲ အချက်အလက်တွေကို သီးသန့်ကြည့်ရှုနိုင်ခွင့်ရှိမှာပါ။ အကယ်၍ ဂျီက မိတ်ဆွေအင်တာဗျူးရဲ့ ဘယ်အပိုင်းကိုပဲဖြစ်ဖြစ် တရားဝင်ထုတ်ပြန်ပြီး မိတ်ဆွေရဲ့ အမည်ကိုလည်း ဖော်ပြချင်တယ်ဆိုရင်တော့ မိတ်ဆွေကို အရင်ဦးဆုံးဆက်သွယ်ပြီးတော့ မိတ်ဆွေလက်ခံ၊ မခံမေးမြန်းမှာပဲဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

(၅) ဒီအင်တာဗျူးမှာ ငါတို့အတွက် ဘယ်လိုဘေးအန္တရာယ်မျိုး ဖြစ်လာနိုင်သလဲ။

အင်တာဗျူးမှာ ငါတို့အတွက် ဘာဘေးအန္တရာယ်မှ ဖြစ်မှာမဟုတ်ပါဘူး။ အင်တာဗျူးမတိုင်ခင်မှာလည်း မိတ်ဆွေ ဘာမှထွေထွေထူးထူး ပြင်ဆင်ထားစရာမလိုပါဘူး။

(၆) ဒီအင်တာဗျူးမှာ ငါတို့အတွက်ရော အကျိုးအမြတ်ရှိလား။

ဒီအင်တာဗျူးမှာ ငါတို့အတွက် ပစ္စည်းဥစ္စာအားဖြင့်တော့ ဘာအကျိုးအမြတ်မှ မရှိပါဘူး။

(၇) ငွေရေးကြေးရေး စရိတ်စက

အင်တာဗျူးအတွက် ပိုက်ဆံပေးမှာမဟုတ်ပါဘူး။ ဒါပေမဲ့လည်း အင်တာဗျူးလုပ်တဲ့နေရာအထိလာရ၊ သွားရတဲ့ အသွားအပြန်စရိတ်ကိုတော့ မိတ်ဆွေပြန်ရမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ မိတ်ဆွေဆန္ဒရှိတယ်ဆိုရင်တော့ လက်ဖက်ရည်နှင့် အစားအသောက်များလည်း ဂျေးမွေးမှာပါ။

(၈) ကိုယ်အင်တာဗျူးမှာဖြေလိုက်တဲ့ သတင်းအချက်အလက်တွေက ဘယ်ရောက်ပြီး၊ ဘာဖြစ်သွားမလဲ။

ဒီသုတေသနနှင့်ပတ်သက်တဲ့ သတင်းအချက်အလက်တွေကို ကုတ်နံပါတ်ဖြင့်လုံခြုံစွာသော့ပိတ်ထားတဲ့ နေရာမှာ ငါ့ ဝက်သိမ်းဆည်းထားမှာဖြစ်ပြီး ဂျီရဲ့ကျောင်းသားရေးရာဌာနတွင်လည်း လုံခြုံစွာသိမ်းဆည်းထားမှာပါ။

မိတ်ဆွေဖြေဆိုမှုများနဲ့ပတ်သတ်ပြီး (မိတ်ဆွေအနေနဲ့ လိုလိုလားလား ဖော်ပြစေလိုသော အခြေအနေမျိုးမှလွဲရင်) မိတ်ဆွေနာမည်နဲ့ ကိုယ်ရေးကိုယ်တာအချက်အလက်များကို ဖော်ပြခြင်းပြုမှာ မဟုတ်ပါဘူး။

အရေးကြီးပြီး အကဲဆတ်တဲ့ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များနဲ့ မိတ်ဆွေရဲ့ ကိုယ်ရေးကိုယ်တာ အချက်အလက်များကို ကုတ်နံပါတ်ဖြင့်လုံခြုံစွာ ငါ့ ဝက် သိမ်းဆည်းထားမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

အင်တာဗျူးဖြေဆိုသူများ၏ နာမည်အစား နံပါတ်စဉ်ဖြင့်အစားထိုးသိမ်းဆည်းထားမှာလည်းဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ သုတေသီဖြစ်တဲ့ ဂျီ၊ ကြီးကြပ်ကွပ်ကဲသူ၊ သုတေသန လက်ထောက်များ၊ မြန်မာဘာသာပြန်နှင့်

စာစီသူများသာ အရေးကြီးထိရှလွယ်တဲ့ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များအား ကိုင်တွယ်ခွင့်ပြုမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ဒါပေမယ့် သူတို့အနေနဲ့ လည်း ဒီသုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းများမစခင်မှာ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များအား

ငါ့ ဝက်ထားရန်သဘောတူညီကြောင်း ခံဝန်ချက်ထိုးထားရမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ဒီသုတေသန မှရရှိတဲ့ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များအားလုံးကို ပုံနှိပ်ထုတ်ဝေပြီး (သို့) အများပြည်သူသို့

သုတေသန အကြောင်းကြေညာပြီးသည့်အချိန်မှစ၍ အနည်းဆုံး ၃နှစ်ကြာသိမ်းဆည်းထားမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

(၉) ယခုသုတေသန၏ တွေ့ရှိချက်များကို ပုံနှိပ်ထုတ်ဝေမှာလား။

သုတေသနတွေ့ရှိချက်များကို စာတမ်းအနေဖြင့်ထုတ်ဝေမှာ ဖြစ်ပြီး ပညာရပ်ဆိုင်ရာ ဆောင်းပါးများအဖြစ်ဖြစ်စေ၊ စာအုပ်အနေနဲ့ ဖြစ်စေ ထုတ်ဝေနိုင်စရာ အလားအလာလည်းရှိပါတယ်။ အောက်စဖို့ဒ်တက္ကသိုလ်ဟာ လူမှုအသိုက်အဝန်းနှင့် စီးပွားရေးကဏ္ဍကိုအကျိုးပြုရန်အလို့ငှာ တက္ကသိုလ်မှဦးစီးသော သုတေသနစာတမ်းများကို ဖြန့်ဝေခြင်းကိုလုပ်ဆောင်ပါတယ်။ ထိုသို့ဖြန့်ဝေရန်အတွက် သုတေသနဆိုင်ရာ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များကိုသိမ်းဆည်းရန် အွန်လိုင်းမော်ကွန်းတိုက်ထားရှိပါတယ်။ အောက်စဖို့ဒ်တက္ကသိုလ်မှာ ဘွဲ့လွန်တက်ရောက်တဲ့ ဂျောင်းသားများ အောင်မြင်စွာတင်သွင်းခဲ့သော ဘွဲ့လွန်စာတမ်းတွေကို အဲဒီမော်ကွန်းတိုက်မှာ ဒီဂျစ်တယ်မီတ္တူများအဖြစ်လည်းစုစည်းဝေပေးထားပါတယ်။ အွန်လိုင်းမော်ကွန်းတိုက်ထားရှိတဲ့အတွက်ကြောင့် သုတေသီတွေအနေနဲ့ စာတမ်းတွေကို အခမဲ့ရရှိနိုင်ပြီး သုတေသနရဲ့အကျိုးကျေးဇူးနဲ့ အသုံးဝင်မှုကို ပိုမိုမြင့်မားလာစေမှာ ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ တကယ်လို့ မိတ်ဆွေအနေနဲ့ ဒီသုတေသနလေ့လာမှုမှာ ပါဝင်ဖို့ သဘောတူတယ်ဆိုရင် ဒီသုတေသနပြုချက်ကို စာတမ်းရေးသားမှာ ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ စာတမ်းကို အောင်အောင်မြင်မြင် တင်သွင်းပြီးတာနဲ့ တစ်ပြိုင်နက် တက္ကသိုလ်၏ အွန်လိုင်းနှင့် ပုံနှိပ်မော်ကွန်းတိုက်များထံသို့ အနာဂတ်သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းစဉ်များတွင်ထပ်မံအသုံးပြုရန်အတွက် ပေးပို့မှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ထို့နောက်စာတမ်းကို လူအများအလွယ်တကူဖတ်ရှုလေ့လာနိုင်ရန် ဖြန့်ဝေမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

(၁၀) ဒီသုတေသနစာတမ်းကို ဘယ်သူတွေဦးစီးပြီး ဘယ်သူတွေကထောက်ပံ့သလဲ။

အောက်စဖို့ဒ်တက္ကသိုလ်ရဲ့ လက်အောက်ခံ ဂျောင်းခွဲတွေ ဖြစ်တဲ့ Blavatnik School of Government နှင့် St. Cross College တို့မှ ဒီသုတေသနစာတမ်းနဲ့ပတ်သက်ပြီး လိုအပ်သောအထောက်အပံ့များကို ငြိအားပေးအပ်သွားမှာ ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

(၁၁) ဒီလေ့လာချက်ကို ဘယ်သူတွေက သုံးသပ်စစ်ဆေးပါသလဲ။

ဒီလေ့လာချက်ကို အောက်စဖို့ဒ်တက္ကသိုလ်၊ ဗဟို တက္ကသိုလ် သုတေသီ ကျင့်ဝတ်ကော်မတီ မှ သုံးသပ်စစ်ဆေးပြီး ကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ ပြစ်ချက်ကင်းစင်ကြောင်း အတည်ပြုချက် ရရှိပြီး ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ (ရည်ညွှန်းအမှတ်စဉ် - BSG-C1A-18-004)

(၁၂) ဒီသုတေသနလေ့လာချက်နှင့်ပတ်သက်ပြီး စိုးရိမ်ပူပန်မှုတစ်ခုခုရှိလာပါကပြောပြလိုခြင်း၊ အဆင်မပြေမှုများကို ထောက်ပြဝေဖန်လိုခြင်းများရှိလာပါက ဘယ်သူ့ကိုဆက်သွယ်နိုင်ပါသလဲ။

(က) တက္ကသိုလ်၏သုတေသနစည်းပျဉ်းစည်းကမ်းဆိုင်ရာကော်မတီမှ ပြန်လည်ဆန်းစစ်သော လေ့လာချက်များနှင့် ပတ်သက်ပါက

သုတေသနလေ့လာချက်၏ မည်သည့်အစိတ်အပိုင်းနှင့်ပတ်သက်၍မဆို စိုးရိမ်ပူပန်မှုတစ်ခုခုရှိလာပါက သုတေသီ ဂျီကို ဖုန်းနံပါတ် +၄၄ ၀၇၉၀၈ ၁၅၁၆၉၂ မှဖြစ်စေ၊ သူမ၏ ကြီးကြပ်သူ ငေါက်တာ မေရာတူငေါက်ကို ဖုန်းနံပါတ် +၄၄ ၀၁၈၆၅ ၆၁၄၃၄၃ မှဖြစ်စေဆက်သွယ်နိုင်ပါတယ်။ သူတို့မှ မိတ်ဆွေတင်ပြချက်များကို အကောင်းဆုံးဖြေရှင်းပေးရန် အသင့်ရှိနေမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ မိတ်ဆွေတင်ပြချက်ကို မည်ကဲ့သို့ဖြေရှင်း လုပ်ဆောင်သွားမည်ဖြစ်ကြောင်း ပုံမှန်အလုပ်ချိန်ကာလ (၁၀)ရက်အတွင်းသုတေသီမှ အကြောင်းပြန်သွားမှာ ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ မိတ်ဆွေအနေနဲ့ ဖြေရှင်းချက်အား အားရကျေနပ်မှုမရှိသဖြင့် ထပ်မံတင်ပြလိုပါက အောက်စဖို့ဒ်တက္ကသိုလ်ရှိ သုတေသနစည်းပျဉ်းစည်းကမ်းဆိုင်ရာ ကော်မတီသို့ တိုက်ရိုက်ဆက်သွယ်နိုင်ပါတယ်။ ကော်မတီအနေနဲ့ မိတ်ဆွေရဲ့တင်ပြချက်အပေါ် မြန်ဆန်စွာ ဖြေရှင်းဆောင်ရွက်ပေးသွားမှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

(ခ) လူမှုသိပ္ပံနှင့် လူမှုဗေဒဆိုင်ရာလေ့လာမှုများအတွက်

သုတေသနစည်းပျဉ်းစည်းကမ်းဆိုင်ရာကော်မတီခွဲ

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လိပ်စာ - သုတေသနဝန်ဆောင်မှုများ၊ အောက်စဖို့ဒ်တက္ကသိုလ်၊ ဝယ်လင်တန်စကွဲ၊ အောက်စဖို့ဒ်။

(Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD)

(၁၃) နောက်ဆက်တွဲ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များနှင့် ဆက်သွယ်ရန်လိပ်စာများ
ဒီသုတေသနနဲ့ ပတ်သက်ပြီးကြိုတင်ဆွေးနွေးချင်သည်များ (သို့) နောက်ပိုင်းတွင် ဆက်လက်ဆွေးနွေးလိုသည်များရှိပါက ဆက်သွယ်ရန်

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အင်တာဗျူးတွင် ငါဝင်ဖြေကြားသူ သဘောတူ ပုံစံ
ကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ အတည်ပြုချက် ရည်ညွှန်းအမှတ်စဉ် : BSG-C1A-18-004

စာတမ်းအမည် - ၁၉၈၈ မှ ၂၀၁၁ ခုနှစ်အတွင်း
အစိုးရအားဆန့်ကျင်ခြင်းများတွင်ပထမဦးဆုံးလှုပ်ရှားသူများအား အသေးစိတ်လေ့လာမှု
ဂေ့ဇင်းပြု၍ အောက်ပါအတွက် တစ်ခုစီကို ဖြည့်ပေးပါ။ အမှတ် ၈ မှ ၁၁ အထိကို
မိတ်ဆွေစိတ်ကြိုက်ရွေးပေးပါ။

- ၁ ဂျန်တော်/ဂျန်မ၏ ငါဝင်မှုသည် မိမိဆန္ဒအဖြစ်ပြီး မည်သည့်အကြောင်းပြချက်မျှ မပေးဘဲ၊ မည်သည့် တန်ပြန်အကျိုးဆက် (သို့မဟုတ်) ပြစ်ဒဏ်မျှ မရှိဘဲ အချိန်မရွေး လွတ်လပ်စွာ ထွက်ခွာနိုင်သည်ကို သိရှိနားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။
- ၂ ဂျန်တော်/ဂျန်မသည် ၎င်းသူတေသနပြုလုပ်စဉ်အတွင်း ရရှိစုဆောင်းထားသော သုတေသနဆိုင်ရာ အချက်အလက်များအား အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်ရှိ တာဝန်ရှိသူများက ၎င်းလေ့လာမှုနှင့် ပတ်သက်သည့် အခြားသောလေ့လာမှုများအတွက် တရားဝင်ကြည့်ရှုခွင့်ပြုထားသည်ကို နားလည်ထားပြီးဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ဂျန်တော်/ဂျန်မသည် ၎င်းတစ်ဦးချင်းစီအား မိမိတို့၏ အချက်အလက်များအား ဝင်ရောက်ကြည့်ရှုရန် ခွင့်ပြုပါသည်။
- ၃ ဤသုတေသနစာတမ်းသည် အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ် ဗဟိုသုတေသနကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ ကော်မတီမှ သုံးသပ်စစ်ဆေးပြီး ကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ ခွင့်ပြုချက်ကို ရရှိထားပြီးသည်ကို နားလည်ပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။
- ၄ ဂျန်တော်/ဂျန်မထံမှ ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်ရေးဆိုင်ရာ အချက်အလက်များကို မည်သူရရှိမည်၊ ၎င်းအချက်အလက်များကို မည်သို့ သိမ်းဆည်းမည်နှင့် ၎င်းသုတေသနစာတမ်းငယ် ပြီးသည့်အခါ ၎င်းအချက်အလက်များ မည်သို့ ဖြစ်သွားမည်ဆိုသည်နှင့် ပတ်သက်၍ နားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။
- ၅ ဂျန်တော်/ဂျန်မသည် ဤသုတေသနစာတမ်းကို မည်သို့ရေးသားဖော်ပြမည်၊ မည်သို့ထုတ်ဝေမည်ကိုလည်း နားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။
- ၆ ဂျန်တော်/ဂျန်မ စိုးရိမ်ပူပန်မှုတစ်စုံတစ်ရာရှိပါက မည်သို့မည်ပုံ အကြောင်းကြားနိုင်သည် (သို့မဟုတ်) မည်သို့တိုင်ကြားနိုင်သည်ကို နားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။
- ၇ အသံသွင်းထားသော အချက်အလက်များအား နောက်ဆုံးသုတေသနရလဒ်တွင် မည်သို့၊ မည်ပုံ အသုံးပြုမည် ဆိုသည်ကို ဂျန်တော်/ဂျန်မ နားလည်ပါသည်။
- ၈ သုတေသနစာတမ်းအတွက် မေးမြန်းမှုလုပ်နေစဉ် အသံသွင်းမှုကို ပြုလုပ်ရန် သဘောတူပါသည်။

၉ သုတေသနစာတမ်း ထုတ်ဝေသောအခါ ဂျာနယ်တော်/ဂျာနယ်၏ အမည်ဖြင့် တိုက်ရိုက်ကိုးကားဖော်ပြရန် ခွင့်ပြုပါသည်။

၁၀ ဂျာနယ်တော်/ဂျာနယ်ရဲ့ မေးမြန်းမှုကို ဖော်ပြရာတွင် အမည်ကို ထိန်ချန်ထားစေလိုပါသည်။

၁၁ မိမိ မည်သူဖြစ်သည်နှင့် မည်သူမည်ဝါဖြစ်ကြောင်း သိနိုင်စေမည့် အမှတ်အသားများအား မေးမြန်းမှု၊ သုတေသီ၏ တွေ့ရှိချက်များနှင့် နောက်ဆုံး သုတေသနစာတမ်းထုတ်ဝေခြင်းများတွင် မှတ်တမ်းတင်ရန် ခွင့်ပြုပါသည်။

၁၂ ယခုလေ့လာမှုမှာ ပါဝင်ပါမည်ဟု ဂျာနယ်တော်/ဂျာနယ် သဘောတူပါသည်။

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ပါဝင်သူ၏ အမည်	နေ့ရက်	လက်မှတ်
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သဘောတူညီမှုရယူသူအမည်	နေ့ရက်	လက်မှတ်

Appendix E: Interview guides

Interview guide for possible first movers

*Note that I conducted semi-structured interviews.

Introduction

- Introduce myself. Ensure that interviewee understands consent form.
- Explain the interview's purpose, format, and expected time.

Warm up questions

- What do you do now? What have you been doing for the last few years?

Personal profile

- How old were you when you first engaged in political dissent activities?
- What kind of work were you doing during the time these dissent events unfolded?
- What was your family composition?
- Did anyone in your family or relatives have a history of dissent?
- Were your parents and other family members supportive or discouraging of your dissent activities?
- Could you describe your education background? What was the highest level of education you received?
- What kind of hobbies did you enjoy? What did you do with your free time? What were your close friends like, and what did you and your friends usually talk about?

Dissent events (Ask these questions for each dissent event)

- What kinds of dissent events did you participate in?
- Could you tell me more about which dates they took place, and where they took place?
- Could you tell me more about the dissent event? How did you get involved in the first place?
- Who else was there? Did you go by yourself? What made you want to attend?
- What kind of activity took place?
- What were you protesting?
- What was the goal of the dissent event?
- How did you communicate with other recruits (early joiners and late joiners)? How often did you communicate with them right before, during and after the dissent event(s)?
- What outcome from the dissent event were you hoping for?
- How big did the dissent event(s) become? Did many people join? How many do you think joined?
- I'm very interested in dissent events that fizzed out. Were you part of any dissent events (especially as the first mover) of any dissent events that did not grow? Why did they not escalate?

Individual participation and motivations

- How did you come to be the first to dissent in the dissent event(s)?
- Have you been involved in political dissent events before?
- If you were caught by the authorities, what could have happened to you?
- What happened to people who were caught dissenting?
- Were the risks different for leaders or early dissenters compared to the risks for people who joined later?
- (*follow up*) If you knew that the risks were so high, what made you want to participate in the event?
- Right before your dissent action, what did you see? Did you hear anything that made you angry or energized? Who were you with right before your dissent action?
- Were you involved in political activity before you first participated in dissent activity? Did you have any friends or family who were politically active? Any activists, or dissenters?

- What did others think of you when they saw you, or later learned that you were the first to dissent? How did that make you feel?

Others in dissent networks

- Do you remember others who joined the dissent early on?
- What do you think made them join early on?
- What kind of people do you think decide to participate in dissent activities first/early on? What do you think motivated them to dissent first?

Other dissent events

- Are there other dissent events that you participated in (for which you were not a first mover)?
- Are there other dissent events you did not participate in that I could interview people about?

People I could interview?

- Dissenters as well as non-dissenters

Interview guide for non-first movers

Introduction

- Introduce myself. Ensure that interviewee understands consent form.
- Explain the interview's purpose, format, and expected time.

Warm up questions

- What do you do now? What have you been doing for the last few years?

Personal profile

- How old were you at the time of dissent event(s)?
- What kind of work were you doing during the time these dissent events unfolded?
- What was your family composition?
- Could you describe your education background? What was the highest level of education you received?
- What kind of hobbies did you enjoy? What did you do with your free time? What were your close friends like, and what did you and your friends usually talk about?

Relationship with first movers

- How do you know [given first mover of specific dissent events]?
- Did you spend time together? If so, what kind of activities did you do together? What did you talk about together?

Events around dissent events

- How did you learn about the dissent events?
- Did you know the first movers and early dissenters (of the specific dissent events)?
- When you learned about the dissent events, what did you do immediately after? What did you think immediately after?

Risks associated with dissent

- What happened to people who were caught dissenting? What happened to the first movers and other early dissenters who were not caught?
- Were the risks different for leaders or early dissenters?
- What did you think about the people who took significant risks to dissent?

Decision around non-dissenting

- What were the outcomes of the specific dissent events?
- Among your close circle of friends, did you know anyone who was interested in political dissent and other politically sensitive activities?

People I could interview?

Interview guide for people who know first movers

Introduction

- Introduce myself. Ensure that interviewee understands consent form.
- Explain the interview's purpose, format, and expected time.

Warm up questions

- What do you do now? What have you been doing for the last few years?

Personal profile

- How old were you during the time of dissent events?
- What kind of work were you doing during the time these dissent events unfolded?
- Could you describe your education background? What was the highest level of education you received?

Information and perceptions of first mover

- How do you know [given first mover of specific dissent events]?
- Could you tell me more about the first mover? What kind of work / study was the first mover doing during the time of dissent? What was the first mover's personality and character like? Did he/she have many friends? Religious? Did this first mover participate in political activities often?
- Did you spend time together? If so, what kind of activities did you do together? What did you talk about together?
- What did other people think about the first mover? What was the first mover's reputation? What was the first mover's family like?

People I could interview?

Interview guide for experts

Introduction

- Introduce myself. Ensure that interviewee understands consent form.
- Explain the interview's purpose, format, and expected time.

Warm up questions

- What do you do now? What have you been doing for the last few years?

Personal profile

- What kind of work were you doing during the time these dissent events unfolded?
- Could you describe your education background? What was the highest level of education you received?

Dissent events

- Other than the 8888 Uprising and 2007 Saffron Revolution, what dissent events could you list (large and small) that you know about between 1988-2011? Is there a list you know about?
- What kind of small dissenting activities did you know or hear about? Could you describe for me the type of people involved, and the type of activities that were involved? What were people upset about, and what outcome were they trying to obtain?
- How did first movers and other early dissenters communicate with one another?
- How did dissent events come about? How did they start, how did they escalate, and how did they end?

Dissenters and first movers

- What types of people were dissenters and first movers? Age, gender, line of work/study, socio-economic status, family composition?
- Are there any first movers that you know, or know of, who I could speak to?

Risks associated with dissent

- What happened to people, especially first movers, if they were caught dissenting the government?
- If the risks involved were well known, why did some people continue to protest?

Appendix F: Changed method for systematizing the dependent variable

Before fieldwork, my initial plan was to score the risk levels of dissent events from 1-10 (10 being highest risk), and if a dissenter was involved in the early stages of a dissent event that had a risk score of 5 or higher, I would label him as first mover of dissent. However, I quickly realized that this plan did not align with my observations from my four rounds of fieldwork. When I tried to ask former dissenters and key informants to code the riskiness of dissent events from 1-10, they all responded that, “everything was high risk. Everything was a 10.” Therefore, I decided to differentiate between the level of risky engagement at the early stages of dissent, rather than the risk level of the event itself.

Appendix G: Specific dissent events

All of these events were described in my interviews. Most did not result in mass mobilization.

Event name

1987 Demonetization protests
1988 Uprising
1990 Election Results Protests
1991 Nobel Peace Prize (10D; for “December 10”)
1992 Anti-national constitutional conventional protests
1994 Yangon protests
1995 December protests
1995 Kyandaw cemetery strike (U Nu’s funeral)
Dec 12, 1996 at 12pm
1997 Protests in Yangon
1998 Protests in Yangon
9.9.99 Protests
Phone Maw Day (Annual)
2002 Military Technological School Mutiny
Protests after the 2003 Depayin Massacre
2004 Tuesday Prayer campaign
2004/5 White Shirt campaign
2004/5 Signature campaign
2007 Saffron Revolution/protests
2008 Constitution protests
2008 Cyclone Nargis civil society activity
2009 Yellow Campaign

Appendix H: “Universe” of high-risk dissent activities captured in my interviews

- “Runners” people who run errands within underground networks to keep communication networks alive
- Awareness-raising and solidarity-building campaigns
- Birthdays, death anniversaries, and other celebrations of famous people critical of regime (e.g., Aung San, Martyrs’ Day, Aung San Suu Kyi birthday, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, U Thant Funeral)
- Book clubs, study groups, and other types of secretive meetings that doubled as political discussion forums
- Burning the country flag
- Communicating to foreigners (especially journalists) about sensitive domestic issues
- Creating and using underground networks to promote political activities
- Creating dissident literature (e.g., Aung Htun’s book on the history of student movements in Burma, publishing any material critical of government)
- Creating student unions
- Distribution of illegal materials (contents included political statements and leaflets, illegal reading materials, Aung San Suu Kyi speeches, documentaries and movies, Gene Sharp’s non-violent resistance literature)
- Guerilla demonstrations (“hit-and-run” protests)
- Hoisting the peacock flag at public demonstrations
- Hunger strikes
- Joining NLD and any other political party that was outlawed before and after the 1990 elections
- Listening to foreign radio
- Marches within and around school compounds
- Monks distributing political pamphlets they hid in their alms bowls
- Monks’ turning alms bowls over in public refusal to accept donations from military
- Oway journal
- Phone calls
- Possessing images of Aung San and Aung San Suu Kyi on visible pieces of clothing
- Prayer campaigns
- Protests and demonstrations
- Providing aid and food for people in need in front of the NLD office
- Providing aid to victims of 2008 Cyclone Nargis (food, shelter, collecting bodies for proper burials)
- Providing care and protection for protestors: medical care, providing food and shelter
- Providing stories to journalists via email, phone calls, and in-person meetings
- Public speeches critical of government
- Saying anything positive in public about Aung San Suu Kyi (e.g., “Aung San Suu Kyi should be healthy!”)
- Signature campaign
- Sit-ins
- Socially acceptable acts that have the intention to criticize the government
- Songs, poems (*kabar ma kyay buu*)
- Walk-outs at school
- Whispering campaign
- White campaign

Appendix I: Issues that people engaged in dissent activity for

Specific issues	General issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government to reverse demonetization (1987) • Demanding the truth about Phone Maw's death (March 13, 1988) • Forcible transfer of students to a new university satellite campus • Demanding that the government allows Aung San Suu Kyi to receive her 1990 Nobel Peace Prize • Released detained student protesters • Demanding government to recognize 1990 election results • Government to reverse decision to repeal fuel subsidies, increasing commodity prices (2007) • Holding anniversaries, memorials, birthdays, funeral memorials of sensitive political figures 	<p>Many dissent events' demands grew into broader demands, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military dictatorship to end • Democracy • Human rights • Education reform

Appendix J: Researcher positionality

(Addendum to Research design and methodology chapter)

The following is one example of my attempt to minimize an invisible distance that existed between me and my interviewee in order to create an environment most conducive to the interviewee offering rich information. In a monastery that took two hours to get to by motorbike from Pakokku, the monk I was going to interview gestured that I should eat, as I must be hungry from a long ride. My Burmese interpreter and I sat down at the open table (this rural monastery had no doors), and I looked down to see half eaten rice, potatoes in soy sauce that were half-bitten, and a variety of oily curries that had bits of rice and dead gnats in it. A few stray dogs, one which had open wounds on his face and belly, sat next to me with hopeful eyes, then started to lick my feet that were protected only by strappy sandals.

Smiling, the monk asked the interpreter if the meal was up to my standards. Refusing to offend the monk – the son of Buddha in the eyes of Buddhists – and the person I was going to interview who allowed a non-Buddhist into his sacred space, I dove into my meal.

Researcher experiences that framed my fieldwork

I encountered unparalleled kindness and generosity in Yangon and Pakokku throughout my fieldwork, which I journaled and spent much time thinking about. In attempt to close the distance as best as I could between myself (a foreigner) and local residents (for whom the GDP/capita is \$1,200 and most have not travelled outside of their hometown), I dressed casually, sporting a backpack and slippers I bought in Yangon. The year-round warm weather and summer monsoon seasons were conducive to the supermajority of people wearing flipflops, regardless of social rank. Given the poor infrastructure, plumbing and sewage systems, I often walked through flooded streets with puddles often reaching mid-calf. Regular trash collection was reserved for mainly the more

affluent blocks, so people often took it upon themselves to collect recycling in exchange for some cash. Street dogs and cats lived everywhere; the unattended (and unvaccinated) animals sat under tables at teashops, waiting for someone to spill fried rice or meat. They walked in and out of the kitchens of teashops, trying to snatch raw meat from cooks. They usually hung around monasteries, knowing that some monks would feed them regularly. Some of the larger dogs roved around in packs at night.

After a dinner meeting one night, I decided to walk the two miles from downtown Yangon to my accommodation. At this point, I was used to walking in near-pitch black streets with my feet feeling their way to avoid falling through stretches of sidewalk that were missing concrete blocks. When I was two blocks away from my hotel, I saw a large dog with its ears perked up, looking straight at me. I cowered, and several more large street dogs appeared behind the alpha male. They trotted towards me, causing me to stumble backwards. As I made this mistake of showing my fear to street dogs, a “rookie foreigner mistake” I was told later, the pack of street dogs started to sprint towards my direction. Carrying a heavy backpack full of notebooks, I sprinted as fast as I could in my flipflops, and lunged into a parked taxi with its passenger door open. I looked to my left at the driver’s seat, where there was a young woman breastfeeding her baby. She looked at me nonchalantly – a stranger who jumped into her car while she was feeding her infant – and did not say anything.

A man, who I assumed to be her husband and the driver of this taxi cab I was sitting in, walked over with his lit cigarette in his left hand, wearing his longyi, and poked his head through the driver seat window. I panicked and pointed to the dogs that had mysteriously stopped chasing me. He grabbed an umbrella and waved it around, causing the dogs to backtrack a bit. A few other taxi drivers, sitting in their parked cars, peered above their opened newspapers with their glasses perched low on their nose bridges, and looked amused at the scene I was causing. I thanked the driver and his wife for helping me, and as I raced

into my hotel lobby, I wondered, how come that young mother did not seem phased whatsoever at a foreigner – albeit a frightened petite female who definitely does not have a threatening countenance – jumping into her car at night? Moreover, she just let me stay in her car, with her baby present, for as long as I wanted to be there. By not kicking me out of her car, she was helping me.

* * *

While recognizing that these two cities are not representative of a country populated by over 135 ethnic groups speaking over 118 languages, they could not be that much of an outlier. While walking on Merchant street in downtown Yangon, a monsoon rain shower hit, triggering young men to race out of their homes to shower underneath rain gutters of their dilapidated homes. Without an umbrella, I ran towards the closest street vendor. By this point, I had mastered running in flipflops through the rain atop slippery moss-covered sidewalks.

Soaked, I squeezed myself underneath the blue tarp held up by a few bamboo rods and twine, which was the roof of this makeshift street vendor selling betel nut, individual packets of instant Nestle coffee, and Shark energy drinks. Two young men with betel nut lips and teeth (lips and decaying teeth that are dyed red from the betel nut chewing habit) motioned for me to sit down on a child-size plastic chair and welcomed me to wait out the rain. They smiled at me, making me feel welcomed as I had – yet again – intruded into someone's private space, this time a business, and they went back to watching YouTube videos on their Hwahuei smart phones.

As I watched the rain pour down on Merchant Street from the haven underneath a betel nut vendor's tarp cover, I wondered why these two men did not take the opportunity to try to sell this foreigner something. Realizing that these men really were not going to be opportunists, I looked to see if I could purchase something. I opened and peaked inside their Styrofoam 'icebox' that had no ice in it, and saw a small dead cockroach, a few grimy

water bottles that were clearly re-used, and a Shark energy drink. I purchased the energy drink and sipped on the sugary drink through the straw I was offered, as I and these two Burmese young men waited out the rain. They had helped me, a foreigner, by letting me wait underneath their tiny tarp while expecting nothing in return.

* * *

I was warned by everyone –from CUREC forms, Burmese friends, and local hotel staff – to always buy bottled water in Burma. So, no matter how inconvenienced or overheated I was, I would always go to a teashop or store to purchase bottled water. A 16-ounce bottle of water was about 200 kyat (about \$0.13), so I would usually buy two bottles, some gum, and some candies to add up to a 1,000 kyat (\$0.66). One afternoon, I went into family-owned shop and bought my usual necessities and walked out into the rain with my umbrella. When I was about a block away, I heard a child’s voice, yelling “Ma! Ma!” (which means ‘sister’ in Burmese). I did not think anything of it until a stranger tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to a child running after me. He was about six or seven years old, drenched from the rain, wearing shorts and no shirt. I had just seen him in the store, playing with a toy car while his mother tended to customers.

Now, he was standing in front of me, wiping the rain away from his young face that was causing his thick black eyelashes to stick together, and opened his hand to reveal a scrunched up, wet 100 kyat bill (\$0.06). I looked past him and saw his mother standing outside her store, overseeing this interaction. It was clear that she had sent her young son through the rain to give back the change that was owed to the customer, a foreigner that she would probably never see again. This means she would probably not suffer any reputational costs if I had later figured out that I had been shortchanged. Moreover, while 100 kyat is a non-negligible amount of money for some local residents, the store owner must have known that six U.S. cents was a trivial amount to a foreigner, which, for a self-interested store owner, would have been easy to keep without any risk.

I reflected on this act of selflessness the whole day. Perhaps she was an exceptionally honest shopkeeper, who was willing to sacrifice her young son's comfort to tend to a customer with moral rectitude. Or was there something else that drove this woman's act? A sense of morality? Treating people – even strangers – with kindness and fairness?

* * *

I walked past a series of book vendors on Bogyoke Road and stopped at one to browse through an English-Burmese dictionary. I had just landed in Yangon the night before and hadn't re-acclimated to the intensely hot and humid weather at the height of monsoon season. My face was drenched, with sweat literally dripping onto the small dictionary I was holding. Everyone else who was shuffling through the sidewalks, including women wearing longyis and tight matching tops with their long straight hair down their backs, looked cool. No one was sweating, which made sense since residents were acclimated to the weather.

A young girl (no older than ten or eleven years old), who was helping her mother run this tiny book stand stepped out from inside the booth and handed me a small packet of tissues in pink packaging, using both hands. Using both hands to give or receive an object is a sign of respect and grace in many cultures, including Burmese and Korean culture. I smiled and said no, I don't need it. She gently insisted, saying "present. Present." This young girl was gifting me a small packet of tissues. I thought, maybe she wants me to buy the tissues. Maybe she wants me to buy a few books in return for this seemingly kind gesture? Either way, I was happy to purchase the dictionary that had my perspiration on it, so I offered to buy the book. The girl shook her head, and said, "No, it's a present. No need to buy anything." I was astonished. I insisted and purchased that dictionary.

* * *

Pakokku was a significantly more rural, less developed town than Yangon. Compared to Pakokku, Yangon seemed like Burma's version of Manhattan, with the

standstill traffic, high rises, and throngs of people buying and selling goods throughout the city. As the sun slowly set, Pakokku became dusty, quiet, and dark. While finding it eerie at first to sit in my hotel room with my fluorescent light bulb flickering on and off, listening to the singing lizard, I quickly got used to it.

The first night my interpreter and I arrived in Pakokku, we walked around the small town to orient ourselves and to find restaurants and cafes where we could have our daily debriefs. Seeing that the lights around the whole downtown seemed to be shutting off, we thought it would be best to head back to the area where our hotel was, which was about four kilometers from where we were roaming around. While we did not mind walking the distance, we had difficulty finding paved roads in near-darkness, so we approached betel nut vender after betel nut vendor, asking where we could find a taxi. Every vendor apologetically shook her head and said she didn't know. It was now completely dark, and most sign of human activity had disappeared off the streets except for men of all ages drinking at beer stations.

A young man wearing white headphones and a jean jacket pulled up in his motorbike next to me and my interpreter and asked where we were going. I told my interpreter to not tell him, because how could we trust him? The young man – probably fifteen or sixteen years old – said he had overheard our conversation with a vendor about needing to get back to our hotel. He said he would take us. My intuition silently screamed “no way” in my head and gut. All day, people had stared not only at me, who was clearly a foreigner, but my interpreter who looked like he was from the big city. I thought we would definitely be taken advantage of in some way.

My interpreter said he trusted this young guy, and that we should hop on his small motorbike. Various scenes from the “Taken” trilogy movies starring Liam Neeson vividly flashed through my mind. But my interpreter who I had spent nearly every day with for the previous three months had good judgment. Trusting him and him only, both of us squeezed

onto the stranger's small motorbike. The young man and my interpreter shouted questions at each other over the sound of the engine and wind as we biked through the cool evening. Where was my interpreter from? What was a foreigner doing in Pakokku? What did my interpreter recommend to the biker on opportunities that would lead him to the big city (Yangon or Mandalay)? What could the biker do to learn English?

When we arrived at the restaurant near our hotel, we both hopped off as I breathed a sigh of relief. How much did he want for driving us? I asked. When my interpreter asked the young man, he vehemently shook his head, scrunched up his face and refused to take money. "We're brothers," he said in Burmese. I insisted that we pay him, and my interpreter stuffed 2,000 kyat (\$1.33) into the man's jean jacket breast pocket and said, "buy your family a meal." The two men bowed to each other, shared blessings, and the young man drove off. We did not see him again during our stay in Pakokku.

If I did not know that the two men were strangers, I would have thought they were cousins, or at least good friends. The familiarity with which they treated each other was unfamiliar to me as an American, even as a well-traveled American. And the absence of any desire to exploit a foreigner in a situation that was ripe for opportunism continued to surprise me. The lack of opportunism that I witnessed among the people I interacted with seemed so counterintuitive to me.

Observations gained from these anecdotes – and so many others that I do not have space to describe – are not meant to stereotype all Burmese people as unusually altruistic. Not only is characterizing any group of people an antiquated and inaccurate practice, but I also recognize that I may have been the recipient of favorable treatment because I was a foreigner. But the more I reflected on the latter point, the more I believed that the charity in spirit I observed was not only because I was a foreigner. Surely, this fact played a factor in my experience in Burma. But my eyes and ears were hypersensitive throughout my fieldwork and while I witnessed unsavory interactions between, they seemed to be outliers.

It was within these contextualized environments that I conducted my interviews. People usually invited me to their homes to do the interviews, but sometimes, I conducted my interviews in people's offices, shops, bookstores, and teashops. Tea and snacks were always involved. Most of the men either smoked cigarettes or cheroots throughout the interview. Some men chewed betel nut and spit out the inedible parts, along with their bright red expectorate, into small cups or plastic bags designated for this sole purpose.

While I had to fight the discomfort of speaking with betel nut-chewing interviewees at first, I quickly came to realize that it was I who had asked for the interviewees to open up to a foreign stranger, and answer questions about some of their most sensitive and dangerous experiences of their lives. It was I, a foreign stranger, who walked into my interviewees' homes, poking and prodding for their stories while offering nothing in return. The least I could do was to not disrupt their daily routine as they told me their stories about risk, heartbreak, repression, and death.

Appendix K: NVivo codebook – description of nodes

Name	Description	Files	References
Comparisons between Yangon and Pakokku	Any structural comparisons — similarities or differences—between Pakokku and Yangon, my two cities of study	10	19
Credit for dissent	Include statements of individuals referring to taking or giving credit for dissent	0	0
Giving credit to someone else	Include statements of individuals referring to giving credit to someone else for dissent	1	1
Taking credit for dissent	Include statements of individuals referring to taking credit for dissent	0	0
Deepening of commitment to dissent	References to processes or events that caused dissenter to deepen one’s commitment to dissent	14	16
Discrete dissent events and activities	Specific dissent events between 1988-2011	0	0
1987 Demonetization	Any reference to the 1987 demonetization, especially as it pertains to people’s emotions, and dissent activity that resulted from the 1987 demonetization	3	3
1990 Election Results protest	Activities protesting the government’s refusal to accept the 1990 election results	2	2
1990 national monk protest	Activities related to monks’ protesting the government’s actions by refusing to minister to soldiers	1	1
1991 Nobel Peace Prize protest - 10D Movement	Activities related to people protesting the government’s refusal to release Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest in order to receive her Nobel Peace Prize	5	6
1994 Yangon protests	Activities related to student-led protests in Yangon in 1994	1	1
1995 December protests	Activities related to protest mobilization attempts in December 1995 in Yangon	1	1
1996 Protests	Activities related to student-led protests, especially in Yangon between October - early December 1996	7	11
1998 protests	Activities related to student protests, especially the student-led protests in Yangon calling for the end of the military regime (September 1998)	3	5
2002 Military Technological College Protests	Protest events related to the military students’ protests against the military school authorities and the senior generals of the country’s military	1	1
2004 Tuesday Prayer campaign	Events related to the Tuesday Prayer Campaign; In July 2004, Naw Ohn Hla started the first Tuesday Prayer Group. The group met weekly at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Yangon and prayed for the release and health of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners in Burma	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
2006 campaigns	Events related to public campaigns led by the 88 Generation leaders, including White Shirt Campaign, Multi-faith prayer campaign, Signature campaign, White Sunday Movement Campaign	7	7
2007 'Saffron Revolution'	Activities related to the 2007 Saffron protests, which was the largest nation-wide mass demonstrations that took place in Burma after 1988 Uprising	18	27
2008 Constitution	Activities related to protesting the 2008 Constitution reform that overlapped with the devastating Cyclone Nargis	2	2
2008 Cyclone Nargis	Activities conducted by civil society that directly went against the government's demands to refrain from engaging with recovery efforts	1	1
2009 Yellow Campaign	Activities related to the one-month long Yellow campaign in August 2009. In August 2009, Naw Ohn Hla and nine other activists launched a month-long Yellow Campaign to pay tribute to the monks who took part in the Saffron protests	1	1
8888 commemoration	Any reference to the 8888 uprising commemorations, especially as it pertains to people's emotions, and dissent activity that resulted from this commemoration	2	3
8888 Uprising	The nation-wide public demonstrations in Burma that started on August 8, 1988 and lasted for over a month until the September 19, 1988 military coup d'état	6	8
9999	Activities related to efforts to initiate another mass demonstration on September 9, 1999; this planned protest did not mobilize people to escalate into a big protest	6	7
Commemorative events of pro-democracy figures	Birthdays and death anniversaries of pro-democracy figures and other individuals that were related to pro-democracy efforts. For example, Ko Phone Maw himself was not a pro-democracy activist, but his death became a symbol for pro-democracy activists. So his death anniversary became an annually predictable rallying cry for pro-democracy activists	11	15
Events (not organizable)	References to dissent events that did not escalate, or catch any momentum	3	3
March 22 2007	A high-visibility one-man protest by Htin Kyaw	1	1
March-July 8888	References to the many dissent activities and events that took place between Ko Phone Maw's death on March 13, 1988 and August 8, 1988. Such events included the Red Bridge Incident on March 16, 1988, June Affair, Group 41, and many other student-led demonstrations leading up to the 8888 Uprising	3	4
Phone Maw Day Demonstrations	Activities related to commemorating Phone Maw's death anniversary. These activities to memorialize Phone Maw took place nearly every year to present day	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Post-2011 dissent events	Dissent events that took place after 2011; while they are important, they are outside my scoping conditions	3	3
Pre-1988 events	References to dissent events that transpired before 1988. While they are important, they are outside my scoping conditions	3	3
Dissent event description		3	3
Dissent event escalation	Dynamics of how a dissent event escalated at the beginning stages	17	25
Dissent event issue	Specific issues and topics that people were wanting to seek change for and/or air grievances about	28	47
Dissent event that fizzled out or did not occur	Dissent events that fizzled out, or did not occur although it was planned to take place	10	14
Location of dissent event	References to any specific location of a dissent event	0	0
Size of dissent event	References to a size of a dissent event (the approximate number of people who attended)	1	1
Type of dissent event or dissent activity	The type of dissent activity (e.g. protest, sit in, boycott)	58	164
Effects of punishment for dissent	Reference to the effect that the punishment for dissent had on the dissenters	0	0
Continued involvement with dissent	Include statements of people who continued with their dissent activity even AFTER they experienced repression and other forms of punishment for their dissent participation. Repression does not deter future activism	27	34
Discontinued involvement with dissent	Include statements of people who discontinued their dissent activity AFTER they experienced repression and other forms of punishment for their dissent participation	6	6
Effect of prison experience	Statements referring to the effect that prison time had on their lives during and after their prison sentence	13	15
Hardship after prison	Statements that refer to the hardship that people experienced after leaving political prison	7	8
Family and parental background	Aspects of the dissenter's family and parental background that may have played a role in their decision to participate in dissent activity in some form	44	106
Discouraging parents	Parents who discouraged the interviewee from participating in dissent activity	6	6
Family members who are former political prisoners	References to family members of the interviewee who were former political prisoners	3	3
Politically active grandparents	References to interviewee's grandparent(s) who were politically active	7	9
Politically active parents	References to interviewee's politically active parents	22	31

Name	Description	Files	References
Politically active relatives	References to interviewee's politically active relatives	3	3
Politically active siblings	References to interviewee's politically active siblings	11	15
Politically inactive parents	References to interviewee's politically inactive parents	11	11
Politically inactive siblings	References to interviewee's politically inactive siblings	8	8
Politically supportive parents	References to interviewee's parents who were actively supportive of the interviewee's participation in dissent activity	16	18
Friction amongst dissenters	Points of tension among dissenters before and after dissent activity	10	15
Linkages with foreigners	Connections that interviewees made with foreigners	4	5
Foreign journalists and radio	Linkages that interviewees made with foreign journalists or radio broadcasters for the purpose of augmenting their dissent activity	15	19
Major actors	References to people who played a significant role in dissent activity	0	0
Behind the scenes mover	References to individuals who played a significant role in dissent activity behind the scenes (in a supportive role)	12	15
Early stage dissenters	References to individuals who were an early-stage dissenter	11	18
Follower or late joiner	References to people who joined a dissent event as a late joiner	1	1
Leaders	References to individuals who were dissent leaders (AKA student leaders) but not necessarily early-stage dissenters	17	32
Organizers and initiators	References to individuals who were organizers and initiators of dissent events May fold into early-stage dissent node later	17	20
Motivating and influential factors of dissent	Issues, events, emotions, people, dynamics that motivate individuals to dissent	0	0
Anti-colonial	Anti-colonial sentiments that motivated individuals to participate in dissent activity	1	1
Aung San Suu Kyi	Sentiments about Aung San Suu Kyi that motivated individuals to participate in dissent activity	4	5
Books or radio	References to access to books and radio programs that motivated individuals to participate in dissent activity. This often led to people's having a heightened political and social awareness about their country's challenges	39	73
Childhood socialization	Aspects of an individual's upbringing that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Curiosity	References to curiosity playing a major role in motivating interviewees to participate in dissent activity	7	8
Dignity, pride, self-autonomy	References to one's human dignity, importance of self-determination, and pride that motivated dissenters to persist with dissent and refuse quitting dissent	3	6
Emotions around dissent	Emotions surrounding dissent that motivated individuals to participate in dissent activity	30	48
Events that motivate	Specific Events that motivated individuals to participate in dissent activity (triggering events)	44	95
Extreme commitment	Extreme levels of commitment (near radical) that motivated individuals to participate in dissent activity	10	12
General Aung San	References to General Aung San having played a role in motivating individuals to participate in dissent activity	6	7
Generational considerations	Considerations about generations (past or present) that motivated interviewees to participate in dissent	14	19
Group mentality	Dynamics around group think/group mentality/herd mentality that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity (usually as a late joiner)	9	11
Higher responsibility, duty, burden	Sense of higher responsibility, duty, moral burden that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	16	19
Ideology or beliefs	Ideology or beliefs in something greater that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	9	13
Individual principles and values	Individual's principles and/or values that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	14	21
Injustice	Sense of injustice that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	34	58
Instrumental reasons	Instrumental reasons (generally referring to survival considerations) that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	10	11
Love of country	Patriotism and otherwise love of one's country that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	7	7
Myth and history of country's past	Statements referring to myths and mythologized history of Myanmar that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	15	19
Networks of like-minded individuals	Networks of similar-minded individuals that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	6	6
NLD	References to the National League for Democracy that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	7	9

Name	Description	Files	References
Non-political at first	Non-political factors that initially motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	19	26
Observations of society that motivate	Observations of society (especially elements of inequality, injustice, grievances) that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	35	66
Personality of dissenter	Aspects of an individual's personality that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	25	40
Political awakening or awareness	An experience of political awakening or general political awareness that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	26	42
Political party other than NLD	A political party (other than the National League for Democracy) that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	0	0
Search for purpose	An individual's search for purpose that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	1	2
Youthful motivation	Aspects of one's youth (higher preference for adventurism, less fear) that motivated an individual to participate in dissent activity	26	36
Myanmar's characteristics	Characteristics and dynamics that are specific to Myanmar. Not necessarily have to do with dissent activity	8	11
Auspicious dynamics	Dynamics and practices pertinent to auspiciousness and superstitions	4	5
Buddhist beliefs and practices	Religious and cultural beliefs and practices of Theravada Buddhism	5	9
Donations and making merits	Buddhist (and Burmese cultural) practices of making donations and other acts of 'making merit'	2	2
Religious ceremonies	Religious ceremonies (funerals, novice hood, ceremonies, etc.)	2	2
Role of monks in society	References to the role of Buddhist monks in Myanmar society	9	15
Protecting monks	References to physically protecting monks, especially when they are in physical danger	4	4
Role of students in society	Statements that refer to the role of students in Myanmar society (usually held in esteem, perceived as noble, moral, hardworking, and immune from attack by the government)	1	1
Networks and Associations	Networks and associations (formal and informal) that fostered and strengthened ties and trust among dissenters	4	5
88 Generation Students	References to the 88 Generation students' informal groups and their 88 Peace and Open Society	5	8
American Center	Events and clubs at the American Center (mainly the American Center Book Club, but also including the American Center debate club) that provided a relatively safer space for activists to gather	10	17

Name	Description	Files	References
British Council	Events and clubs at the British Club that provided a relatively safer space for activists to gather	1	1
Communication and connection	References to secretive (and risky) modes of communication among dissenters to facilitate organization of dissent events	16	19
Like-minded people	Informal gatherings and groups of like-minded people among dissenters	16	18
Neighborhood and proximity	Informal networks of like-minded people in neighborhoods or other forms of proximity (classrooms, teashop)	4	4
Networking in prison	Networks and relationships formed in prison	14	20
NLD	Networks and connections formed through the National League for Democracy	4	4
Other groups		1	1
Personal political networks	Networks and connections built through personal social networks	26	40
Political parties	Networking through political parties (other than the National League for Democracy)	4	4
Relatives of former political prisoners	Connections formed through the relatives of former political prisoners	3	3
Student unions	Networks and connections built through student unions	28	50
Ah Ta Tha (Basic Education Students Union)	Networks and connections built through Ah Ta Tha (Basic Education Students Union)	0	0
All Burma Student Democratic Front	Networks and connections built through ABSDF (armed wing of ABSFU)	6	6
Ba Ga Tha (All Burma Federation Students Union)	Networks and connections built through the ABFSU (Ba Ga Tha)	13	29
Ma Ga Tha (All Myanmar Federation of Students Union)	Networks and connections built through All Myanmar Federation of Students Union (Ma Ga Tha)	1	3
Ta Ka Tha (University Students Union)	Networks and connections built through Ta Ka Tha (University of Student Union)	0	0
Ya Ka Tha (Yangon University Students Union)	Networks and connections built through Yangon University Students Union (Ya Ka Tha)	0	0
Non-dissenters		1	1
Gender aspect	Dynamics related to gender that explains why some people did NOT dissent	8	11
Manifestation of fear of dissent	Actions that result in fear of the punishment for dissenting, for merely associating with dissenters	11	11
Reasons for non-dissent	Practical interests and reasons for why some people did NOT dissent	5	6
Strategic non-dissent	Strategic reasons for why people did not dissent	3	6

Name	Description	Files	References
Ordinary Nature	References to themselves and other dissenters' ordinariness in their nature.	6	10
Perception of dissent and dissenters		1	1
Negative perception of dissent and dissenters	References to negative perception of dissent and dissenters	1	1
Positive perception of dissent and dissenters	References to positive perception of dissent and dissenters	5	8
Personal dissent history	References to the interviewee's personal dissent history	32	44
First time participating in dissent activity	References to the interviewee's first time participating in any type of dissent activity (This is NOT the act that a person participates in as an early mover)	30	36
Organized dissent event	References to an interviewee organizing a dissent event	1	1
Recruited for dissent event	References to an interviewee recruiting others for a dissent event	1	1
Repeat participant in dissent activity	References to an individual being a repeat-participant in dissent events	6	6
Recruitment of dissenters	References to methods and targets of recruiting people to dissent	3	4
Children of political prisoners	Statements that explain that children of political prisoners being targets of dissent recruiters	6	8
Other types of recruits	References to certain types of people being targeted for dissent recruits (other than children of political prisoners)	5	6
Recruiters	Statements about individuals who recruited for dissenters	6	9
Relationship - specific		26	53
Repressiveness of military government	References to the repressive nature of the military government, and the specific repressive measures they took against civilians	18	27
Additional repression for Muslims	References explaining the additional repression that Muslim citizens faced for their religion	3	3
Co-optation by government	References to the government co-opting dissenters into their government networks and to neutralize their dissent activity	6	10
Humiliation of monks	References to how the military government humiliated monks as a tactic to repress dissent	3	3
Informers monitors spies	References to the vast networks of informers, monitors, and spies who worked for the government to identify and punish dissenters	17	21
Risk of dissent	References to the risks involved in dissent activity	6	6
Arrest	References to arrest as a risk for dissent	33	51
Death	References to death as a risk for dissent	21	22

Name	Description	Files	References
Family and collective punishment	References to punishment of family members and other forms of collective punishment as a risk for dissent	20	26
Interrogation	References to interrogation (notorious for its brutality) as a risk for dissent	7	9
Job loss or expulsion	References to job loss or expulsion from school as a risk for dissent	11	14
Political imprisonment	References to political imprisonment as a risk for dissent	2	3
Pressure from military government	Pressure from the military government as a risk of dissent	11	12
Pressure through third parties	References to the military pressuring a dissenter through third parties (e.g. through family, close friends, teachers) as a risk for dissent	4	5
Surveillance and monitoring	References to the phenomenon of the government's surveillance and monitoring a dissenter as a form of pressure as a form of risk for dissent	4	7
Social stigma	Social stigma attached with being dissenter, or having a personal history of dissent (or a former political prisoner)	1	1
Torture	References to torture used against dissenters as punishment and deterrent	12	14
Spaces	References to spaces (literally or figuratively) where people could meet and/or discuss dissent activity and/or air grievances and discuss politically sensitive issues	4	4
Safer Political Spaces and Events	Relatively safer spaces for people to meet to discuss politics and plan dissent events	3	3
American Center	References to the American Center being a relatively safer place for people to meet to discuss politics and plan dissent events.	5	5
Art space	Art — the production of it, and meeting to create art — being a relatively safer place for people to meet to discuss politics and plan dissent events.	2	2
Funerals and birthday gatherings	References to social gatherings that were more acceptable to hold, and used as a thinly-veiled disguise to hold political meetings	11	14
U Kyi Maung 2007 memorial	References to U Kyi Maung's August 19th 2007 memorial; it was at this meeting that dissenters started to march, triggering the protests that led up to the 2007 Saffron protests. U Kyi Maung died August 19, 2004	9	10
Monasteries and pagodas	References to monasteries and pagodas being a safer place for people to meet to hold political meetings and to plan dissent events	13	18
Teashop	References to teashops being a relatively safer place for people to discuss politically sensitive issues, and a place for dissenters to quietly meet	11	13

Name	Description	Files	References
Schools closed	References to schools being closed due to protests; students went home when schools were closed and with nothing to do, the government inadvertently created literal and figurative spaces for young people to meet and scheme	17	27
Symbols and symbolism	References to visual and audible elements that held big symbolic power	1	1
Flag	References to the Myanmar flag's symbolic power	9	10
National anthem or kabar Ma Kyay Buu	References to the Myanmar national anthem or the 8888 song (Kabar Ma Kyay Buu) holding symbolic power	3	3
Traits of dissenters	References to personality and character traits of dissenters	12	18
Z_Memorable QUOTES	Quotes to be included in dissertation and/or book	41	91

Appendix L: Interviewees

Name	Birth year	Gender	Highest Education Level	Hometown	Religion	Ethnicity	Age of first dissent	First mover?	Former political prisoner?	Number of political prisoners in family	Socio-economic class (at time of dissent)
Interviewee 1	1965	Male	University	Yangon	None	Burmese	22	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Upper Middle
Interviewee 2	1962	Male	Monastery	Nga Tha Yout (near Pakokku)	Buddhist	Burmese	25	Yes	No	Unknown	Lower
Interviewee 3	1969	Male	Monastery	Taung Thar township (Mandalay)	Buddhist	Burmese	19	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Lower
Interviewee 4	1963	Male	Monastery	Aung Thu Kha village	Buddhist	Burmese	25	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Lower
Interviewee 5	1964	Male	Monastery	Myopa Village (Mandalay Division)	Buddhist	Burmese	15	Yes	No	0	Lower
Interviewee 6	1963	Male	University	Yangon	None	Burmese	24	Yes	Yes	0	Upper Middle
Interviewee 7	1965	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	23	Yes	Yes	0	Middle
Interviewee 8	1988	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	18	Yes	Yes	3	Upper Middle
Interviewee 9	1958	Male	University	Pakokku	Buddhist	Burmese	30	Yes	No	0	Lower
Interviewee 10	1940	Male	University	Pakokku	Buddhist	Burmese	20	Yes	No	0	Lower
Interviewee 11	1987	Female	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	18	Yes	Yes	1	Unknown
Interviewee 12	1963	Male	High school	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	24	Yes	Yes	1	Middle
Interviewee 13	1965	Male	Primary	Yangon	Unknown	Burmese	15	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Middle
Interviewee 14	1966	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	21	Yes	Yes	2	Middle
Interviewee 15	1968	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	20	Yes	Yes	2	Middle
Interviewee 16	1969	Male	University	Taunggyi township (Shan State)	Buddhist	Burmese	19	Yes	Yes	1	Middle
Interviewee 17	1961	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	26	Yes	Yes	0	Middle
Interviewee 18	1970	Male	High school	Pakokku	Buddhist	Burmese	16	Yes	Yes	0	Poor
Interviewee 19	1981	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	15	Yes	Yes	0	Middle
Interviewee 20	1978	Male	University	Wakhema township (Ayeyarwady)	Buddhist	Burmese	10	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Lower

Name	Birth year	Gender	Highest Education Level	Hometown	Religion	Ethnicity	Age of first dissent	First mover?	Former political prisoner?	Number of political prisoners in family	Socio-economic class (at time of dissent)
Interviewee 21	1986	Male	University	Bago	Atheist (former Buddhist)	Burmese	19	Yes	No	0	Middle
Interviewee 22	1968	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	20	Yes	Yes	1	Middle
Interviewee 23	1972	Male	High school	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	16	Yes	Yes	1	Middle
Interviewee 24	1987	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	19	Yes	Yes	0	Middle
Interviewee 25	1962	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Mon	26	Yes	Yes	0	Upper Middle
Interviewee 26	1958	Male	University	Mon State	Buddhist	Mon	30	Yes	Yes	No	Upper Middle
Interviewee 27	1966	Male	University	Yangon	Muslim	Burmese-Pakistani	22	Yes	Yes	0	Middle
Interviewee 28	1976	Male	University	Bago	Muslim	Burmese	12	Yes	Yes	2	Middle
Interviewee 29	1966	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	21	Yes	Yes	0	Poor
Interviewee 30	1964	Male	University	Malaing township (Mandalay)	Buddhist	Burmese	22	Yes	Yes	0	Poor
Interviewee 31	1947	Male	University	Tha Yet (Middle Burma)	Buddhist	Burmese	20	Yes	Yes	0	Poor
Interviewee 32	1958	Male	Middle school	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	26	Yes	No	0	Lower
Interviewee 33	1962	Female	Primary school	Yangon	Buddhist	Karen	20	Yes	Yes	0	Poor
Interviewee 34	1980	Male	High school	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	19	Yes	No	0	Middle class
Interviewee 35	1972	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	24	Yes	No	Unknown	Middle class
Interviewee 36	1987	Female	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	19	Yes	Yes	1	Lower
Interviewee 37	1967	Male	University	TaungNgu (Pegu Division)	Buddhist	Burmese	20	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Middle
Interviewee 38	1972	Male	High school	Yangon	Buddhist (former Christian)	Karen-Burmese	16	Yes	Yes	1	Middle
Interviewee 39	1987	Male	University	Yangon	Muslim	Burmese	16	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Middle
Interviewee 40	1972	Female	High school	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	16	Yes	Yes	0	Lower
Interviewee 41	1968	Female	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	20	Yes	Yes	0	Lower
Interviewee 42	1978	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese-Rakhine	20	Yes	Yes	1	Middle
Interviewee 43	1969	Male	University	Pakokku	Buddhist	Burmese	19	Yes	No	1	Middle
Interviewee 44	1985	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	22	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
Interviewee 45	1971	Male	University	Bago region	Buddhist	Burmese	17	Yes	Yes	0	Middle
Interviewee 46	1964	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	24	Yes	Yes	0	Middle

Name	Birth year	Gender	Highest Education Level	Hometown	Religion	Ethnicity	Age of first dissent	First mover?	Former political prisoner?	Number of political prisoners in family	Socio-economic class (at time of dissent)
Interviewee 47	1976	Male	High school	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	12	Yes	Yes	1	Middle
Interviewee 48	1981	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	21	Yes	Yes	0	Lower
Interviewee 49	1971	Female	Graduate degree	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	17	No	No	0	Upper Middle
Interviewee 50	1993	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	NA	No	No	6	Elite
Interviewee 51	1985	Male	University	Bago	Muslim	Burmese	NA	No	No	3	Middle
Interviewee 52	1984	Male	Graduate degree	Sittwe	Muslim	Rohingya	NA	No	No	Unknown	Middle
Interviewee 53	1965	Male	Graduate degree	Hpa'An (Karen State)	Buddhist	Burmese	23	No	No	No	Middle
Interviewee 54	1959	Male	Graduate degree	Magway Division	Buddhist	Burmese	16	No	No	0	Middle
Interviewee 55	1959	Male	University	Crown Colony, Trinidad	Unknown	NA	NA	No	No	NA	NA
Interviewee 56	1960	Male	University	Dite Oo (Bago Division)	Buddhist	Burmese-Chinese	23	No	Yes	1	Middle
Interviewee 57	1960	Female	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	26	No	No	5	Elite
Interviewee 58	1968	Male	High school	Pakokku	Buddhist	Burmese	19	No	Yes	0	Middle
Interviewee 59	1968	Male	High school	Pakokku	Buddhist	Burmese	19	No	No	0	Middle
Interviewee 60	1973	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	15	No	Yes	0	Middle
Interviewee 61	1974	Male	University	Mon State	Buddhist	Mon	26	No	No	Unknown	Middle
Interviewee 62	1973	Male	High school	Yangon	Buddhist (former Muslim)	Burmese	15	No	Yes	0	Poor
Interviewee 63	1978	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	NA	No	No	0	Middle
Interviewee 64		Female	University	Kyao Pwe (Rakhine)	Buddhist	Rakhine	NA	No	No	Unknown	Unknown
Interviewee 65	1965	Male	University	Pakokku	Buddhist	Burmese	23	No	No	1	Middle
Interviewee 66	1970	Male	University	Yangon	Buddhist	Burmese	Unknown	No	No	NA	NA
Interviewee 67	1967	Male	University	Yangon	Muslim	Burmese	21	No	Yes	1	Poor
Interviewee 68	1937	Male	University	Ayeyarwady region	Buddhist	Burmese	25	No	Yes	Unknown	Lower