POLITICAL VIOLENCE

IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:

FINDING 'A WAY OUT' IN THE

'8888 UPRISING' & 'SPRING REVOLUTION'

IN BURMA/MYANMAR

By

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Abstract

I argue that the two largest social movements in Myanmar's history - the '8888 Uprising' and the 'Spring Revolution' chose different repertories of actions because of different shifts in 'political opportunity structure', using Tarrow (2011)'s framework. In 1988, with the military framing the '8888 Uprising' as 'anarchic riots' and itself as 'provider of law-and-order', I contend that the democracy movement tried to 'harness the hegemony' rather than 'oppose the hegemony'. The movement actors framed the contention as a choice between "bad rulers" and "good rulers" without needing to violently confront the military as a whole. Meanwhile, the 'political opportunity structure' had shifted in favor of more contained form of collective actions, leading people to take 'a way out' with non-violent democratic struggle. In 2021, the military lost its claim over state amid the 'revolutionary situation' and the shift in people's understanding of 'state legitimacy'. With the escalation of violence by the military, the 'political opportunity structure' shifted in favor of violent repertoires of actions as people perceived that there was 'no other way out'. As such, I argue that the 'liberation frames' emerged, indicating the radicalization of people and their desire for liberation. While the 'Spring Revolution' justified 'violence' through "anti-terrorist' frames for the international audience, I argue that, it was not necessary to justify it locally because the winners would be able to claim the use of 'violence' in the name of 'state authority' once the 'revolutionary situation' was resolved.

Keywords: Political Violence, Social Movement, 8888 Uprising, Spring Revolution, Civil Disobedience Movement, People Defence Force, National Unity Government, Myanmar military

Long Live Burmese People

Table of Contents

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Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BSPP	Burmese Socialist Program Party
CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
CRPH	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organization
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUCC	National Unity Consultative Council
NUG	National Unity Government
PDF	People Defence Forces
SAC	State Administrative Council
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
UN	United Nations

Chapter I: Introduction

'Finding A Way Out'

After the Myanmar military staged the coup d'état against the democratically elected civilian government on February 1st 2021, huge demonstrations erupted all over the country for months, now called 'Spring Revolution'. The civil servants joined in the protests, which later became to be known as 'Civil Disobedience Movement' (CDM), and refused to work for the military junta which took over the civilian government. The military council (called State Administrative Council - SAC) responded violently to these developments, arresting and jailing CDM government staffs, cracking down the protests with lethal force, and killing many protesters who were largely young people. The use of such extreme violence was reminiscent of what the same military did in 1988, in which a similar democracy movement was also harshly and violently cracked down. In 1988, after the military staged the coup d'état and shot down the peaceful protesters, the democracy movement was largely demobilized on streets. Although a few armed groups emerged after the events of 1988, the following years were noted for the non-violent democratic struggle led by the newly-formed National League for Democracy (NLD). However, in 2021, after the military violently crack downed the peaceful demonstrations, the movement transformed into a nation-wide armed revolt. What explains the different trajectories of the two movements?

The summer of 1988 in Myanmar was marked by demonstrations calling for a multi-party democratic system, protests and boycotts against the ruling Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP) regime. It became to be known as the '8888 Uprising'. In September of the same year, the military declared that they had staged a coup d'état to prevent the collapse of the state from the

deteriorating situation. After the announcement, the military started to crackdown the dissidents and fired indiscriminately on any protesters who remained on streets. The military council (known as State Law and Order Restoration Council - SLORC) that came to power promised that they would return to the barracks after successfully holding a multi-party general election. Many political parties emerged and registered to compete in the election. The most popular was the NLD party in which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was one of its founding leaders. However, in 2021, the promise of another general election seemed to be irrelevant. After the violent crackdowns by the military council (SAC), many people formed and joined different armed groups to fight back. This paper intends to explain the different outcomes of the two largest social movements in Myanmar's history.

1.1 Research Questions

This paper will address the following research questions –

(1) Why were people staging an armed revolt in the 'Spring Revolution' while they continued with a non-violent struggle in '8888 Uprising' after the violent crackdowns by the military? What was the relationship between the state and the movements that produced different outcomes?

(2) How has the construction, understanding and interpretation of state legitimacy, contentious politics and political violence shifted in 2021 compared to 1988 with the different directions of the two movements?

1.2 Argument

In the '8888 Uprising' of 1988, I argue that when the power relations between the state and society broke down during the highly contentious periods, Hobbesian state of nature emerged. When the military council (SLORC) escalated the use of violence in the Hobbesian state of nature, it was perceived as closed opportunity structure for large scale street demonstrations. But the political opportunity structure was opening up for other forms of non-violent actions with an offer to hold elections as 'a way out'. This led the movement of 1988 in the direction of non-violent democratic struggle. In 2021 Spring Revolution, I argue that the power relations between the state and society broke down amid a 'revolutionary situation' with the rival bodies claiming to state power. When the military council (SAC) escalated violence, it radicalized people as they perceived there was "no other way out". This was perceived as 'closed opportunity structure' as people no longer believed that they could change the regime with non-violent actions. Meanwhile, the 'political opportunity structure' was opening up for violent repertoires of collective actions, leading the Spring Revolution into a 'nation-wide armed revolt'.

I claim that collective action frames with regards to the state legitimacy, political violence and contentious politics had shifted in 2021, reflecting the difference of the two movements' choice of repertories of actions. In 1988, the frames of *mìn-méh-zá-yaiq* (anarchic situation) were employed by the coup regime (SLORC) to demobilize the movement by portraying "having no king (central state authority) is bad" and justify their violence as "maintaining law and order". The democracy movement of 1988, in turn, framed the dynamics of contention as choosing between the "bad rulers"

and “good rulers” but did not call for the overthrow of the state authority or violently confront the military. Instead, the movement justified the non-violent repertoires of actions with historical examples such as Gandhi and Aung San as well as personally exemplifying the non-violent contentions. In contrast to 1988, I argue that, in the Spring Revolution of 2021, the coup regime was consistently framed as “illegitimate” and people should support the “legitimate people’s government”. When the military resorted to violence, the movement employed the frames such as “terrorists” and “rights to self-defense” to mobilize the international community and to communicate that the use of force was going to be necessary. When the international community failed to intervene and the military escalated more violence, the frames of liberation such as “anti-fascist” frames emerged, indicating that the movement saw the situation as “no other way out” than the use of force to liberate from the military rule. Apart from using the generic ‘liberation frames’, I contend that the movement did not try to justify the use of violence locally as this was a ‘revolutionary situation’ and the winner would be able to justify it in the name of ‘state authority’ once the ‘revolutionary situation’ was resolved.

1.3 Methodology and Data Collection

For analysis of the movement in 2021, I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews (see Appendix) in the month of May 2022 with the movement actors including the militias from different areas, politicians, activists, fundraisers and medics working in the armed groups. I had paid attention to the privacy and security so as not to compromise their safety and mine, and all our communication was encrypted. Although some interviewees were well-known activists and allowed me to publish their names, I had anonymized all the interviewees in this paper as an extra-precaution. I also

analyzed the documents, public interviews, statements and news articles produced by the media, movement actors and individuals. Having lived through the military coup d'état myself, I was well-positioned to access the movement actors which would have been difficult for other non-Burmese academics. I have also made a network of activist friends during my activism in the university years who later became involved in the armed revolt, which allowed me to have the necessary trust and rapport to collect the data. My work experience in the field of politics had also allowed me to navigate through the complex landscape and identify the key informants who can provide me with the necessary information. For the analysis of the 1988 movement, I relied on secondary data sources, which included existing literature, documents and publicly available data sources and biographies of 88-generation activists and politicians.

1.4 Chapters

The chapters are arranged as follows. Chapter II discusses the literature review and presents the theoretical tradition this case belongs to, explaining why the approaches offered by terrorism studies are not applicable and why social movements literature fit better. It will also explain my methodological approaches and data collection. In Chapter III, I will discuss the role of political opportunity structure in different trajectories of the two movements. In this chapter, I will contrast my empirical findings of the 'Spring Revolution' with the '8888 Uprising'. After that, Chapter IV will discuss the role of collective action frames, which are crucial in people's interpretation of political violence, state legitimacy and meaning of contentious actions. In Chapter V, I will offer my conclusion and policy implications as well as way forward for future research agendas.

Chapter II. Literature Review and Methodology

'Political Violence'

In revolutions and social movements, 'political violence' is often viewed as a "byproduct of either social transformation or the dynamics of domination and resistance" rather than as a category of analysis (Grandin and Joseph 2010, 5). I aim to study how and when violent or non-violent repertoires of actions emerge out of a social movement. I use the term 'political violence' as defined by della Porta (2013, 6):

> "Political violence consists of those repertoires of collective action that involve great physical damage to an adversary to achieve political aims."

There are two theoretical traditions in analyzing 'political violence' – terrorism studies and social movement studies[1].

2.1 Terrorism Literature

At the micro-level analysis, terrorism studies focus on psychological behavior of terrorists which they often deem as 'pathological' and 'deviant from normal behavior' (della Porta 2006). This approach is inapplicable to my cases as the development of violent or non-violent repertoire of actions was a result of highly contentious periods in the country. Many people, not only a few individuals, were involved in the ongoing armed revolt. At the organizational-level (meso-level) analysis, terrorism studies offer to analyze the 'ideological aspects' and 'rational choice' of

[1] This chapter is based on a term paper I wrote for 'Social Movements' class in the winter semester.

terrorist organizations which employ the methods of violence as they could not persuade the public with legal and peaceful means. Thus, terrorist organizations are usually small, secretive and clandestine and largely isolated from the society (Crenshaw 2011). However, in my case, the armed groups that had emerged had large public support. They were also the direct results of demonstrations against the military that had imposed its rule on the society. So, the meso-level analyses from the terrorism studies are not applicable either. Most importantly, I share Franks (2009)'s concern that terrorism studies has "the tendency to legitimize the violence of hegemonic power center while delegitimizing the opposition entities" as he has argued. In the movements I analyze here, the concepts of "terrorists" and "state authority" themselves are contested. Henceforth, I will consider the social movements' tradition of analyzing political violence.

2.2 Social Movement Literature

According to della Porta (2013), the actors involved in the social movement may have conflicting aims and may use unconventional means to achieve their objectives. Their main concern is to employ disruptive forms of protests, which sometimes may include escalation. But Tarrow (2011, 103) claims that there is a "paradox in disruptive forms" because it entails the risk of the protests becoming routinized and loses the commitment of its participants. On the other hand, the violent repertoires of actions have become rarer than the non-violent forms (della Porta 1995) with the rise of the nation-state and its monopoly of violence. The risk of being repressed is also higher with the use of violence as it gives the justification for the state authorities to repress with violence and turn sympathizers away (Eisinger 1973; Tarrow 2011).

2.2.1 Structural Explanations and Political Process Models

The revolution studies which analyze the 'structural conditions' focus on the issues of capital-labor relations, rural-urban coalitions, and the status of a society in the global economy in explaining the emergence of national revolts and insurrection. For instance, in a comparative study of national revolts in peripheral societies, Walton (1984) argues that the under-development and exploitation from the core countries lead to revolutionary situations in them. Similarly, 'peasant revolt theses' by Wolf (1999) points out that the social dislocations produced by the capitalist market create a crisis in power relations in the society and lead to peasant revolutions. Charles Tilly (1978) similarly argues that it is the emergence of new social groups and the refusal of old groups to disappear that lead to political violence. However, structural explanations are not adequately equipped to explore how 'political violence' manifests in the dynamics of contention and becomes the dominant mode of contention in a movement as they analyze the long-term trends.

The next set of explanations is offered through the analysis of 'political opportunity structure' (POS) in which violence can emerge from the dynamics of contention between the challengers and the challenged (Tilly 1978; Mitchell, McAdam, and Williams 1983). Tarrow (2011) argues that during the episodes of contention, opportunities are created, "innovation in the repertoire" happens and "even the conventional interest groups are tempted by unconventional collective action" (Tarrow 2011, 190). But the 'political opportunity structure' explanation has been criticized for its unidirectional, static and deterministic approach. In this regard, Tarrow (2011) and others have suggested a dynamic interactive approach, which they called "political process theories". In these models, the dynamic of contention between the challengers and the challenged engage firstly in

the framing "the world out there" and provide an interpretation of what is happening (ibid.). In the interactive process, they create and attribute resources to attract participants in the innovative collective action. Their strategic choices are constrained or facilitated by the opportunities and threats they perceive. Such dynamic interactive models could capture how the movement actors choose violence or non-violence as an appropriate tactic in the movements.

2.2.2 The Need to Bring Agency Back In

In the dynamic model described above, violence and repression by the state authorities could be regarded as closing of the political opportunity structure for the contentions. However, with increase in state repression, people perceive that "a state that was 'firing at me', or 'at my community' was unjust" (della Porta 2013, 68). In such regimes, with more state repression, people more and more view that the political moderates are ineffective and feel that there is "no other way out" except for the radical violent actions (Goodwin 2001). But, in fact, people could wait for next opening of political opportunity structure without resorting to armed struggle. In fact, it has been noted that violence has declined in social movements over the time (Tarrow 2011; della Porta 2013). Thus, we should look at whether there are opening of the opportunities for more contained forms of collective actions as well as violent forms of collective actions in the 'political opportunity structure'.

Even if 'state repression' justifies the violent repertoires by the movement actors, there is no guarantee that people will actively participate in it. In fact, one would ask whether massive but peaceful response to a repressive government does not demonstrate more strength and legit power

of the movement. Thus, in addition to exploring the opening and closing of 'political opportunity structure', we need to look at how the meanings have been constructed and perceived throughout the dynamics of contention. In this way, we can get a full picture of how people have embedded their contentious actions in the broader historical and global contexts.

2.2.3 Integrated Approach

For both of my cases, I will employ the 'dynamic interactive framework' of Tarrow (2011) in which he elaborated both the roles of framing and 'political opportunity structure' in analyzing mobilization in contentious politics. The interactive model captures the relational nature of contentious politics, and allows the analysis of how different movement actors perceive and attribute opportunities and threats in strategically choosing their repertoire of collective actions. In addition to analyzing the usual opportunities and threats that the movement actors perceive, I will look at the "escalating violence" by the state authorities which della Porta (2013, 35) has suggested to serve as "the barometer for the available political opportunities". As Tarrow (2011) argues, political opportunities can also be made by the early risers that indicate the points of weakness by the authorities. As such, analyzing how the opportunities and threats are perceived and created in light of escalation of violence by the authorities could explain the trajectories of my cases.

After that, I will integrate in my analytical model, as Tarrow (2011) has suggested, how the meanings of contention and the choice of repertoire were made during the moments of heightened conflicts, through the analysis collective action frames. This could explain how the meanings were constructed "to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to

demobilize antagonists" (Snow and Benford 1988, 198). With the Tarrow (2011)'s model of combining 'political opportunity structure' and analyzing the collective action frames, I will explain the differing trajectories of the two movements.

2.3 Brief Literature Review on the Two Cases

While the '8888 Uprising' has been analyzed in scholarly literature, these studies usually focus on the reasons for its emergence or the long democratic struggle of Myanmar in 1990s and 2000s. The gap between these two periods and exactly how the movement became a non-violent struggle have not received enough attention. Ferrara (2003) studied those last days of the '8888 Uprising' and argued that people were subdued by the state as they were forced to choose between anarchy and the stability offered by the state. But he did not pay attention to the fact that the democracy movement, in fact, continued right after this tumultuous period and culminated in the electoral victory of NLD's victory in 1990 General Election.

As for the 'Spring Revolution' of 2021, the movement was recent and only a few studies had come out. Surprised by the movement's evolution into an armed revolt, some scholars have offered perspectives from security studies that usually end with how the movement actors should not fight with the "country's strongest institution" (Nay Yan Oo 2021) or how the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) would be the "king-makers" (Min Zin 2021; Ye Myo Hein 2022, 11). While I recognize the differing views and valuable insights offered from these studies which could well in fact describe where the balance of military power currently stands, I do not agree that this is a matter of analyzing the fire-power of the two sides. In fact, one security expert was so bewildered

by the developments of the armed revolt that his analysis swinged from "why Myanmar military will win in the end" (Anthony Davis 2021) to "Is Myanmar's military starting to lose the war?" (Anthony Davis 2022) in one year. Instead, I suggest that the armed revolt should be studied from the social movements' tradition, embedded within the wider picture of the whole "Spring Revolution" and analyzed in contrast with the only other catharsis moment of Myanmar's post-independence political history - the '8888 Uprising'.

2.4 Methodology, Theoretical Contributions and Data Collection

My research design is based on a small-N binary comparison with a comparative strategy of analyzing the two different historical periods within a single unit. As della Porta (2002, 297) argues, "a paired comparison allows us to test hypotheses without losing the thick description of the units of analysis". In my case, I would like to explain how the movement strategies evolved vis-à-vis the political opportunity structure. As McAdam et al. (1988) has suggested, the social movement literature could be enriched by looking at the dynamics of contention past the emergence of a movement. My study aims to contribute to that body of scholarship by looking at how the two movements evolved in different directions after both facing the violence from state authorities during the height of mobilization.

To analyze the Spring Revolution, I collected primary data in the form of semi-interviews in addition to secondary data sources that were publicly available. My interviewees were from different regions of the country, different organizations, urban guerilla groups, and armed groups (see Appendix), and primarily young people between the age of 20-30. The interviewees included

people from the current hotspots of military conflicts (Karenni, Central Dry region, Karen among others). I employed the snowball sampling method from the key informants I identified to reach the participants who were less well-known yet still important to bring their motivations and perspectives to the analysis so as to avoid only representing the elites' perspectives. Having stayed in Myanmar during these periods (the first quarter of 2021), I had also personal experiences and observations of the movement that I had used in my analysis. For the sake of transparency of my own bias, I would like to state that I am rooting for the end of military dictatorship. With participant observation and documentary methods, semi-structured interviews can provide "access to the motivations and perspectives of a broader and more diverse groups of social movement participants than would be represented in most documentary sources" (Klandermans 2007, 93). For the '8888 Uprising', I had relied on the secondary data sources such as biographies, journalists' accounts, books, interviews, documents and videos that were available online. Due to Myanmar's opening in 2012, there were new data sources available for the events in 1988 - notably the biographies written by U Win Htein (the patron of the NLD), U Win Tin (a cofounder of NLD) and Ma Thida (San Chaung), a respected 88-generation activist among others. There were also new videos and interviews about 1988 that were available online thanks to the grassroot activists. I incorporated these new available data in my analysis of 1988.

Chapter III: The Role of Political Opportunity Structure

'Hobbesian State of Nature' in 1988 versus 'Revolutionary Situation' in 2021

In this chapter, I analyze the political opportunity structures of the two movements. I examine the four aspects of political opportunity structures as suggested by Tarrow (2011) - access to participation, political realignments, division within elites and presence of influential allies. I will examine the periods of heightened conflicts in both the movements and how they evolved afterward. Particularly, I will analyze how the escalating violence by the military also impacted on the political opportunity structures of both the movements. While both the movements in 1988 and 2021 faced violence from the military in their pursuit of objectives, the two movements evolved into different directions - the '8888 Uprising' into a non-violent struggle and the 'Spring Revolution' into a nation-wide armed revolt. I argue that the reason for the different trajectories was in 1988, the political opportunity structure shifted in favor of non-violent more contained forms of contentious actions whereas in 2021, it shifted in the favor of a nation-wide armed revolt.

3.1 The '8888 Uprising' and the 'Hobbesian state of Nature' in 1988

For the '8888 Uprising' of 1988, I analyzed the time period between the time of heightened conflicts in the movement, i.e., the time around the military coup d'état in 1988 September and the General Election in 1990 May. I argue that a Burmese version of Hobbesian state of nature (will be elaborated) emerged during the dynamics of contention between the military and the democracy movement actors. The subsequent military coup d'état reasserted the control of state and the military council offered a way out in the form of elections and limited participation in the political

process. There were also institutional rearrangements, military elite realignments and the emergence of influential allies in the period which caused people to believe that the change was possible by non-violent means without having to violently confront the military or overthrow the state. The result was the long non-violent struggle from that point onward.

3.1.1 The breakdown of power relations

Myanmar, known as Burma at the time, was under a military regime led by General Ne Win, ruled with a single-party called "Burmese Socialist Program Party" (BSPP). The country's socio-economic problems worsened under the autarchic economy, and it was finally designated as the "Least Developed Country" in 1987 by the UN (Thant Myint-U 2007). Unhappy with the country's situation, university students started organizing protests against the regime. The sparks of protest finally triggered nation-wide protests on August 8, 1988, with people coming out on the streets to call an end to the one-party regime and to establish multi-party democracy. Workers around the country joined the students in a general strike and peaceful demonstrations were held throughout the country.

The military regime responded to the protests with vicious repression, including arrests and murder. The estimates put the death toll of protesters killed by security forces as high as 3000 between August 8 and August 12 in Yangon alone. However, as Ferrara (2003) observed, the repression was inconsistent. General Ne Win, who had ruled the country with an iron fist, announced that he would resign from the party and president positions. However, he also threatened the protesters that if they continued to protest, they would be shot. General Sein Lwin replaced Ne Win as

president, but the protests continued to escalate and later he himself resigned on August 12. The people were jubilant and believed that the regime was collapsing and expected their victory to be imminent (Ferrara 2003; Pilger 1999, 195–97; Fink and Fink 2009; Popham 2012; Lintner 1989, 146). With Sein Lwin's resignations, the call for formation of interim government grew louder. However, the military regime appointed Dr. Maung Maung, a civilian insider from the ruling regime, as next president. Soon, the military announced the withdrawal of troops from major cities including Yangon and Mandalay.

Around this time, new political leaders such as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the country's martyred hero General Aung San, emerged in Myanmar's political landscape. She and other veteran politicians were asked by the student activists to form an interim government, but it never materialized since there were apparently political divisions difficult to overcome. Some wanted to wait and see whether the military regime would keep the promise of multi-party elections (Fink and Fink 2009, 184). Despite the regime's faltering hold on power, the movement was never able to consolidate around a unified political leadership that could act as an alternate center of power. This was one notable difference from the movement in 2021 where the alternative sovereign body emerged and elicited support from the public. As Tilly (1983) argues, it is the presence of multiple sovereign body with public support that creates a 'revolutionary situation'. In this regard, the movement in 1988 didn't reach the revolutionary situation.

3.1.2 'Hobbesian state of nature' and reassertion of state

While the opposition remained fragmented and the effective control by the state had broken down with the troops' withdrawal, it was the loosely organized General Strike Committees that were managing affairs in townships. According to Bertil Lintner's account, local people took over the party offices of the regime and ran their own administrations (Lintner 1989, 163). In Mandalay, monks were taking responsibilities of day-to-day administration including rubbish collection, providing water supply and maintaining law and order (ibid. 164). At the end of August, the military announced the escape of thousands of criminals from prisons. According to some accounts, it was the regime's deliberate attempt to sabotage the protests by creating a situation of chaos and violence so that people would accept their rule over anarchy (Smith 1999; Ferrara 2003).

The result was the total breakdown of law and order in many parts of the country and crimes rocketed, which Ferrara (2003, 310) calls "20th century version of Hobbes' state of Nature", a situation of anarchy and chaos without a functioning state. This was also 'Burmese version' because power relations between state and society had been replaced by authorities such as township committees, elders and monks. There were beheadings of suspected military agents as well as lootings and robberies in many places after the release of common criminals according to the accounts of journalists and 88-generation activists. U Win Htein (2021) wrote in his memoir that it was "mobocracy", and Ma Thida (Sanchaung) (2012), a well-respected 88 activist, also recounted that -

> "In the first week of September, there were more and more looting and robberies of government warehouses and factories. There were public beheadings of suspects who the public thought posed a danger to the people. There were no public buses and had to walk between downtown and Sanchaung. There were suspicions to each other within the public.

> In almost all provincial cities, there were lootings and robberies." (Ma Thida (Sanchaung) 2012, 57).

Bertil Lintner (1989, 166) also wrote that "what had started as a carnival-like, Philippine style "people's power uprising" was beginning to turn nasty". While the opposition could not form an interim government, the military announced that they had staged a coup d'état "in order to bring a timely halt to deteriorating conditions on all sides of the country[2]".

3.1.3 Escalation of violence and 'a way out'

The military council was headed by General Saw Maung and called itself "State Law and Order Restoration Council" (SLORC). Both domestic and international observers considered at that point that the same people were still running the government and Ne Win was behind (Fink and Fink 2009; Popham 2012). People came out on the streets to demonstrate against the army's take-over but the military was more ruthless in crackdown this time. Many more protesters were killed in the army's attack against the demonstrations after the coup (Popham 2012; Fink and Fink 2009; Lintner 1989). Soon, the protests were over and the country slowly returned to a "new normal". Ferrara (2003, 303) suggests that Myanmar people submitted to "a stationary bandit" when presented with the Hobbesian dilemma to live in anarchy at the mercy of pillaging "roving bandits". However, this does not take into consideration how the democracy movement evolved in the aftermath of the military takeover. I will argue that it was not only the emergence of Burmese version of Hobbesian state of nature but also the changing political opportunity structure that pushed the movement into a long non-violent struggle in the years forward. The escalation of

[2] Announcement on Burmese Broadcasting Service (BBS) at 4 pm on September 18, 1988.

violence indicated a closing in the political opportunity structure to participate in more *disruptive* forms of contention, to use Tarrow (2011)'s words, but the opportunities were emerging to participate in more *contained* forms of collective actions.

A. Institutional changes

After the coup, the military abolished all the state organs from the parliament, State Council to local administrative bodies. The only entity from the socialist era that was left behind was the election commission. This was a major shift in the institutional arrangements within the country since 1972. Moreover, a new generation of military elites came into power with the coup d'état. General Saw Maung, the army leader, insisted that they would not hold onto power for long and would transfer power to the next government within three months after free and fair multi-party elections (Popham 2012). While the movement initially still called for the formation of interim government, the emergence of a Hobbesian state of nature and escalating violence by the military made it difficult to continue organizing street demonstrations. The general strikes of workers had also collapsed at this point and civil servants returned to work on October 3rd (Fink and Fink 2009; Lintner 1989).

B. Military elites' realignments

But the people seized upon the changing political opportunity structure to participate in a different way – i.e., forming political parties and preparing to participate in the upcoming elections. National League for Democracy (NLD) with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo and U Aung Gyi as its

founding leaders was one of the first parties to register. Both U Tin Oo and U Aung Gyi were retired soldiers. U Tin Oo served as the commander-in-chief of the military under the BSPP regime, and U Aung Gyi was a former brigadier general who involved in staging a coup d'état against Prime Minister U Nu in 1958 and 1962 (Nu 1975). Although U Aung Gyi later resigned from NLD, the politics at this period was realigning itself as a struggle between the old-generation military elites (Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also being the daughter of Aung San, the founder of the military) and new-generation military elites under Ne Win. After all, it was the student activists themselves who had gone and asked the old-military elites to take part in the democratic struggle (Win Htein 2021), probably with the hope that the military could transformed from within by these people.

C. Access to political process with non-violent means

There were also new ways to participate in the political process with the changes in party system from one-party to multi-party system. People were also registering themselves in political parties. Ma Thida (Sanchaung) (2012, 62) wrote that "the application forms for NLD party sold out so fast that we barely had time to eat". The new party registration law also allowed people to meet legally and discuss politics for the first time (Lintner 1989). People's participation in the changing political process could be seen in Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's campaign trip starting from 1989 October. Everywhere she went, there were huge crowds waiting to greet her and hear her speech. It was not only the NLD party that had registered but also many other parties emerged during that time. Student activists in Yangon formed a political party called Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS), whereas those in Mandalay formed a party called Organization of Students and Youths for National Politics. Ethnic political parties such as Shan Nationalities' League for Democracy

(SNLD) and Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) also registered around this time. The military regime's former party changed its name and now it became National Unity Party (NUP).

While there was severe repression against the activists and members of pro-democracy political parties throughout the period, the registration of political parties, at the very least, suggests that the movement had evolved into trying to transform the state from within rather than overthrowing it from without. This was an important distinction from 2021's Spring Revolution in which people felt that they had run out of options. On the campaign trail of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, there were many interruptions from the military but the people defied them and attended her public rallies despite the risk of being arrested. The power relations between the democracy movement and the state authorities could be seen in NLD's *thangyat*[3] of ceremony in 1989 *Thingyan* (water festival). The NLD officials had to submit a letter to township general administration to get a permission for the ceremony. Although they obliged to that, there were very daring performances, challenging and ridiculing the ruling military. Ma Thida (Sanchaung) (2012, 79) wrote that a huge crowd filled up the street to attend the ceremony. Soon afterward, some people from NLD who performed in the festival were arrested. The year between the aftermath of 1988 uprising and 1990 general election was filled with these kinds of incidents, including between movement actors not only NLD but also other pro-democracy parties and student activists. Such kind of wrestle between the movement and the military regime culminated in 1989 martyrs' day, in which NLD originally planned to march but had to cancel in the last minute because of threats from the regime that they would shoot (Popham 2012; Ma Thida (Sanchaung) 2012; Win Htein 2021). Eventually, the 1990

[3] Thangyat is a traditional folk verse performances usually seen in Thingyan festival. It includes a mixture of satirical jokes, songs and dances.

general election was held while prominent figures from NLD such as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and others were still under arrest. NLD won 392 seats, which is more than 80 percent of the seats contested, while the military-backed National Unity Party (NUP) won only 10 seats. Shan and Arakan ethnic parties also won in their respective constituencies.

3.1.4 Conclusion

In this section, I have argued that it is the emergence of Hobbesian state of nature and subsequent opening up of political opportunity structure that led the movement into a non-violent struggle. While escalating violence in Burmese Hobbesian state of nature signaled the closing of political opportunity structure to participate in *disruptive* forms of contentions, there were openings of other opportunities such as institutional rearrangements, military elites' realignment and some political participation to participate in more *contained* forms of contentions that were previously not possible. With the emergence of figures such as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo, former commander-in-chief, people had reasons to believe that the military could be reformed from within.

This was the dynamics between the state and the movement in the crucial periods following the mass uprising. My analysis shows that opening and closing of political opportunity structure are not static but rather dynamic during the dynamics of contention. It also reveals that they are not clear-cut but rather a reversible process with uncertain ends. Some movement actors did choose the armed struggle as well in 1988 but it never evolved into the stage of a nationwide armed revolt as in 2021. As there were opening in opportunities, the majority of the movement's energy was directed into the non-violent struggle led by NLD and other activists in the following years. In a

way, people perceived that there was ‘a way out’ and they were willing to try it. After all, the non-violent struggle with cat-and-mouse repression and co-optation consummated in the NLD’s decision to participate in the 2015 general election in which it won by a landslide.

3.2 The ‘Spring Revolution’ and the ‘Revolutionary Situation’ in 2021

In the Spring Revolution of 2021, I analyze the time period from the emergence of large-scale peaceful demonstrations in February 2021 to May 2022 in which the movement had already evolved into a nation-wide armed revolt. The parallel government called ‘National Unity Government’ (NUG) announced the formation of ‘People Defence Forces’ (PDF) in May 2021 and had declared ‘people’s resistance war’ against the coup regime in September of the same year (Myanmar Now 2021b). Similar to my analysis of the ‘8888 Uprising’ above, I apply the political opportunity structure framework to explain the movement’s evolution. As in 1988, the power relations between the state and the society broke down, but this time amid a different situation and a different set of opportunities and threats that ultimately led the movement into a nation-wide armed revolt.

3.2.1 Revolutionary situation

After the coup, the military council (SAC) was never able to consolidate their claim to power. Even though it put up the façade of adhering to the 2008 constitution, the military coup d’état itself violated the constitution (Melissa Crouch 2021; Noel 2022), which the generals drafted to ensure the military’s continued dominance in politics. Under these circumstances, a group of newly

elected and yet-to-be-sworn-in members of parliaments (MPs) declared that the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (the Union parliament) had been successfully convened online and the members of parliament had been sworn in (CRPH 2021a). They formed Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) to represent the parliament and the NLD government. The establishment of CRPH and later formation of National Unity Government (NUG) in April 2021 by these same MPs created, what Tilly refers to as, 'the revolutionary situation', a situation in which there are 'multiple sovereign bodies' claiming state power and a significant portion of the population supporting it.

Before the formation of CRPH and NUG, Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) erupted. I argue that the movement actors of Spring Revolution succeeded significantly, if not totally, in its aim of delegitimizing the military's claim to state power as well as denying the actual exercise of state power. The medical doctors, who had been working hard, up until the coup, to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, were the ones who initiated the CDM, and asked all the workers to refuse to work for the military council (SAC)[4]. Soon, a large portion of the public sector workers and some private sector workers refused to work and the almost entire state bureaucracy came to stand still (Richard Horsey 2021; Drechsler 2021). The people also boycotted the government taxes, electricity and water bills and even the state lottery tickets (Frontier Myanmar 2021a). State revenue significantly fell down from the boycotts (RFA 2021a). Empty government hospitals without medical workers were also visible signs of the military council's lack of control over state amid the raging Covid-19 pandemic. On international legitimacy, ASEAN refused to allow the military council leader

[4] Many government workers from different sectors released statements of how they could no longer work for an illegal and illegitimate government. These statements could be found on Civil Disobedience Movement Facebook Page. See more at https://www.facebook.com/civildisobediencemovement2021.

and foreign minister to attend the ASEAN meetings, a move unprecedented by ASEAN (Reuters 2021). Myanmar Ambassador to the United Nations, U Kyaw Moe Tun, who was appointed by the NLD government, also refused to represent the military council, while pledging loyalty to the National Unity Government (NUG). The inability to reassert a full control over the government bureaucracy after one year was a stark difference to the situation in 1988 in which the government workers' strike was ended a few weeks after the coup d'état and the military slowly reasserted their control.

3.2.2 No reassertion of state and the breakdown of power relations

More importantly, in the 2021 Spring Revolution, the military council (SAC) could not establish control at the local level as well, changing the perception of the political opportunity structure by the movement actors. One of the flagship reforms of the NLD government was moving the General Administration Department, responsible for day-to-day administration of the country, from military to civilian control (Lachlan Mcdonald 2020). The ward and village tract administrators were also elected in the local government elections (Htet Min Lwin 2019). After the coup, the military council (SAC) tried to reverse the NLD-era reforms and install their own administrators at the local level and reinstate the mechanisms to monitor their opponents. The democracy movement actors in return released plans and encouraged locals to form people's administrative bodies to control the local administration (CRPH 2021c). With both sides vying for control over local administration, many military-appointed local administrators resigned en masse because of stiff opposition from the public (Frontier Myanmar 2021b; Irrawaddy 2021b).

My interviewees from Sagaing, Karenni and Chin States told me that they had taken charge of administration at the local level in most rural areas in their respective regions. Even in big cities, the control by the military council (SAC) was crumbling. This could be testified by the fact that the military had resorted to burning down villages as they could not effectively assert their control in these areas (Washington Post 2021; AP News 2022; Myanmar Now 2022; BBC 2021; Data for Myanmar 2022). While the skeletal structure of the local administration remained in place, there was no effective control of the state at the local level. Meanwhile, the parallel government NUG was trying to provide state services such as education and healthcare in some of these areas (Mizzima 2022b). The control of local administration became an important factor in the movement's calculus as they adapted their strategy to the escalating violence by the military. The decline of repressive capacity at the local level also paved way for the movement actors to adopt any repertoire of actions.

No more 'state' to co-opt

I argue that the revolutionary situation, Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and the collapse of state control at the local level had led to a situation where the military council (SAC) could no longer act in the name of state authority. In contrast to 1988, the promise of an election had become irrelevant at this point. My interviewees told me that they did not think about an election at all. The positions of political parties also reflected the sentiments of my interviewees. Many key pro-democracy parties had refused to cooperate with the military-appointed Union Election Commission (Irrawaddy 2021a). Similarly, many small ethnic political parties rejected the offer of the military council (SAC) to join its cabinet positions (RFA 2021b). The movement actors in

1988 did not also entirely trust the military to keep its promise of an election, but at the very least, the military in 1988 could act in the name of state authority, leading to the registration of political parties. The state could not co-opt anyone because the state, that could make concessions and accommodate the opposition, no longer existed.

3.2.3 Escalation of violence and 'no other way out'

With this background, when the military escalated its use of violence radicalized the people to believe that non-violent protests could no longer work. Since the third week of February, the military started using lethal force against the public in dispersing the protests and asserting their claim over state. As della Porta (2013, 35) argues, how the protests are being handled serves as a "barometer for the available political opportunities". The escalation of violence and inability to co-opt the movement indicate that the opportunity structure was closing for non-violent actions. Moreover, the way the military was using violence also indicated how they regarded the public participation in politics. It was using lethal force not only to disperse the demonstrations but also to instill fear with the use of snipers and heavy weapons[5]. According to a report, the military ordered its soldiers to "make sure a bullet equals to an enemy killed" in cracking down the protests (Fortify Rights 2022, 45). The military council (SAC) also threatened that the protesters are "in danger of getting shot in the head and back" (Aljazeera 2022). There were at least 1500 documented cases of people who were killed during protests, including 200 people who were tortured to death during military custody within one year since the coup according to UN (Reuters

[5] The military also flew their fighter jets over cities to scare the public during that time.

2022). Such use of extreme violence reinforced the public perception that the military would not retreat from politics with non-violent protests.

A. Reassessing Opportunities and Threats

Initially, the public maintained non-violent protests with only handmade shields to defend themselves from bullets. People were worried that if they used force to fight back against the police and soldiers, they would be labeled as 'rioters' and 'terrorists' and would not receive help from the international community (Vice 2021). But the international intervention the protesters hoped for never materialized. A medical doctor who later went to an insurgents-controlled area to work as a medic and fundraiser for armed struggle told me in an interview how the lack of international intervention amid the violence by the junta impacted his assessment of the situation. In his words, he said:

> "There were many protesters who were arrested and killed cruelly by the military but nobody actually came to help us despite our pleas. If we don't do something, we will all just perish soon[6]."

The public mood was changing with the escalation of violence from the military council and their perception was that even if they maintained the non-violent demonstrations, the outside world was not going to intervene (Vice 2021).

[6] Interview with Aung Aung (pseudonym), a CDM medical doctor who later went to a liberated area to work as a medic and fund raiser for armed groups, May 9, 2022, online interview.

It was during this time that the activists started to reassess the opportunities and threats with regards to their strategy. Kyaw Kyaw, a leader of the University Students' Unions Alumni Force[7] who became a PDF soldier, detailed how the mood changed after the military started shooting down the protesters with snipers:

> "We used to believe in non-violence. We used to even stop people throwing stones at the police. But Min Aung Hlaing's army has been savage. After the shooting of Mya Thwe Thwe Khaing[8], and the sniper shots in other cities, the mood in our meetings changed. We didn't talk about non-violence anymore. We knew the army was not going to back down and we needed to adapt our tactics accordingly[9]."

Many people, even including peace activists (The Guardian 2022; DVB 2022), saw the atrocities of the military and realized that there were no more opportunities to participate in non-violent means. For people who always suspected that the military won't give up power with non-violent tactics, escalating violence confirmed their suspicion. Ko Hein (pseudonym), a PDF soldier, told me in the interview:

> "With my own eyes, I saw an aunty who used to hide us [from the soldiers] in her house and an uncle were cruelly shot to death. After witnessing this, it consolidated my thinking that an armed revolution is necessary[10]."

The sentiment of "the need to do something" was also found in my other interviewees and other online interviews (MPA 2022; Mizzima 2022c; 2021; DVB, n.d.). With an increased in violence by the military, people started to seek other means and allies.

[7] It is a network of former members of students' unions. It is called 'တကသကျောင်းသားဟောင်းများ အင်အားစု' in Burmese.
[8] She was the first protester who died from gunshot by the soldiers during a crackdown on protesters in Naypyitaw
[9] Interview with Kyaw Kyaw (pseudonym), a former student activist who became a member of People's Defence Forces (PDF) under National Unity Government (NUG) in his local town, May 7, 2022, online interview.
[10] Interview with Ko Hein (pseudonym), a member of People Defense Forces (PDF) under National Unity Government (NUG), May 10, 2022, Online interview.

B. Political Realignments, New Access to Politics and Emergence of Potential Allies

Meanwhile, the opportunity structure was shifting in favor of participating in the armed revolt. As I argued above, this was a revolutionary situation, and political opportunities and threats should be assessed in this context. There were at least two centers of power - the military council and the movement side apparently unified behind the rival government NUG. As Tarrow (2011, 165) and Eisinger (1973, 15) argue, contentious actions are more likely in systems "mixed with open and closed factors". While the channels of political access to the military council had been closed, the people could gain access to rival political bodies. For example, many fundraisers[11] and medical doctors, who were important players in the armed struggle, gained access to ministries of NUG or National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC)[12]. These political bodies also tried to recruit highly influential movement actors to their side[13]. Many of these fundraisers or doctors used to be far away from politics but this new access provided them the political and social capital to influence[14] the ongoing political process and the future political arrangements.

[11] An officer from NUG ministry of defense confirmed me in an interview that they were developing financial mechanisms to ensure the accountability of the proliferating armed groups. Fundraisers in my interviews confirmed me that NUG was holding coordination meetings with them.

[12] NUCC is a platform for elected MPs, EAOs, civil society, CDM workers and activists to discuss about future political arrangements of the country.

[13] For example, Dr. Zaw Wai Soe, a prominent CDM senior medical doctor became Minister of Health in NUG. Another prominent activist Ei Thinzar Maung became a deputy Minister of Youths and Women in NUG. A highly popular social influencer called Pencilo was working as a fundraiser of Ministry of Planning, Finance and Investment as well as for the Ministry of Defense in some Public Relations matters.

[14] A Chin youth politician, I interviewed, for example was working with the regional coordination body including the armed groups and politicians. They will have influence on the future political arrangements of their state. Similarly, another interviewee, working as a fundraiser and on ground activist, from Sagaing Region was involved in NUCC. The fundraisers, I interviewed, who were never involved in politics before, now had the direct or indirect access to NUG ministries.

Meanwhile, unlike in 1988, the country's political transition in 2012 had created the connections between the civil society and the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) in peace dialogues. Initially in February 2021, although EAOs condemned the coup, they declared that they would stick to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signed in 2015, and asked the military to declare a ceasefire as well (PPST 2021a). However, the public pressure to dissociate them from the military council (SAC) grew and made it harder for such a posture. In fact, a prominent strike committee called GSCN (General Strike Committee of Nationalities), consisting of young people from diverse ethnic groups, specifically appealed to EAOs to side with the protesters in March 2021 (GSCN 2021). With more protesters being killed, many EAOs started to change their positions to openly side with the movement (PPST 2021b). As recently as in December 2021, General Twan Mrat Naing, the leader of a powerful EAO called Arakan Army, which initially distanced itself from the movement, condemned [15] the military after the soldiers deliberately killed young protesters, calling it "barbaric" and "totally unjustifiable". Many EAOs began to provide refuge for the protesters and CDM workers coming to their areas. It was the emergence of public demonstrations, CDM, revolutionary situation and ultimately the escalation of violence by the military that caused a change in posture of these EAOs into openly supporting the armed revolt.

The NUG had also announced that they had abolished the 2008 constitution and the country's political future would be 'federal democracy', which was welcomed by the EAOs (PPST 2021b). The emergence of powerful allies and the political rearrangements that promise to accommodate ethnic diversity, increased the perception that an armed revolt could actually succeed. Ko Chan, a recently joined PDF soldier, shared his thought -

[15] https://twitter.com/TwanMrat/status/1467497976285511682

> "I was looking at the political developments every day and realized that there was now a real chance of success. The whole country is on our side. I don't mind dying but I want to make sure it is not in vain[16]."

Meanwhile, the fundraiser networks that already emerged to support the boycotting CDM workers were redirecting their funds to the armed struggle. The fundraisers I interviewed recounted that the young people asked their help for financial support for armed resistance because they found them to be trustworthy for their efforts for CDM. Thus, the important groups that could help with the armed struggle emerging as allies, political rearrangements and existing financial networks not only allowed the people to acquire the necessary resources such as trainings and weapons but also increased the perception that the armed revolution could actually succeed.

C. Decline of Repressive Capacity

Meanwhile, the collapse of state control at the local level served as an opportunity for the actors to participate in the armed struggle. While the military maintained naked power to crush down the visible peaceful street demonstrations, they did not have enough capacity to hunt down emerging networks supporting the armed struggle. Although there were risks, many fundraisers and weapon suppliers, according to my interviews, considered that they could take it. I was also told that they were using various mobile banking systems, both domestic and international, for transfer of money. Ko Paing, who was supplying weapons, ammunitions and necessary equipment to PDF groups described -

> "They [the military] can't even find a prominent activist like Tayzar San[17]. How could they even know who I am and what I am doing? There are new local administrators in my ward

[16] Interview with Ko Min, an officer in NUG defense ministry, May 12, 2022, Online Interview.
[17] Tayzar San is a prominent activist from Mandalay who led one of the earliest protests of Spring Revolution.

> but they are neither green nor red[18], and certainly not interested in politics. Otherwise, they would have been shot by someone already[19].

The sheer number of people involved in supporting and participating in the armed groups, availability of online technology and the lack of control at the local level made it very difficult for the military council (SAC) to hunt down all of them. This is not to undermine the fact that the decline of repressive capacity is uneven across the whole country. In general, some repressive capacity remained in big cities but it had declined significantly in provincial towns and totally collapsed in rural areas.

With the cycle of contention spiraled into violence, the military also resorted to more violence by burning down villages and punishing the whole communities. This indiscriminate violence further fueled the people's motivations to get involved in the armed revolt through 'the process of identification' as della Porta (2013) has suggested. The people viewed that the military is "firing at me" or "my community or my people". There were stories of teachers, medics or other professional workers deciding to take up arms after the military council started harassing their fellow professionals or firing at their community. In my own interviews, Ko Lin, an officer from a prison department described how the treatment of people by the military council impacted his decision to join the armed resistance:

> "Some of the political prisoners arrived to my prison with injuries and beaten marks. How could the soldiers beat the innocent civilians who have done nothing against them? I could not stand my people being abused like this[20]."

[18] Green means the military-affiliated administrators whereas red means the NLD-era local administrators.
[19] Interview with Ko Paing, a weapon and ammunition supplier to PDF (People Defense Forces), May 12, 2022, Online Interview.
[20] Interview with Ko Lin, a former officer from government state prison who later became a commander of a People Defence Forces (PDF) group under National Unity Government (NUG), May 19, 2022, Online Interview.

Thus, for these protesters, joining armed groups was a step necessary to not only continue their resistance against the military rule but also to defend their community against the violence being perpetuated by the military. And the political opportunity structure has shifted in favor of participating in the armed struggle.

3.2.4 Conclusion

I have argued that the revolutionary situation arose from the earlier phase of contention between the military council (SAC) and the people. The military had lost control over the state bureaucracy down to the local level administration. The escalating violence by the military was perceived as the closed 'opportunity structure' for non-violent actions. The military also could not co-opt in the name of state authority like in 1988. Meanwhile, the opportunity structure, as I argued, had opened up for an armed revolt. Since then, many armed groups calling themselves PDF had emerged with varying degrees[21] of organization and coordination with the NUG, and had been clashing with the coup regime all over the country (Ye Myo Hein 2022). Security experts have assessed that the military council (SAC) was also performing poorly in these clashes with the emerging armed groups loosely united under the NUG and its allies (Ye Myo Hein 2022; Anthony Davis 2022). In Goodwin (1997)'s words, there is 'no other way out' and violence has become the politics.

[21] Ye Myo Hein (2022) claimed that, as of May 2022, seventy-five percent of new armed groups are linked to NUG, and the rest operating independently. In my own interviews, I was told that urban guerilla missions had good co-ordination from NUG's chain-of-command, whereas combat units outside big cities had varying degrees of centralized control. To the best of my knowledge, there were currently more people willing to fight than the number of weapons available. Exact figures were not available at this point.

Chapter IV: The Frames of the Contentious Periods

Same Violence, Same Perpetrators, Different Meanings, Different Repertoires

In this chapter, I analyze how the meanings of the two movements were constructed, employed and interpreted. In examining them, I used the concept of framing defined as "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment" (Tarrow 2011, 144; Benford 1992, 137). As my central question is how the movement strategy evolved, I analyze how 'the world out there' was constructed, and how injustice frames were formed and contested by the actors in relation to their strategy.

As I argued in Chapter III, the shifting political opportunity structures of 1988 and 2021 were different, and as such the frames and the meanings of state legitimacy, contentious politics and political violence evolved differently. I argue that while the coup regime of 1988 was allowed to act in the name of state, that of 2021 was viewed and perceived as an 'illegitimate entity'. The military in 1988 justified their use of violence as 'restoring law-and-order' whereas in 2021, the military was called out as 'terrorists' and 'fascists'. Framing the opponents as such is not sufficient in and of itself to mobilize the people into armed struggle but I argue that the meanings of contention and 'political violence' had shifted in 2021, revealing the radicalization of people and their desire for liberation, as opposed to an incremental change from within.

4.1 The 8888 Uprising's Frames of Anarchy versus Frames of Social Democrats

For the '8888 Uprising', I analyze the frames of contention between the military council (SLORC) and the democracy movement between the critical period of the 1988 movement and 1990 election. I looked at the discourses and speeches given by important movement actors, such as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the military (SLORC) and other activists as well as news and articles, which were the means to reach the public. In 1988, the military council (SLORC) had the monopoly over national media, and as such, the democracy actors had to rely on campaign trips, pamphlets and radio broadcasts of foreign media to reach the wider public. During this crucial period, the movement and the coup regime engaged in framing contests to construct 'the world out there' and justify their particular course of actions with cultural and historical references.

4.1.1 Frames to demobilize the movement: "Having no kings is bad"

The military council (SLORC) that came to power with the coup in September 1988 tried to frame the situation of chaos and violence that the country had descended as *mìn-méh-zá-yaiq*, whose literal meaning is 'the anarchic situation' without a king (*mìn*). It has a negative cultural connotation and referred to the traditional understanding of the concept of central authority i.e., king (*mìn*), and the lack thereof (*mìn-méh*) with an implied meaning that people would act violently without the king. The military also explicitly made the accusations that the events of 1988 were created by the communists (Lintner 1989; Silverstein 1990). This was a 'diagnostic framing' process in reverse, in Benford and Snow (2000)'s term, because they aimed to demobilize the movement by framing the general grievances of the people who were facing chaos and violence

as a situation created by the communists. Blaming the communists was also partly strategic because the military had always portrayed themselves as the savior of the state since 1950s and according to them, the communists were always trying to violently overthrow the state (Lintner 1989; Popham 2012; Win Htein 2021; Than Win Hlaing 2011).

In this way, the military justified their take-over of the state's responsibilities and the use of violence as to 'reestablish law and order'. The name of the military council "State Law and Order Restoration Council" was self-explanatory. The coup leader, General Saw Maung said (Win Tint Tun 2007, 484):

> "The uprising was going wild with *mìn-méh-zá-yaiq*[22] (*the anarchic situation*). So, Tatmadaw (the military) had to take the state responsibility just in time".

The subsequent press conferences held by SLORC were full of references to *mìn-méh-zá-yaiq* and communists' plots (Lintner 1989; Silverstein 1990). This kind of framing of the '8888 Uprising', as anarchic riots, continued throughout the military rule, through national newspapers and propaganda films (Than Win Hlaing 2011; Naing 2021). The narrative remained in the collective memory of the public and diplomats. In the early days of 2021 movement, when the military tried to provoke the peaceful protesters, the people were warned by the UN officials not to respond with violence so that they don't fall into the "trap" of the military (CNN 2021). The counter-frames[23] would emerge in 2021, amplified by the catchy slogans like – "The [military's] ways of [19]88, They won't work in [20]21[24]" throughout the protests to deny the military an excuse to frame its violent crackdowns as "law-and-order" like in 1988.

[22] In Burmese, it is 'မင်းမဲ့စရိုက်ဆန်စွာ ဆူပူသောင်းကျန်းမှု'.

[23] I will discuss in the later sections.

[24] In Burmese, the slogan is "၈၈ က အချိုးတွေ ၂၁ မှာလာမချိုးနဲ့".

However, it was difficult for the democracy movement in 1988 to directly challenge the hegemonic frames of *mìn-méh-zá-yaiq* and the military's role in the stability. The memories of the civil war from 1950s and 60s with the communists and insurgents were still fresh. Even the student activists who went to ethnic insurgents-controlled areas were worried[25] that they might lose the public support for associating with insurgents (Lintner 1989). The accusations of the "communists'" involvement in the NLD also led to factions within the party (Win Htein 2021). At the same time, whether the pro-democracy movement should adopt a more conciliatory approach or openly confront the military was hotly debated including within the NLD (ibid. 2021). After all, the NLD co-founder U Tin Oo himself was former commander-in-chief who had the experience of fighting Burmese Communist Party (Than Win Hlaing 2011). Meanwhile, those who wanted the movement to be more confrontational criticized the NLD party as too accommodating to the military. Around that time, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was criticized in a public letter by an activist leader called Moe Thee Zun, who later went to join an armed group, for her allegedly less confrontational approach and the acceptance of elections (Moe Thee Zun 1989).

4.1.2 Frames of mobilization: "Having bad kings is bad"

Amid this background, the frames of democracy movement evolved for the next contentions. I argue that the democracy movement of 1988 sought to "harness the hegemony" rather than

[25] For example, a student activist from Yangon called Soe Soe said: "Many people in the town still believe that propaganda they have been fed by the government for years. It would be a mistake for us if we openly joined forces with the insurgents at this stage. It would inevitably cause misunderstandings and we could lose the popular support we now enjoy." (Litner 1989, 209)

"challenge the hegemony", in the words of Maney et al.(2009). As the military framed themselves as the provider of stability to demobilize the people, the democracy movement offered a different diagnosis and remedy of the injustices. Rather than constructing the truly oppositional symbols to the military, the democracy movement framed the suffering of the people as caused by the 'top leaders' of the military and the solution was to replace just them.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in her first speech in August 1988 already connected the current struggle with the Independence movement of 1940s led by her father, calling it "Second Struggle for Independence" (Than Win Hlaing 2011, 67). In her subsequent speeches, after the September military take-over, she used the concepts of "democracy" and "human rights" to mobilize the people, together with historical references to her father because these were new concepts to the public (Pederson 2016). She explained that the problems people faced "could be resolved with votes, not bullets" and "every individual was entitled to human rights" (ibid. 79). In promoting these prognostic frames, which offer solutions, she made cultural references for the majority Buddhist population to easily digest the new concepts. She told the public that the rulers should follow the ten virtues of the kings (*Dasavidha-rājadhamma* in Pali) as taught in Buddhism which were charity, morality, altruism, honesty, gentleness, self-controlling, non-anger, non-violence, forbearance and non-opposition to the will of the people (ibid.). She explained how this traditional concept was compatible with the modern democracy. These cultural references were "bricolages", as Tarrow (1989) uses, because they transformed the traditional concepts of Burmese Buddhist understanding of the duties of the kings to the modern concepts of democracy and human rights. In a way, she was also implying that the current rulers were not fulfilling these duties. These frames were fitting for the time of 1988 but when the very same concepts ('the ten virtues of the kings')

were regurgitated in 2021, they immediately drew public condemnations and outrage which I will describe later sections.

Since the '8888 Uprising' encompassed different groups, the collective identity of the movement 'We the People' did not need remaking. The injustices they suffered were framed as "caused by bad rulers of the country incompatible with the Buddhist values and democracy" as described above. Rather than targeting the whole military, the movement signaled out "Ne Win" as the culprit and the military council (SLORC) as Ne Win's puppet (Than Win Hlaing 2011). For example, in June 1989, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi openly challenged the military council by stating

> "U Ne Win being the real leader of the military government, the source of the people's hardships, and the man who destroyed everything her father stood for and tried to achieve" (Silverstein 1990).

It was a strategic framing on part of the democracy movement to encourage the military as a whole to abandon the top leaders and side with the movement. The symbols of Aung San, the founder of the military, had been used throughout the protests in 1988 and the slogan like - "The military education given by Bogyoke[26] was not to kill the people[27]" was very popular. By invoking the cultural image of General Aung San and appealing the military to be "Aung San's army", the country's revered hero, the movement was trying not only to mobilize the people but also to demoralize the supporters of the military regime. These attempts were so successful that over the years, the military council (SLORC) slowly dropped General Aung San's image from the currency notes (Irrawaddy 2020) and demoted him in the school textbooks from a central figure in history to 'just one among others' (Salem-Gervais and Metro 2012).

[26] Bogyoke means General [Aung San].
[27] In Burmese, it is "ဗိုလ်ချုပ်ပေးတဲ့ စစ်ပညာ ပြည်သူတွေကို သတ်ဖို့မဟုတ်ဘူး".

4.1.3 Frames to justify the non-violence: "Gandhi and Aung San"

The movement leaders claimed that the state and military could be reformed from within using "votes instead of bullets", and students and workers have the "rights" to form unions, and everybody should be involved in the quest for democracy (Popham 2012; Win Htein 2021; Win Tint Tun 2007). In the mode of social movements' organizations, this is social democratic model which aims to build "a state within a state" in contrast to the anarchic model which aims to "overthrow the state" (Tarrow 2011). To mobilize the people, the movement leaders asserted that it was a "moral duty" to be part of the movement. This is how the frames of the democracy movement were evolving amid the background of an anarchic situation and hegemonic framework of "military as provider of law-and-order".

In May 1989, the NLD party announced a 'Civil Disobedience Campaign[28]' led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi with a catchy slogan (Win Htein 2021): "Disobey the unjust orders [laws] as a duty![29]" Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the other democracy movement leaders gave speeches about figures like Mahatma Gandhi (ibid.), while a song[30]about Aung San, Kodaw Hmaing (the renounced peace advocate) and the fallen heroes of democracy struggle became popular in protests (Myanmar Times 2021). In line with diagnostic and prognostic framing, this campaign targeted not at the

[28] In Burmese, it is "အာဏာဖီဆန်ခြင်း".

[29] In Burmese, it is မတရားတဲ့အမိန့်ဟူသမျှ တာဝန်အရဖီဆန်ကြ။ I used my own translation.

[30] The popular protest song "Gabar Ma Kyay Bu" (Until the end of the world) emerged in the last days of September 1988, as a way of inspiring people to continue the movement. It sang about the unknown martyred heroes of the previous democracy struggles, and referred Aung San as father, and Kodaw Hmaing and grandfather of the country.

military as a whole but rather at the "unjust elements" of the state. Thus, these frames motivated the people to take part in the struggle and justified non-violent actions, which they assured the people as the same tactic of the former movements in the country and beyond. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi herself defied the orders of the military council (SLORC) that she deemed as "unjust" in her trips throughout the country in 1989. In one particular incident in a town in Delta region that became famous, she was nearly shot by soldiers as she refused to submit to their order to stop (Popham 2012). These kinds of civil disobedience acts were inspiring and promoted the credibility of the frames the movement was articulating.

4.1.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the counter-frames of democracy movement evolved amid the military's attempt to portray the '8888 Uprising' as an anarchic situation and itself as the provider of law-and-order. The frames of the democracy movement did not directly challenge the military (or state) as a whole but rather signaled out the top leaders of the military and framed the injustices and grievances suffered by the people as caused by "Ne Win's army". Thus, the solution was to be "Aung San's army." This was a costume of consensus, in Tarrow (1989)'s words, within the movement to "harness the hegemony", because the memories of the civil wars and propagandas about communists were still fresh amid the chaos of the last days of 1988. Thus, the frames of social democrats, i.e., building a state-within-state with democracy and rights, evolved together, justifying the strategy of non-violent actions in the name of Gandhi and the possibility of the military to be 'Aung San's army' rather than 'Ne Win's army'.

4.2 The Spring Revolution's Frames of Liberation and the Frames of Legitimacy

For the 'Spring Revolution', I analyzed the documents, statements, media posts and interviews produced by important movement actors such as CDM campaigners, CRPH, NUG, strike committees, student unions, EAOs and the military council (SAC). Unlike in 1988, the coup regime in 2021 did not have monopoly over the news media, particularly the social media which was the primary platform of communication for the movement actors. The military council (SAC)'s social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were all removed (Fobes 2021), leaving them to rely only on state media to reach the public. With this context, the movement and the military council contested in creating 'meanings' for the dynamics of contention.

4.2.1 Frames to mobilize CDM: "They are no kings"

The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) that erupted after the military coup d'état aimed to reverse the coup by staging a government workers' strike. As such, the movement needed to mobilize the workers into collective actions. It did this by presenting the military take-over as "illegitimate and illegal". This was a strategic framing on the part of CDM initial campaigners as they considered some workers might be worried of violating the civil servants' rules and

regulation[31]. In a statement released on CDM official[32] Facebook page in February 2021, medical doctors described how they viewed of the newly formed military council (SAC) -

> "We do not recognize them as our government. We refuse to obey *any orders* from the *illegitimate* military regime." (Civil Disobedience Movement 2021)

In contrast to the Civil Disobedience Campaigns of the 1989-90s, the choice of the words here was "any orders" not only "unjust orders" because, as the doctors explained, it came from the "illegitimate military regime". The credibility of the frame was also partly promoted by the fact that the medical workers, who were well-respected in Myanmar's society and had been at the forefront of the Covid-19 pandemic, were the ones who started the CDM[33]. As the frame began to spread, it was also justified within the legal framework of 2008 constitution (Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw 2021b). The online posts also shared the messages that the coup leader as "having committed treason against the people and state[34]." Thus, the act of joining the CDM began to mean "not recognizing the illegal power grab of the illegitimate military council".

[31] At the night of 2nd February 2021, medical doctors from different government hospitals across Myanmar held a Zoom meeting to discuss how they should respond to the coup d'état. In this meeting, it was discussed how to mobilize the government workers who might be worried of violating the civil servants' rules and regulations. It was discussed in the meeting that the military violated the 2008 constitution and they should not be recognized it as a "legitimate government". There were also discussions about how the act of CDM did not violate the civil servants' rules and regulations, and how they could not be sued with existing laws. (From my own recollection of events)
[32] Being bluemarked on Facebook and Twitter also gave the appearance of being authentic, genuine and official.
[33] See this video https://fb.watch/dkvGFo3jBN/ released by Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) Facebook Page. In it, a medical doctor explained (1:53) how they had been at the forefront of Covid-19 pandemic and how they had given their lives for the betterment of Myanmar people, and he encouraged other civil servants to join CDM.
[34]See for example - https://www.facebook.com/civildisobediencemovement2021/photos/a.349725656117082/359990758423905/ ; https://twitter.com/cvdom2021/status/1358471510696988673 and https://twitter.com/cvdom2021/status/1358668874753839105.

A. Active Framing Process

The use of social media amplified the frame of "illegitimate military council" in these early days of CDM. Many statements[35] released online by different professional groups became viral on Facebook and soon the frames of "illegitimate military council", "treason" and "traitors" were also seen on other repertoires such as street demonstrations, videos[36] and posts by social influencers. One popular street protest slogan was "The motherfucker short guy [the coup leader] robbing the high heels [of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi][37]" which essentially captured the illegitimacy of the action [the coup] as well as its intention to convey that the coup had not succeeded [robbing the high heels, not even the throne]. Htet Min Lwin (2021, 10) noted that these protest slogans mocked the coup leader's claim to power "to the furthest extent possible in Burmese language" and most importantly, "no one sees the coup and the related events as a change from one king to another[38]". These were frame amplification processes using online technologies, and cultural references or "bricolages" as Tarrow (2011) calls it.

[35] Many of these statements could be found at https://www.facebook.com/civildisobediencemovement2021/. Although there were some uses of the word "military government" in some of the earlier statements, this was slowly dropped with the emergence of CRPH and NUG.

[36] See for example: https://fb.watch/dkvGFo3jBN/

[37] The slogan in Burmese is "ဒေါက်လုတဲ့ဆောက်ပု". There were other popular slogans ridiculing the illegality of the power grab such as "go breath dust, power-crazy Min Aung Hlaing" (အာဏာရူးတဲ့မင်းအောင်လှိုင် ဖုန်ရှူလိုက်၊ ဖုန်ရှူလိုက်), "You want to be a king, but you are performing the play of a dog" (ဖြစ်ချင်တာက ရှင်ဘုရင် ခင်းနေတာက ခွေးဇာတ်ခွေးဇာတ်". Htet Min Lwin (2021)

[38] In Burmese, it is မင်းပြောင်းမင်းလွဲ.

I argue that this was an important difference[39] with the '8888 Uprising' in which the movement leaders during the contentious periods framed the ruling regime as "bad kings violating the ten virtues of the Buddhist kings" (Htet Min Lwin 2021; Walton 2016). But in 2021, the use of the word "government" was hugely contested. In one incident in February 2021, well-respected senior monks from *Shwegyin* monastic order were condemned by the public for their use of the word "to act according to ten *kingly* virtues in the tradition of the Buddha Dhamma" in a public letter to the coup leader. Although the letter was probably written as a well-intentioned appeal to stop the violent crackdowns, it was viewed as legitimizing the coup leader as "king", making it unacceptable and leading to angry responses of "They are no kings!" (Htet Min Lwin 2021). Activists had also asked the non-Burmese speakers[40] to stop using the word "Tatmadaw"(the royal army), a self-styled term used by Myanmar military, because it implicitly associates the army with the "king" (Desmond 2022). The military council (SLORC) in 1988 had intentionally promoted the word "Tatmadaw government" throughout 1990s as a way of subtly justifying their rule. But in 2021, the offer of elections or peace agreements by the military council was moot because it was an "illegitimate entity" that had no control over the state - real or perceived. My interviewees responded me, when I asked about their views on elections, that they did not see the military as "government" and, as such, "it is not their job to conduct an election[41]". Similarly, when the military council (SAC) offered peace talks to EAOs in May 2022, Karen National Union, a well-established EAO, responded - "It's difficult to hold peace talks with an *illegal* entity" (Irrawaddy

[39] The use of "SLORC government" referring the coup regime was no big deal back in 1988-89. See this interview with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for instance. https://www.voanews.com/a/excerpts-from-interview-articles-on-1989-aung-san-suu-kyi-house-arrest-109999214/175056.html

[40] In everyday Burmese language, Myanmar military is called "sit-tat" by the people. But Myanmar military refers itself as "Tatmadaw" and non-Burmese speakers have been using the word "Tatmadaw" in English-language publications.

[41] Interview with Ko Ye, a leader of a local PDF group, not affiliated with NUG, May 12, 2022, Online Interview.

2022). These indicate that these frames were not mere constructs but well-accepted by the important stakeholders in the country and resonating within the public.

B. The "Legitimate People's Government"

After the formation of CRPH[42] and NUG[43], the frames of "our legitimate democratically-elected government" also emerged. While in 2022, after one year, the legitimacy of CRPH and NUG as "our legitimate government[44]" appeared natural, the initial framing process was less than straightforward, not least in part because the MPs leading these bodies were less well-known young politicians. They were justified initially within the legal framework of 2008 constitution and 2020 election results, to the dismay of those who wanted the abolishment of the 2008 constitution. In February 2021, CRPH announced that they had convened the sworn-in ceremony and held the session of the Union parliament online in accordance with the 2008 constitution. The protesters also creatively made use of the internet technology using hashtags[45] such as #WeAcceptCRPH, #WeAcceptNUG and #RejectSAC on Twitter and Facebook to amplify the message. The repertoires of actions also spread on street demonstrations and together with the frame of "illegitimate illegal military council", CRPH and NUG began to be recognized by public as the "legitimate government of Myanmar". While the local media had since adopted "legitimate

[42] Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (the Union Parliament)
[43] National Unity Government
[44] CRPH is the parliament and legislative branch whereas NUG is the executive branch.
[45] During the early days, these hashtags appeared so rapidly online with the message "spread on internet quickly" ("အင်တာနက်ပေါ်အမြန်ဖြန့်") sometimes coupled with a message such as "UN is monitoring which government is legitimate, counting the numbers of hashtags." I see it as an indication of the anxiety and desperation of people who were worried that the international community might give the recognition to the military council as Myanmar's legitimate government.

NUG government", international media continued to refer them as "shadow government[46]", "ousted MPs[47]" or "government-in-exile[48]" to the dismay of protesters[49]. This was because, as Tarrow (2011) claims, the media was focused on "what makes news" (with its own interests) and the movement was on achieving its objectives.

With the escalating violence from the military, people called for the NUG, which they viewed as their "government", to form an army and declare war against the military (Jurist 2021). Posts such as "Create federal army", "Government needs an army" and "Ready to join armed services if necessary[50]" had gone viral on social media since the early weeks of March 2021. In April 2021, CRPH declared that the 2008 constitution had been abolished and announced the "federal democracy charter" justifying its acts with the mandate given by the elections results (Myanmar Now 2021a). As a show of support to CRPH and NUG, protesters burned the constitution on streets that day (ibid.). These were significant acts and repertoires that gave more legitimacy to the claim of "NUG government."

[46] See for instance, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmars-shadow-government-create-its-own-police-force-2022-06-07/
[47] See for instance, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/myanmar-coup-crph-lawmakers-india-parliament-mps-government-219616
[48] See for instance, https://www.dw.com/en/myanmars-government-in-exile-finds-friends-in-the-czech-republic/a-60460310
[49] See this for instance https://twitter.com/burmamyanmaract/status/1534196074235273217
[50] Some of these posts could be viewed with the hashtag #စစ်မှုထမ်းရန်အသင့် (Ready to join armed services) on Facebook.

4.2.2 Frames to justify the armed revolt: "They are Fascists and Terrorists"

With the context described above, when the military escalated violence against the people, the violence is explained within "the terrorist framework". While the military council (SAC) tried to justify its use of violence through "maintaining law and order" framework, it was more difficult this time than in 1988 as there was no notable violence committed by the movement. CRPH's declaration[51] of the military council (SAC) as a terrorist group in March 2021 also added legal appearance to the "terrorist frame". Since then, the local media and the people had been consistently using "the terrorist military council" in the local news and statements. This was an important development because people started to refer "the right to self-defense[52]" against "the terrorists". This was also a "frame bridging" effort, as Snow et al. (1986) calls it. Because, by referring to these frames, they justify the need of use of force to the international audience well-versed in the language of "global terrorist framework". In a way, it meant that the people wanted the international community to be "understandable" if not outright supportive of their armed revolt against the military (NUG 2021).

The frame of legitimacy also allowed the movement to present how they viewed of the emerging armed groups. Many of newly formed groups called themselves PDF whether they were formed under the NUG or not. The code of ethics for armed groups and central chain of command were

[51] [51] CRPH also uploaded a video on YouTube with more official-looking appearance to convey the seriousness of the declaration. It could be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FkKbAS4UhI.

[52] See this exchange, for example, between UN Special Rapporteur and the official CDM twitter page https://twitter.com/cvdom2021/status/1366705861398208513. CRPH also announced that people had the right to self-defence. https://www.crphmyanmar.org/informing-the-people-of-their-right-to-self-defense-according-to-the-law-as-civillian-population-in-case-of-violence/

also being developed by the NUG to communicate to the international community that these forces were in fact the "legitimate armed forces" not "terrorists". An official from the NUG defense ministry told me in an interview that the NUG defense ministry was currently developing financial mechanisms to ensure the accountability of the new armed groups[53]. These were all important processes as a student armed organization that emerged out of the '8888 Uprising' was designated as a "terrorist group" by the international community (DVB 2011).

While the "terrorist frame" was employed to speak to the international community, another frame evolved to communicate with the local audience - i.e., framing the military as "fascist army". This was a departure from the '8888 Uprising' in which the movement leaders tried to frame the movement as a choice for the military to be "Aung San's army[54]" rather than "Ne Win's army". By using "fascist army", the Spring Revolution was connecting the military with its origin of being trained by fascist Japanese army in World War II, now omitting that it was once "Aung San's army". This indicated the hardening of attitude by the movement actors because, in their words, Nazi army and fascist Japanese army "were not reformed but abolished[55]". Slogans and street protests also started to routinely call for "Root out the fascist army for good[56]"amplifying the "anti-fascist framework". The flag of newly formed armed wing of the movement - People Defence Forces (PDF) was a recycle of Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL)'s flag, the political party central in the Independence struggle from the British and Japanese. While "Ne Win's army"

[53] Interview with Ko Minn (pseudonym), an official from NUG defense ministry, May 10, 2022, Online Interview.
[54]Although Daw Aung San Suu Kyi once (and only once as far as I am aware of) called the leaders of the military regime "fascists" on 1989 Martyrs' Day, the usual framing was to be "Aung San's army" rather than "Ne Win's army".
[55] https://twitter.com/cvdom2021/status/1469603296507793412
[56] The slogan in Burmese is "ဖက်ဆစ်စစ်တပ် အမြစ်ဖြတ်".

could have been reformed from within to become "Aung San's army", "the fascist army" needed to be "rooted out".

The "anti-fascist" framework is not an ideological justification for 'violence' but rather how the movement viewed itself as a liberation movement determined to remove the military for good from politics without compromising like in 1990s and 2000s. In fact, no cultural or ideological justification (such as 'for democracy' or 'for elimination of fascism') is given locally for the use of violence. Ko Lay, a leader of urban guerilla group explained why they used 'violence' against the civilian administrators who worked for the military council (SAC):

> "Actual military rule is done by these administrators who are doing whatever the military wants. So, we warn these administrators to resign first by sending bullets or detonations. Only after we have exhausted our warnings, we think about eliminating them[57]."

According to him, 'violence' was understood in terms of naked power struggle. He also did not frame it within the framework of "according to the laws of legitimate NUG government" as well. Similarly, another guerilla soldier, I interviewed, told me that the 'violence' was necessary because these administrators were parts of the military rule and were responsible for the deaths and arrests of people[58]. This sentiment is found in many posts and statements released by the new armed groups[59], and in fact, shared by the public who has come to view the military rule as "unjust" and "illegitimate". This is not surprising, because as I argued, this was the revolutionary situation and

[57] Interview with Ko Lay, a former student activist who became an urban guerilla in a big city, May 15, 2022, online interview.
[58] Ko Za (pseudonym), a former CDM staff who became a PDF group leader not-affiliated with NUG, May 11, 2022, online interview.
[59] See this post for instance - https://www.facebook.com/twantaydailynews/posts/pfbid02GHxrtNSmqDDYc8TogCyTWuXoNK6CCUdAxpuvyT2uFJFgBUYQ2XLkvKuDQ93MtaVJl, an urban guerilla group claims it has "taken action" against a "military informant" (a local administrator) because he is enforcing the military rule. Many such statements were removed by Facebook, apparently for violation of its community standards.

the use of violence would be justified and monopolized by the winning side in the name of the 'state authority' once the revolutionary situation was resolved.

4.2.3 Conclusion

This section analyzed how the dynamics of contention between the military and the movement had been constructed, interpreted and understood - "the power grab of the illegitimate military council being opposed by the people supporting the legitimate government of Myanmar". Unlike in 1988, the framing choices revealed that the military was not viewed as 'state' or a 'central authority providing law-and-order'. Rather, they were viewed as "illegitimate", "terrorists" and "fascists" that needed to be rooted out for good. I argue that the Spring Revolution saw itself as a movement of liberation, determined to end the military dictatorship for good and remake the state, rather than as a movement like the '8888 Uprising' which aimed to reform the state and the military from within. And although the 'Spring Revolution' tried to justify the use of 'violence' with 'self-defense against terrorists' framework for the international audience, the meaning of 'violence' locally was perceived within the context of the 'revolutionary situation'.

Chapter V: Conclusion

'This is Unjust'

I have argued that a movement's choice of repertoire of actions depends on the shifting of the political opportunity structure. But rather than being a static phenomenon, I have demonstrated that, the opportunities and threats were also created at the height of contentions, and that it was a dynamic process. Contrary to the popular wisdom of agency-based explanation focused on the Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, I had offered a perspective from 'political opportunity structure' approach for the emergence of non-violent campaigns in the aftermath of the '8888 Uprising'. With an opening in opportunity structure in 1988, amid the anarchic situation and the military's violent reassertion over state, people took 'a way out' with contained forms of non-violent collective actions. However, in 2021, the military could not reassert itself as a state authority amid the revolutionary situation and shift in people's understanding of 'state legitimacy'. With the escalation of violence, opportunities emerged and were also created by the challengers to stage a nation-wide armed revolt. My analysis suggests that the emergence of armed revolt in the 'Spring Revolution' should be understood in the context of the wider anti-dictatorship movement, rather than focusing on any new or old armed groups. It was neither simply a choice of some radicalized actors nor to be resolved by choices of some. The people collectively will have to decide how the revolutionary situation is going to be resolved. In other words, the people are the 'real king-makers'.

The framing choices also reflected the available political opportunity structure. In 1988, the military council framed the dynamics of contention as "having no kings is bad" whereas the

democracy movement framed as “having bad kings is bad”. But in 2021, the movement viewed the matter as “They were no kings!” Naming the opponents “terrorists” and “fascists” have also been so overly done by many social movements around the world that it has become a cliché. But as I have argued, for Myanmar people, escalation of barbaric violence in the context of the military’s repeated violations of them, the frames of “terrorist” and “the right to self-defense” were as far as the global hegemonic framework of liberal democracy allowed to articulate. In fact, if there were stronger words that could express the frustrations and the helplessness of Myanmar people, they would have used them. One sentimental pattern of words I commonly heard in my interviews was “this was unjust and I could not stand doing nothing”. When the international system failed to provide the “Responsibility to protect” (R2P), the people of Myanmar went back to the “anti-fascist” framework to indicate that this was going to be a liberation movement and a revolution just like the Independence struggle of the 1940s. While the choice of non-violent actions in 1988 were justified with the cultural and historical frameworks to mobilize the people, the violence in 2021 was only justified for the international audience. I argue that it was because people viewed this as a ‘revolutionary situation’ and the winner would claim the use of force in the name of ‘state authority’ once it was resolved. As I have repeatedly claimed that the state authority - real or perceived, had collapsed, the obvious question was what remained and what was keeping law and order. A possible answer, as Roberts and Rhoads (2022) points out, is *nahlehmu* (which means ‘understanding’), a Burmese way of “negotiating power through mutually understanding norms and social sanctions” at the local level to navigate through complex security landscape. My interviews, to some extent, seem to confirm this hunch but it merits further theoretical and empirical investigations.

Having laid down the academic arguments, I would like to emphasize that I am not romanticizing the violence. In fact, having witnessed the violence and gone through the experience of the struggle myself, I wish peace and democracy to come to the people as quickly as possible. But if the context of how the violent repertoires of actions developed is not understood properly, there is going to be "wrong medicine for wrong disease" as a Burmese saying goes. If the international community ignorantly or intentionally legitimizes the military council (SAC) which the majority of the people in Myanmar have come to view as "illegitimate", it is going to inevitably prolong the suffering of the people and the crisis. The military has no control of the state as their continued escalation of violence has testified. The best way for the international community to assist is to hold the military council (SAC) accountable for its crimes against the people in Myanmar and crimes against humanity. After all, there is 'no other way out'.

APPENDIX

I. Interview Topic Guide

1. **Motivation to join/support the armed struggle despite risks**
    - Recruitment mechanisms
    - How military trainings/weapons received
2. **Opinion on institutions/groups**
    - On National Unity Government (NUG)
    - On the military council (SAC)/military as a whole
    - On soldiers and police forces under SAC
    - On the proposed elections
    - On the future political arrangements of the country
    - Alliance with other groups
3. **Prior involvement in politics/armed groups before the coup d'état**
4. **Prospect of Success**
    - Current area of control/SAC's control
    - General assessment on political situation
    - Opinion on people's participation in the movement
5. **Funding sources/Fundraising techniques**
6. **Opinion on use of violence**
    - against local administrators working for SAC
    - in combat
7. **The meaning of symbols and names used**

II. List of My Interviewees

1. Kyaw Kyaw (pseudonym), a former student activist who became a PDF soldier under NUG in his local town, May 7, 2022, online interview.
2. Ko Thu (pseudonym), a doctor-turned PDF soldier, May 8, 2022, online interview.
3. Dr. Aung (pseudonym), a CDM medical doctor who worked as a medic and fundraiser for armed groups, May 9, 2022, online interview.
4. Ko Hein (pseudonym), a PDF soldier under NUG, May 10, 2022, Online interview.
5. Salai (pseudonym), a Chin youth politician in Chin State political coordination bodies, May 10, 2022, Online interview.
6. Ko Lwin (pseudonym), a prominent student activist-turned PDF member under NUG, May 11, 2022, online interview.
7. Ko Wai (pseudonym), a prominent student activist from central dry region now in NUCC, May 11, 2022, online interview.
8. Ko Za (pseudonym), a former CDM staff who became a PDF group leader not-affiliated with NUG, May 11, 2022, online interview.
9. Ko Ye (pseudonym), a leader of a local PDF group not affiliated with NUG, May 12, 2022, Online Interview.
10. Ko Min (pseudonym), an officer in NUG defence ministry, May 12, 2022, Online Interview.
11. Ko Paing (pseudonym), a weapon and ammunition supplier to PDF in a big city, May 12, 2022, Online Interview.
12. Dr. Thet (pseudonym), a former chair of a medical students' union who now worked as a medic for armed groups, May 14, 2022, online interview.
13. Ko Lay (pseudonym), a former student activist who became an urban guerilla in a big city, May 15, 2022, online Interview.
14. Ma Thazin (pseudonym), a prominent online fundraiser affiliated with NUG, May 16, 2022, Online Interview.
15. Ma Nandar (pseudonym), a fundraiser not affiliated with NUG for CDM and armed groups in central dry region, May 17, 2022, Online Interview.
16. Ko Lin (pseudonym), a former officer from government state prison department who later became a commander of a PDF group under NUG. May 19, 2022, Online Interview.
17. Dr. Khaing (pseudonym), a CDM medical doctor who worked as a medic for armed groups, May 22, 2022, online interview.

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