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Introduction: Myanmar Media Historically and the Challenges of Transition

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At the end of August 2018, as this book was about to go to press, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) released its report summarizing the main findings and recommendations of its Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar. The report outlines serious human rights violations and abuses in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine States. It recommends that six senior military figures be investigated for genocide against the Rohingya, including Myanmar's armed forces commander-in-chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, and that the case be taken up by the International Criminal Court (ICC), or alternatively that an ad hoc international criminal tribunal be created (Human Rights Council 2018).[1] The report notes that "The role of social media is significant. Facebook has been a useful instrument for those seeking to spread hate, in a context where for most users Facebook *is* the internet. Although improved in recent months, Facebook's response has been slow and ineffective"

(p. 74). Facebook quickly responded to the report's release by removing the accounts of eighteen high-profile army figures in Myanmar, including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, and fifty-two Facebook pages, which had a combined total following of close to twelve million users (Facebook 2018).

A few days later, two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, were sentenced to seven years in prison under the Official Secrets Act over accusations of holding secret government documents that they intended to share with international media and the ethnic armed group Arakan Army (Sithu Aung Myint 2018). The two were arrested in December 2017 after investigating a massacre of Rohingya men and boys in the coastal town of Inn Din in northern Rakhine State. After responding to a call from police officers, who met them in a restaurant and handed them documents, the journalists were arrested for having the documents in their possession. As they were being taken away from the court after the sentencing, Wa Lone was quoted as saying, "We know we did nothing wrong. I have no fear. I believe in justice, democracy and freedom" (Shoon Naing and Aye Min Thant 2018, ¶22). The arrest and subsequent sentencing were met with national and international condemnation, as was the rejection of their appeal in early 2019. At a public protest to call for their release, organizer Ei Ei Moe, from the pro-democracy youth movement Generation Wave, described their jailing as "blocking the eyes and blinding the ears of the public" (Dunant and Su Myat Mon 2018, ¶15).[2]

These events underscore the complexities of Myanmar's much lauded "transition". Celebrated early on for the release of imprisoned journalists and the end of pre-publication censorship, hopes for increased freedom of expression and media freedom were tempered by the crackdown that followed. Much has happened in the media sector since the controversial elections in 2010 organized by the military junta and boycotted by Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD), including reforms to laws that had repressed the media for decades. Some argue that these changes are a continuation of the military government's Seven Step Roadmap to Disciplined Democracy, announced in 2003 (see the interview with Thiha Saw, this volume; Lall 2016; Rogers 2012). Laws on news media and publishing replaced older ones, allowing private owners to

publish print dailies for the first time in five decades, despite enormous financial and resource challenges. Media outlets formerly in exile and in the country's borderlands, including those that identify as ethnic media, were permitted to officially register and to set up offices in the country as early as 2012. Many are now disseminating content — including in historically banned ethnic languages — previously considered too critical and subject to censorship and criminal prosecution. Stop-gap reform measures intended to appease those critical of the ongoing centralized control of the broadcast sector include two-year cooperation agreements between five Myanmar companies and the state-run MRTV that see each company operating as a content provider for one of MRTV's digital free-to-air TV channels.

At a September 2018 public protest in Yangon held in solidarity with the imprisoned Reuters journalists, poet Maung Saungkha donned a beige NLD jacket, topped it with a green military-style jacket, and proceeded to "hit" journalists covering the event with a rolled up copy of state-run newspaper *Kyemon* (Dunant and Su Myat Mon 2018, p. 17).[3] After the NLD's landslide victory in the November 2015 general elections, and despite continued military control over key levers of government power, there were high expectations that the NLD and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi would prioritize and nourish free media and free expression. This demonstration reflects the disappointment and anger of journalists and free expression advocates about these unmet expectations.

Assessments of the NLD's performance thus far have been dismal. In May 2018 the writers and free expression network PEN Myanmar, along with eighteen of its civil society and free expression partners, gave the government a score of two out of sixty possible points for its second-year performance because of restrictive laws, defamation lawsuits and imprisonments, the regression of free expression in the digital sphere, dominance of state and military-owned media, powerful joint-ventures between the state and its business cronies, and a generalized failure to prioritize media reform and free expression; the 2018 score was six points lower than the previous year (PEN Myanmar 2018).

The Telecommunications Law is one of the NLD's weapons. Since 2013 the law has been used widely against online critics. According

to Athan (2018), a free expression NGO, as of 9 September 2018, 150 cases had been filed under this law, the vast majority since the NLD came to power. Although a coalition of twenty-two civil society groups called for Section 66(d) of the law — which criminalizes expression — to be abolished, a revised version of the law passed by the Union parliament in August 2017 did not abolish 66(d) or decriminalize defamation. Journalists have also been arrested and charged under colonial-era laws such as the Unlawful Association Act and the Official Secrets Act.

State media have long been criticized for being government mouthpieces, a role they are continuing under the NLD with their focus on Aung San Suu Kyi and other top leaders, their avoidance of controversial topics or bad news, and their publishing of misinformation which, some say, is simply "better written propaganda" than under the military regime (PEN Myanmar 2016, p. 4; see also PEN Myanmar 2017). In high-profile cases, such as accusations of military crackdowns in northern Rakhine, state media also often bury the stories or opt to attack critics. This was very telling on 29 January 2017, when a senior member of the NLD team, the prominent Muslim lawyer and NLD legal advisor Ko Ni, was shot dead at Yangon International Airport upon his return from an official trip to Indonesia. Ko Ni was famed for his work as an advocate for constitutional and legal reform and for religious diversity.[4] Private national media and netizens captured the grief and mourning of NLD party members, civil society activists and ordinary citizens (Thant Sin 2017). In stark contrast, the state media's coverage was subdued, highlighting official news of events and meetings attended by Aung San Suu Kyi and then president Htin Kyaw, and burying news of the assassination and its aftermath on inside pages (Htun Khaing 2017). According to critics, the NLD-led government was reluctant to draw attention to the deep divisions signalled by the assassination of a respected and beloved Muslim lawyer in what is officially and predominantly a Buddhist country (San Yamin Aung 2017). Two years later, the killers have not been brought to justice.

Soon after the assassination, Wirathu, the leader of the radical nationalist Buddhist organization Ma Ba Tha (Committee for the Protection of Nationality and Religion), congratulated Ko Ni's killers on social media. When the award-winning investigative journalist

Swe Win criticized his actions, also on social media, a high-ranking member of the Ma Ba Tha in Mandalay sued him for defamation. A separate case filed in Yangon was later dropped. Myanmar's Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture publicly defended the journalist, saying he had done nothing wrong (RFA 2017), and Myanmar's highest religious body, the State Sangha Maha Nayaka (Ma Ha Na), banned Wirathu from preaching publicly for one year and then declared Ma Ba Tha illegal (*Straits Times* 2017).[5] The Ma Ba Tha complainant later petitioned the court to withdraw the charge, but the case has nonetheless continued, including the arrest of Swe Win at Yangon's international airport in July 2017 and his subsequent release on bail. In August 2017 the complainant was himself arrested after participating in anti-government protests in Mandalay (Aung Ko Oo 2017). The assassination — and the responses to it — along with many other cases discussed in this chapter, illustrate the complexity and contradictions of Myanmar's ongoing political transition, and the role of media as sites for the playing out of power struggles and as active agents in their own right.

This compilation of work by academics, journalists, writers, media development experts, trainers and civil society activists documents developments in the media sector since the country's political opening. *Myanmar Media in Transition: Legacies, Challenges and Change* offers critical analyses and captures experiences on the ground, moving beyond the common research focus on media "systems" to instead focus on *processes* through which media are engaged as tools by key stakeholders and through which media act as agents themselves. This introductory chapter begins with an overview of existing research and theoretical debates about media in transition in other countries and world regions. This is followed by a history of Myanmar media inside, on the borders and outside of the country, and an overview of the current media landscape and major issues facing reformers. The Epilogue discusses the challenges we faced assembling this volume.

Media and Political Transitions

The wave of democratization in Latin America in the 1980s and Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union re-energized

the longstanding interest in the role of media in political transitions. This led to the emergence of the "transitions" paradigm, which remains the dominant approach to understanding transitions away from authoritarianism. The transitions paradigm has been critiqued, however, for its assumption of a movement towards liberal democracy (Roudakova 2012, p. 247) and its teleological approach (Carothers 2002). As this period of democratization was wrapping up towards the end of the 1990s, analysts began to discuss regimes combining authoritarian and democratic elements, and the growing consensus in comparative politics now revolves around the notion of such "hybrid regimes" as "the most common form of political organization around the world" (Roudakova 2012, p. 247; Voltmer 2015).

The field of comparative media and political communication has been dominated by the state-centric media "systems" approach since the publication of the highly influential *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert et al. 1956). An important attempt to update and expand this seminal work is Hallin and Mancini's (2004) *Comparing Media Systems*, which proposes three models of media systems as possible frameworks for comparison. These are the Liberal Model, which they argue prevails in Britain, Ireland and North America; the Democratic Corporatist Model, that characterizes northern continental Europe; and the Polarized Pluralist Model, which they say can be found in the Mediterranean countries of southern Europe. They note that these models are ideal types, more normative than real, and that they may include variations that the authors hope would be revealed by applying these models in various contexts. A more recent edited collection by Hallin and Mancini (2012), *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*, is a conversation with critics of their first book who argue that the three basic models it proposes do not translate well enough to be heuristically useful in most other parts of the world. The newer volume addresses some of these concerns, featuring significant critiques questioning the value of static models of media as "systems" and the lack of attention to *process* in comparative media work and research on political transition (McCargo 2012; Roudakova 2012). Roudakova (2012) calls for a typology that conceptualizes media systems as *processes*, distinguishes between processes that function to maintain and to erode order, and analyses how this shifts over time. She argues that the project by "transitologists" and "hybridologists" to

formulate a "typology of hybrid regimes" (p. 247) is unhelpful "when it denotes a lump of features that the researcher does not know how to untangle" (p. 248). Suggesting that researchers focus on media agency, McCargo (2012) argues that modelling "systems" is problematic since "there are so many exceptions to every rule that rules tend to obscure rather than explain the nature of the game itself" (p. 202).

Even those committed to theorizing them admit that "typologies" of democratic media, and their role in transitions, are often limited due to the unique circumstances of each national context (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 2012). Although there has been significant research into media's role in political transitions, and several models developed, no overarching, coherent explanation that applies to all such cases has emerged. This is not particularly surprising, as the role of media in this process has proven to be highly contextual and varied. Reflecting on the case of Indonesia a decade after the fall of the authoritarian regime, Krishna Sen argues for "micro-level careful, empirical studies of media structures, regulations and practices" to explain how media operate in changing political environments (Sen 2011, p. 2).

Since media generally defy ready classification, McCargo (2003, 2012) offers us a useful formulation, urging us to "see media outfits as polyvalent, speaking with forked or multiple tongues, and given to acting in apparently contradictory ways" (McCargo 2012, p. 202). He has offered a framework for understanding media as agents of stability that work to preserve the social order; agents of restraint that provide checks and balances on the political order; and agents of change that help shape political changes during times of instability or crisis (McCargo 2003). This approach also interrogates commonly used terms such as censorship, ownership and partisanship, and the assumption underlying much research that most media can be understood as business enterprises, which does not hold with local realities in several Asian countries (McCargo 2012). McCargo (2012) argues that the tendency to characterize some forms of media using terms such as "clientelism" or "instrumentalism" suggests that they are peripheral deviations, when they are actually far more common than we are led to believe and are perhaps even dominant patterns globally.

Research on media and transition, like many discussions of media and politics, also tends to conflate media with journalism, mentioning only in passing, for example, that "similar processes have been at

work in other areas of media and communication practice" (Hallin and Mancini 2012, p. 259; see also Curran 2007; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Zeilonka 2015). Too often transition research ignores the role of the entertainment industries and pop culture and downplays the role of social groups, civil society groups and political parties, as well as the impact of ideology and globalization, moves that disconnect the research from the ways in which contemporary democracies work (Curran 2007; Heryanto 2008). More attention needs to be paid to the non-state and non-commercial efforts that also compel and propel change during transition, a gap *Myanmar Media in Transition* addresses. However, while avoiding state-centrism, we cannot ignore the important role of the state. The available models for thinking about the relationship between media and the state present both useful insights and limitations.

State/Media Relationships

Hallin and Mancini's (2004) Polarized Pluralist Model has been both used and critiqued as a catch-all for societies outside of Europe and the Americas. It emphasizes political clientelism, "in which access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for deference and various forms of support", and formal rules are less important than personal and political relationships (Hallin and Mancini 2004, p. 58). They note that clientelistic relationships exist to some degree everywhere, and are often the target of reform efforts. Clientelism tends to be associated with lower levels of professionalization, as journalists are integrated into the clientelist networks characterized by private rather than public forms of communication. The process of political communication thus tends to be closed and "to serve the process of negotiation among elites rather than providing information for the mass public", while access to information for journalists tends to depend on their political ties (p. 59). Media that operate in this way function as agents of stability, maintaining the status quo.

In Southeast Asia, clientelism is often indicated by the term "crony", used to define business elites in countries across the region and their close association in many cases with authoritarian regimes, in particular since privatization in the 1980s and after the 1997 financial crisis. It is common to hear such references in Myanmar, where a class of

business owners hailed from the military or had close ties with top generals and access to capital and ownership during the time of the junta. Since the country's wave of privatization began in 2008, a new class of oligarchs has emerged that benefited from the earlier patronage of the military, and while they are characterized to a certain degree by political clientelism, they are becoming increasingly autonomous from the political elites and consolidating their own economic power (Ford, Gillan and Htwe Htwe Thein 2016). Functioning as agents of stability, these oligarchs and their media promote the status quo in order to preserve their own footing in the media landscape. The growing concentration of media ownership in the hands of these oligarchs and cronies across Asia has had a negative impact on public participation in political processes (Tapsell 2015). In addition, clientelistic systems have become entwined in an increasingly interconnected global media network. Flew, Iosifidis and Steemers (2016) argue that in this context the role of states has shifted from controlling the media — a key feature in oppressive environments — to managing, coordinating and facilitating developments through the regulatory framework, and sharing power, to varying degrees, with the corporate sector, international bodies and civil society, as well as with the emerging media oligarchs.

Another potentially useful concept is the "new despotisms", a "new spectre" greatly entangled with democracies by doing business with them, selling arms to them, negotiating alliances with them, and mimicking them by experimenting with democratic practices (Keane 2015, p. 249). Keane (2015) defines despotism as "top-down, vertically organized power structured by interconnected patrons and clients" in which both benefit, but under "asymmetries of power" in which "things are stacked in favour of the more powerful" (p. 251). Contemporary despotisms are "governing arrangements mixed with concentrations of private capital" that expand their power through misinformation and spin that threaten actual or emerging democracies (p. 249). The media employed in such a project construct a rhetoric of change while functioning as agents of stability by reinforcing the status quo of power relations. They employ the rhetoric of democracy and make reference to "the people", embracing "the institutional facades of electoral democracy", while excluding undesirable candidates and

voters (Keane 2015, p. 250). This concept can help illuminate aspects of Myanmar's transition, including, arguably, assessing the role of those oligarchs that currently control the broadcast sector.

The continued role of the state can be problematic when governments transitioning from authoritarian rule use the powers available to them to curb press freedom and freedom of expression, demonstrating that changing regulatory frameworks is one challenge, but dealing with cultural change is another entirely. Transitions literature refers to the phenomenon of *path dependency*, or the tendency to repeat patterns from the old regime in the organization and behaviour of new institutions and practices in the newly democratizing state (Powers 2016; Voltmer 2013). Those who have been in power will try to remain there, employing media as agents of stability, while contending forces will contest this by working to break free of old cultural patterns, employing media as tools or as partners in their attempts to push for change. Writing about the political changes in post-Communist Eastern European states and the relationship between the political actors and the media, Milton (2001) argues that the democratic forces that came into power after the Communist regimes retained the same media dependence as the regime they were replacing. Regardless of ideology (whether, for example, nationalist, Nazi or Soviet regimes), political actors "will use available political opportunities and resources to pursue their own political goals, and therefore institutional relations of media dependence will persist because this serves the agendas and interests of the political actors charged with granting media independence" (Milton 2001, p. 518). In their chapter on the legal framework for media and expression, Gayathry Venkiteswaran, Yin Yadanar Thein and Myint Kyaw argue that the democratically elected NLD government also uses legal tools as a means to keep itself in power.

Economic Forces of Change

Economic liberalization and promotion of commercial media are creating a global media model that is displacing the national variations of the past, and where journalism, in particular, is being modelled after dominant political and economic powers like the United States (Hallin

and Mancini 2012, p. 251). Sen (2002) argues that the liberalization of the broadcast sector was one of the seeds of the political transition in Indonesia, which political economists have often attributed to the 1997 financial crisis. During Soeharto's authoritarian rule, this liberalization of the broadcast sector benefited his family and cronies but also weakened state control of information and news and thus expanded the space for media to function as agents of change (Sen 2002, p. 85). In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Price (2009) found two major influences on the direction of media reform: accession to the European Union and its requirements for regional standardization, and the impact of privatization and private forces, factors he argued were far more important than large-scale media development assistance from the United States and Europe.

Nevertheless, media assistance can provide an important impetus for change, with a number of large foundations, organizations and governments often dedicating funds towards media development and reform. Much media assistance focuses on the journalism sector and reforming the legal framework to accommodate the shift from the predominantly government-owned or -controlled media to public (especially in the broadcast sector) or independent private media and self-regulatory mechanisms (Price and Krug 2000; Kumar 2006). Other key initiatives include building professionalism among journalists, supporting media associations and providing funds to set up independent media outlets. The media development "industry" is largely motivated by the belief that a free and independent media environment is key to democratizing society, especially in improving public participation in political and public processes. How these dynamics have shaped historic media development work in Myanmar is discussed by Jane Madlyn McElhone and Lisa Brooten in this volume.

Grass Roots Change Agents

Other uses of media as agents of change include myriad grass-roots efforts to create alternative venues for expression, especially given the incredible technological changes that have recently made participation more accessible, including artistic performances, visual arts and other various forms of locally produced media. These locally produced

media range from one-offs, such as performance art, street theatre or event flyers or other leaflets, to ongoing efforts such as small local print publications intended primarily for local communication within groups or small localities (Bailey et al. 2008; Brooten 2008*b*, 2011*b*; Downing 2001, 2011). Activists and reform advocates have also used online platforms to campaign locally and globally for their causes, creating mailing groups, online petitions and setting up alternative sources of information and news (Gan et al. 2004; Abbott 2011). Segura and Waisbord (2016) write that Latin America experienced one of the most active periods of media reform in the 2000s as a result of public mobilization and media movements, public debates, strategic litigation, and leftist governments that were open to reforms. Much of the early literature on the use of digital media in Southeast Asia focuses on efforts to challenge or topple regimes, while later works examine how these media can or do contribute to ongoing efforts to reform and democratize the media sector (Siriyuvasak 2005; Chowdhury 2008; Weiss 2012).

Although many commentators argue that Myanmar's current transition is "top down" — in that it was initiated and is being pushed by the state — this picture makes invisible all of the work done under the radar for two decades prior to the political opening that led to this recent push for change inside the country, and it diverts attention from non-state actors' contributions to the new Myanmar. Lall (2016) argues that activists and external donors promoted under-the-radar development of civil society during the final years of the military regime, particularly from 2005 to 2010, and that these developments played a key role in making the current transition towards the regime's goal of "discipline-flourishing democracy" possible (p. 3). Myanmar's civil society sector has become increasingly active, but along with such changes also come threats and challenges to the momentum for change. In her chapter, Jennifer Leehey explores local media as agents of change and the use of an evocative essay as a form of community resistance against large private interests, at the risk of costly legal challenges. This complex media landscape makes for engaging discussion in this volume, which we hope will jumpstart a long and fruitful exchange between academics, policymakers and media practitioners on these vital topics of participation and change.

Several chapters in this volume focus on individual and group resistance to historic and emerging forms of control and the opportunities being seized to access and share information beyond society's power brokers in order to push for change. State and private interests are far from the only players in this landscape; journalists, writers, filmmakers, musicians and civil society actors are also important in shaping new developments in media, as are audiences. This volume examines a variety of media and their roles in the current transition as agents of change, restraint and stability. Those producing and screening short films and documentaries about human rights, using social media in political debates, promoting change in the music industry, and writing poetry and other literature are all engaging in this work. We recognize, however, that power relations between the different groups and key players are not balanced, and that the influence of culture, interactions between groups, and the impact of fear also affect the direction of this transition. It is key, therefore, that reformers and policymakers have a historical grounding in order to understand recent events in Myanmar and the cultural patterns that have led to the current media landscape.

A History of Media and Free Expression in Myanmar

Developments since the political opening must be understood against the backdrop of struggles for freedom from military rule and the contestations of identities associated with nationhood resulting from decades of dictatorship and prolonged ethnic conflicts throughout the country. A look back at the earliest vestiges of media in Myanmar (then officially called Burma) sheds light on the country's long struggle with official censorship and control — and efforts to counter it — as well as religious and state involvement with media. It also highlights the country's vibrant, yet tumultuous, journalistic past, especially given the historically contentious relationship between the state and the people, and between the different ethnic and religious communities, since the colonial period.

Myanmar is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world (Smith 1994), but accessing accurate population figures and data about ethnic identities has always been difficult. Myanmar is estimated to be

ninety per cent Buddhist. The majority Burmans (or Bamar people), who primarily reside in the seven regions in the central part of the country, are mainly Buddhists and they have historically dominated politics and the military, and, by extension, narratives in the media and other social and religious institutions. According to the former military junta, and the two governments that have since been in power, there are 135 different indigenous ethnic groups in the country. However, this figure is widely contested; some say there are 135 languages and dialects spoken, not ethnic groups; others say the figure is propaganda, as the military was never able to produce any reliable data or list of the "135 national races of Burma" (Smith 1994, p. 18; see also Cheesman 2017; Lintner 2017). For the first time in more than thirty years, a census carried out in 2014 with UN help calculated the population to be 51,486,253, including an estimated 1,206,353 people who were not counted in parts of Rakhine, Kachin and Kayin States due to conflict and problems of access in those regions (Department of Population 2015). Many ethnic civil society organizations (CSOs) criticized the ethnic coding in the census, claiming it was designed without proper consultation, and they called for the census to be postponed until peace was attained. More than one million Rohingya Muslims were not officially counted unless they agreed to be categorized as Bengalis (Mclaughlin 2014), although the UN did include them in the final population estimate. Millions of Myanmar nationals living outside the country were also not counted. That this issue is contentious can be assessed from the fact that as this volume was going to press the government had yet to release any data on ethnicity collected in the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing census (San Yamin Aung 2018).

Many of the ongoing, and in some cases increasing, conflicts in Myanmar echo earlier conflicts from the British colonial period. During the post–World War II negotiations for independence, General Aung San, who had backed the Japanese during the war, signed the 1947 Panglong Agreement with several ethnic groups from the north who were pro-British and wanted assurances of self-administration upon independence. But Aung San was assassinated before the agreement could be enforced. Although the concept of federalism was included in the independence constitution, it became a tool for the subsequent Burmese military governments to impose their rule over the ethnic

states (Kipgen 2017). The military has been at war with dozens of groups from the ethnic states ever since, and attempts to broker peace over the decades have mostly failed. Aung San Suu Kyi's current leadership in the peace negotiations has been much criticized, and yet the military largely controls the process, which has excluded many of the key players from the ethnic states (Horsey 2017; Min Aung Htoo Nai 2017). The Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP) has also pointed to the absence of women in the peace negotiations, reflecting a wider problem of gender inequality and discrimination in the society (AGIPP 2017). Thin Lei Win's chapter in this volume speaks to this exclusion in the media context.

Even though Myanmar is linguistically diverse, this diversity was suppressed for decades under military rule in favour of the Burmese language. As such, information about the seven states and other self-administered areas named after ethnic minorities had in the past tended to be scarce, with the exception of efforts by individuals and communities that managed to produce reports, documentaries and interviews with journalists outside the country. This means that younger generations of ethnic minorities have for the most part been deprived of education and training in their own languages, although some have been educated in rural schools run by ethnic armed groups and therefore have a stronger grasp of their mother tongues, both oral and written. Ethnic nationality communities have nonetheless promoted their languages through their own media, from 'rebel broadcasts' in the 1970s and 1980s to news and religious media today (Lintner 2001, p. 29).[6] Many of these developments stem from patterns established under colonial rule.

The British Colonial Period (1824–1948) and Post-independence Civilian Rule (1948–62)

Education and literacy have always been highly valued in Burma and a source of national pride (Lintner 2001). Newspapers were first published in Burma during British colonial rule, beginning with the English-language newspaper *The Maulmain Chronicle*, founded in 1836 and published by the British administration as a means of communicating with British forces. This was followed by other papers produced by the British administration, Baptist missions and other English merchants

(U Thaung 1995). Burmese King Mindon was impressed with these early papers and their ability to openly critique leaders, and he became a strong proponent of a free press, which he tried to implement (Lintner 2001; U Thaung 1995). The first printing press in Burma was set up in the early nineteenth century by American missionary Adoniram Judson, who also printed the first book, *The Way To Heaven*, which he wrote and then published in 1816 (U Thaung 1995).

The early papers in Burma were published in English, with the exception of two papers produced by the local Baptist mission. One was the *Hsa-tu-gaw* (Morning Star). Launched in 1842 in Sgaw Karen language, it was considered the country's first ethnic language newspaper. It was also the longest-running vernacular newspaper, until its closure by General Ne Win just before he took power in 1962 (San San May 2016; Smith 1991). The other was the Myanmar-language Christian *Dhamma Thadinsa* (Religious Herald), founded in 1843 and considered the country's first Burmese-language newspaper (San San May 2016). In 1853 the ethnic Arakan Weekly Press published a twice-weekly paper called the *Akyab Commercial News* (later called *Arakan News*) in Sittwe, in what is now officially called Rakhine State (San San May 2016). English-language newspapers were published in Rangoon (now officially called Yangon) as early as 1853; the first Burmese-language paper in Rangoon was believed to have been launched in 1869 (San San May 2016).

Censorship rules in Burma were largely determined by the British administration in India (Larkin 2003). Following the Indian Mutiny in 1857,[7] the Governor General of India, Lord Canning, attempted to regulate the press by banning the publication of news without prior approval; his law became known as the "Gagging Act" (De 2013, p. 166). Then, in 1873, two years before the British annexation of Upper Burma, the country's second-to-last reigning monarch, King Mindon, introduced an act ensuring freedom of the press, considered the first indigenous press freedom law in Southeast Asia (*The Irrawaddy* 2016; Lintner 2001). One year later, the king started publishing a weekly.[8] In 1878 he also established the *Burma Herald* to counter what he called the pro-British views of Rangoon newspapers. That same year, the Vernacular Press Act was enacted in British India, of which Burma was a part, banning newspapers from reporting or depicting what it termed defamation of the government.

The media tended to support the nationalist movement that grew during the 1920s, contributing to its radicalization (Linter 2001; San San May 2016). The first cartoon published in Burma was drawn in 1914 by a British railway official, and, in 1917, Shwe Ta Lay's cartoon critiquing British officials for callously wearing shoes in Buddhist pagodas initiated a controversy that stirred early Burmese nationalist consciousness (Leehey 1997). By 1923 there were thirty-one newspapers operating in Rangoon, Mandalay, Moulmein, Sittwe, Bassein and Tharawaddy, including one of the country's longest-running newspapers, the state-owned *Myanma Alin*, launched in 1914 (*The Irrawaddy* 2016).[9] Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Burmese media and Burmese language cartoons reflected the popular desire for independence (Leehey 1997; Linter 2001).

In 1947, Burma's first constitution guaranteed citizens the right to freely express their opinions and convictions, and ushered in a brief era of parliamentary democracy during which writers and artists had almost total freedom of expression. When the country won independence from the British in 1948, there were thirty-nine newspapers publishing in a variety of languages, including Chinese, Gujarati, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu and Hindi (Tharaphi 2011). During the post-independence period, media in Burma thrived, reinforcing the country's reputation as having one of the liveliest presses in Asia (Leehey 1997). Many of the more than thirty daily newspapers and myriad journals and magazines operating at the time considered themselves watchdogs against corruption, and most had their own cartoonists (Allott 1993; Leehey 1997). Ethnic conflict was rife, and journals emerged in the rural areas of the country that were home to ethnic rebel groups, establishing what Smith (1991) has called an "insurgent press" (p. 69). By the 1950s, the space for free expression was beginning to narrow. Writers began joining various political factions, and literary criticism became politicized despite the inability to write freely (Leehey 2005).

Film-going began around 1906, with films projected on to large sheets hung by scaffolding in the streets because of a lack of equipped theatres. Documentary filmmaking started in 1920 with a short work about the independence hero U Tun Shein (Aung Min 2012). In the post-independence period, the film industry grew, with for-profit companies beginning to produce documentaries, including recordings of the funerals of high-profile student leaders Bo Aung Kyaw and

General Aung San and a popular film on the Karen conflict, the country's longest-running civil war (Aung Min 2012).

During the Cold War, both the United States and Russia engaged in a propaganda war. They poured financial aid into Burma to support the publication of their views and to gain the support of the Burmese. A large influx of U.S. money supported the publication of books on U.S. culture and the dangers of the Russian empire, but it also promoted corruption in the publishing industry (U Thaung 1995). In the ongoing propaganda war, Russia and China also flooded the market with publications, which divided Burmese political forces and the literary field into pro-U.S. and pro-Russian camps (U Thaung 1995).

After only a few years of civilian rule, a 1962 *coup d'état* brought General Ne Win to power. Several name changes and shuffles in personnel notwithstanding, the military retained control of the country for the next half-century.

Military Rule and Censorship: 1962–2010

This period in Burma's history was characterized by strict censorship of all media, including the visual arts and live performances. After seizing power in 1962, General Ne Win targeted the press, imprisoning newspaper editors and establishing two state-run newspapers: *Working People's Daily* and *Forward Weekly* (Smith 1991). He also created the Burma Press Council to promote press freedom through the voluntary observance of a state-imposed code of ethics, revoked all existing press laws, and enacted a new instrument of censorship, the Printers and Publishers Registration Law of 1962. For the first year, General Ne Win allowed private weekly and monthly journals to publish without incident, but in 1964 he nationalized all private publications and arrested editors and journalists, decimating the country's previously vibrant private press (Allott 1993; Lintner 2001). Private newspapers were banned altogether in 1966 (Lintner 2001). Political cartooning also disappeared as a result (Leehey 1997). Those publications that remained became mouthpieces of Ne Win's Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP), political content was forbidden, and cartoons were limited to less sensitive topics such as nutrition and agriculture (Allott 1994; Leehey 1997; Smith 1991).

Nevertheless, cartoons remained a vital form of political commentary, allowing for multiple interpretations and thus veiled messages that could get past the censors, and revealing "the critical discourse which cannot be expressed explicitly" (Leehey 1997, p. 154). Filmmaking, on the other hand, was harnessed to the goals of the socialist state, and Burmese filmmakers were isolated and unable to access technical innovations or the creative developments in cinema in the United States and Europe (Aung Min 2012).

With the exception of official publications and school and university textbooks, book publishing remained in private hands, yet all books and periodicals had to be approved by the censorship body, the Press Scrutiny Board (PSB), before publication and distribution. Separate censorship boards existed for film (and later video) scripts and for popular music, and book covers and paintings also underwent scrutiny before publication or exhibition (Allott 1993). Reinforcing its pride in its literacy levels, under the BSPP regime the country twice won UNESCO prizes for its literacy campaigns, in 1971 and 1983 (Smith 1991; Gartner 2011).[10] Nevertheless, the challenge of printing book-length works and the lack of independent reporting contributed to the rise in importance of monthly literary magazines as a forum for serious writing during the 1970s and 1980s (Leehey 2005). Literature and literary debate remained vibrant during this time period, and what Leehey (2005) identifies as "the new style" in Burmese literature emerged, characterized by shifting and elusive meaning, which through its very shifting "captures something important about the subjective experience of everyday life under military rule" (p. 198). The country's historical love of print continues today, as veteran journalist Thiha Saw explains in his interview in this volume.

In 1974 a new constitution granted free expression in accordance with the "Burmese Way to Socialism". The News Agency Burma controlled the flow of information in and out of the country. All foreign correspondents, except those working for the Soviet Tass and China's Xinhua, were expelled, and foreign journalists banned. Burmese writers during the 1970s and 1980s were concerned about the arbitrary nature of the decisions handed down by the PSB, and the fact that publications had to be printed *before* submission and then censored by either ripping out pages or inking over the allegedly offensive bits (Allott 1993).

Burma was the last country in Southeast Asia to establish a television service (McDaniel 2002), yet, despite the censorship, other forms of creative expression prospered. Well before the advent of TV, the first Burmese feature film was released in 1920. And as Jane Ferguson explains in this volume, even during the decades of military dictatorship, film studios continued to produce feature-length movies that entertained audiences in hundreds of cinemas throughout the country. Myanmar Radio was launched in 1960 and MRTV in 1980. The country was for a long time limited to three state-run stations that each broadcast a few hours a day. By 1968 the cinema industry was in decline as cinemas and production houses were nationalized (Zon Pan Pwint 2016). In the 1990s, because of a lack of resources, strict rules on content, and emerging digital technologies, producers shifted to selling their content — largely low-budget dramas and comedies — in VCD format (Lim 2012).

Under military rule it was well known that a blacklist had been created of those writers forbidden to publish (Allott 1993). In another form of blacklist, various parts of the country were designated as white, brown or black areas, corresponding to the degree of control the regime had over each area. White areas designated military control, brown areas were only partially controlled by the military, and black areas were under the control of ethnic nationalist groups (Brooten 2003; Kumar 2014). Visitors to the country were generally confined to white areas, and research on the country was severely restricted. For this reason there are few scholarly works that examine the development of media and communications systems during this period. Restrictions were particularly harsh for ethnic nationalities seeking to preserve and teach their own languages, and many intellectuals from ethnic communities were arrested or went underground (Smith 1991).

1988: Uprisings, the "Democracy Spring", and a Coup

By early 1988 the Press Scrutiny Board (PSB) had relaxed its restrictions and private individuals could obtain magazine publishing licences fairly easily. By the middle of the year, more than ninety different magazines on a variety of topics were being published (Allott 1993). Massive uprisings in August and September led to a hiatus, albeit an extremely brief one,

from the censorship that characterized communications under military rule. Started by students, the protests transformed within a short time into a nationwide strike. A large number of newspapers, press sheets and other publications emerged, many with biting satirical commentary on the political scene under General Ne Win and rule by the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). Political cartooning re-emerged, ridiculing General Ne Win and the BSPP, and *Ayaun Thit*, a journal produced by the newly established Artists and Cartoonists Union of Burma, printed cartoons as posters and displayed them at demonstrations (Leehey 1997; Lent 1995). The year 1988 also saw the formation of the Musicians Union (Smith 1991). Evidence of this creative proliferation can be found in the nearly one hundred unofficial, independent publications from this period documented and archived in the British Library, including a lot of information that was unavailable in the mainstream private or state-run media of the time and many courageous statements from older, senior journalists who had long been silenced (Allott 1993). Even the state-run newspapers reported more accurately during this period (Smith 1991). The ban on foreign journalists was temporarily lifted. Students used the available space to organize small group communication structures that later became an underground opposition movement, exemplifying a history of student agitation for change (Brooten 2003).

On 18 September a *coup d'état* brought a new military configuration, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), to power, which then imposed martial law and banned all public protests. Newspapers were banned, with the exception of the state-run *Lok-tha Pyei-thu Nei-zin* and its English-language version, the *Working People's Daily* (Allott 1993). Strict censorship was imposed and many editors, journalists and writers were arrested. As a result of the protests and their aftermath, an estimated 3,000 people were killed, 3,000 imprisoned, and 10,000 fled the country, some to ethnic minority controlled areas along the borderlands and others into exile (Guyon 1992). Journalists, cartoonists, writers and other artists were forced to decide whether to stay and give up their independence and their (short-lived) ability to publish freely or to continue their work in exile.

The month following the coup, Burma's favourite comedian and satirist, Zargana, was arrested for participating in the pro-democracy

movement. He was imprisoned until April 1990, including seven months in solitary confinement (Human Rights Watch 2009). Hugely popular in the late 1980s, Zargana's name means "tweezers", referring to his ability to "pick out" the irony of political situations. Another well-known satirist and writer at that time was Maung Thawka, known by his pen name U Ba Thaw. He was a popular speaker at evening literary gatherings, where he could "reduce large audiences to fits of laughter with his satirical accounts of VIPs — very important pigs, very important phongvis (monks), very important government officials" (Allott 2001, p. 387). When an unofficial Union of Burmese Writers was launched in 1988, Maung Thawka was elected president. A known supporter of Aung San Suu Kyi, when she was placed under house arrest in July 1989, he was also arrested. Maung Thawka died in prison in 1991 (Allott 2001). These are only a few of the many stories of those who struggled against the military regime, a struggle that continued after the 1988 coup, bubbling under the surface for nearly two decades in this tightly controlled environment.

Brewing Storms: Between a Coup and a Revolution

The newly installed SLORC amended the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Act in 1989, increasing fines for infractions. For the press, writers and artists, a new range of topics became taboo, including democracy, human rights, politics, the events of 1988, government officials, and anything to do with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as references to South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela. Leading writers were arrested, such as Ba Thaw and Win Tin, the chairman and vice-chairman of Burma's Writers' Association. Rising production costs and tightening censorship made publishing more difficult and books and periodicals more expensive (Smith 1991; Hudson-Rodd 2008). Ethnic writers and intellectuals were also arrested or went underground, and fewer books were published in ethnic minority languages under the SLORC than under the BSPP regime (Smith 1991). The SLORC's state-run media also orchestrated a xenophobic campaign against Burma's substantial Indian and Chinese populations, warning against interracial marriage and its resultant racial impurity (Smith 1991).

An additional censorship board was established in 1989 under the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs to protect Burmese music

from foreign influences. Military Intelligence chief Khin Nyunt urged musicians to be patriotic in their work and to cooperate with the state-controlled Myanmar Media Association (Smith 1991). Following a performance of satirical songs, chants and skits at the NLD headquarters during the Thingyan water festival in 1989, arrests of musicians and singers continued (Smith 1991). The SLORC similarly targeted the film and video industry, arresting key industry actors and directors, charging the chairman of Burma's Film Society with treason and launching a "cultural" campaign to coerce actors and directors to work with the Motion Picture Organization, a patriotic institution allied with the SLORC (Smith 1991).

Other performers, including comedians, also faced serious crackdowns during this period. For example, in May 1990, one month after being released from prison, Zargana was rearrested after doing stand-up comedy — telling a joke about the Minister of Information — at the Yankin Teachers Training College Stadium in Rangoon. He was sentenced to five years but released in March 1994. Once released he was banned from using his stage name Zargana and from performing publicly or even attending public events. His jokes were nonetheless said to have continued spreading by word of mouth. Despite these sanctions he was repeatedly invited to appear on military television — invitations that he always refused (Allott 2001; Human Rights Watch 2009).

The Burmese people did not consider the country's state-run media credible (Allott 1994; Smith 1991, 1992) and, as a result, relied on international broadcasters such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA) (Fink 2001; Lintner 1989). Aware of their influence, the military regime targeted foreign media. Two books in particular, *The Conspiracy of Treasonous Minions within the Myanmar Naing-Ngan and Traitorous Cohorts* and *A Skyful of Lies* [sic], attacked the foreign media for their reporting during 1988. Smith (1991) counted more than a hundred cartoons attacking the BBC in the state-run *Working People's Daily*, a campaign which he argued "conjured up the image of a network of foreigners secretly working together to seize control of Burma" (p. 72). In addition, a black market trade in pirated videotapes from Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia emerged in the early 1980s. Despite the low penetration of television, villagers often collaborated to purchase video players, and

communal watching was common. Western news reports and video footage of NLD or other protest rallies were keenly-sought-after items (Smith 1991).

In the years following the 1988 protests, media continued to be used as tools in the struggle for power. Shortly after assuming control in 1988, the SLORC began signing ceasefire agreements with as many ethnic minority groups as it could, and the discourse and promise of peace and development in the ethnic regions became especially prevalent in state-run media (Brooten 2003). The NLD won elections in 1990 but was prevented from assuming power. Many of its leaders were subsequently arrested or went into exile, and the military retained its rule of the country. In 1995, in a largely symbolic but devastating blow to the ethnic opposition, the Burmese military captured the ethnic minority alliance headquarters at Manerplaw, just across the border from Ban Tha Song Yang in northwestern Thailand, a hub for visiting journalists and dignitaries meeting with opposition ethnic nationalist leaders (Brooten 2003). The hub then shifted to the Thai town of Mae Sot, across the Karen State border.

The 1988 coup had little effect on media already being published in the ethnic-controlled rural areas, home to myriad opposition forces, yet it spawned other media, including outlets established by students who had fled the country (Brooten 2003; Smith 1991). Opposition ethnic minority radio stations emerged intermittently. Several writers and journalists who fled the country established writers and artists clubs in the "liberated area" of the border, and they began publishing magazines that offered an important forum for young writers and cartoonists (Smith 1991). And while media produced in exile rarely made it to Rangoon, opposition groups did manage to smuggle information into the country periodically in order to counteract the regime's media representations of the opposition activists and the various ethnic nationality groups and to raise awareness of the plight of ethnic minorities in rural areas (Brooten 2003; Smith 1991).

During the 1990s the emergence of private monthly magazines was an important development, starting with business-oriented magazines that told stories of Burmese living abroad that would not have previously been allowed (Allott 1993). These magazines featured articles, cartoons, poems, foreign news features and eye-catching photographs,

as well as many short stories, which Allott (1993) argues was "the most popular and important literary genre in Burma" (p. 23; see also Allott 1994; Brooten 2003; Kumar 2014). Many were fanzines focused on Myanmar celebrities. These monthlies were a refreshing alternative to the dry state-run newspapers, and the short stories they contained often used metaphor, allusion and irony to express ideas indirectly to avoid the censors. Nevertheless, like all non-state publications, including novels and other books, they had to undergo review by the Press Scrutiny Board *after* they were printed, creating strong pressure for authors and publishers to self-censor to avoid having to alter existing physical copies, especially given the increasing cost of paper (Allott 1993). This eventually changed with the introduction of computers in the 1990s, when pre-publication review and censorship replaced the older system (Leehey 2005). These private monthlies set the ground for the private weeklies that appeared in the early 2000s, and the newsweeklies that later followed in the mid-2000s. The first private weekly was a soccer journal, because soccer was a very popular sport and an easy money maker. *The Myanmar Times* was one of the prominent newsweeklies, launched in 2000 by Sonny Swe, the son of military intelligence head Brigadier General Thein Swe, in partnership with Australian businessman Ross Dunkley. Despite criticism that it was able to operate due to its close ties with the military, it quickly became one of the standard-bearers of journalism inside the country. Perhaps more than any other outlet, it has had a tempestuous history, including in 2004 when Sonny Swe was thrown into prison for nine years, ostensibly for violating censorship regulations. His father was also imprisoned as part of a military purge that saw military intelligence disbanded.

After 1988 the broadcast sector remained largely controlled by the government, but expanded to include the military and a few select private interests. In addition to state-run broadcasting, which began in 1936 during the colonial period and was named the Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS)[11] in 1946, the military launched Myawaddy TV on 27 March 1995, Burmese Armed Forces Day. In 2004 the regime entered into a joint venture with Forever Group to launch MRTV-4, and in 2010 established another lucrative broadcast joint venture with Shwe Than Lwin Media Co Ltd., the owner of the pay TV network

SkyNet, a direct-to-home satellite service. In 2005 the exiled Democratic Voice of Burma (now called DVB Multimedia Group) became the first Burmese satellite broadcaster, beaming into the country from exile. Government control was also undermined by the emergence of black market satellite dishes (Reporters Without Borders 2010a). The nationwide state broadcaster, Myanmar Radio, was launched in 1960 as an AM station and remained the only radio service in the country until the launch of Yangon City FM in 2001. Yangon City FM was one of seven FM stations which were established as joint ventures between the government and private companies (business cronies) over the next ten years. Additional state-controlled stations were later launched, including Thazin FM in 2008 by the Ministry of Defence and Myanma Radio Athan by MRTV and the Ministry of Information (Nwe Nwe Aye 2012; UNESCO and IMS 2016).

Documentary filmmaking was challenging in the aftermath of the 1988 uprisings. The craft was not developed inside the country and, given the pervasive climate of censorship and fear, foreign filmmakers had difficulties getting visas, let alone accessing people willing to talk with them. Those who were able to get a permit to film inside the country were stuck with a government "minder" who controlled where they could travel and what they could film, and, even if the filming was successful, it was challenging to get the film safely out of the country, past the eyes of the customs agents (Schlaefli 2016). A new surge of documentary filmmaking began to emerge in the mid-2000s, however, with classes and workshops offered at the Yangon Film School (YFS) and the Alliance Française (Aung Min 2012; Schlaefli 2016). YFS, established in 2005 by Anglo-Burmese filmmaker Lindsey Merrison, is officially a Berlin-based non-profit organization but was established to support young Myanmar filmmakers. Since its founding, YFS has produced almost two hundred films — including several award-winners — that have screened in film festivals around the world. YFS also creates films for local and international development organizations working in Myanmar, and trains their students to help local people in marginalized communities shoot their own films (Schlaefli 2016). A more detailed history of the Myanmar film and video industry and the impact of the transition are the focus of the chapter by Jane Ferguson in this volume.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, local punk and hip-hop bands emerged on to the Burmese music scene. Punk rock lyrics were overtly anti-establishment, performed by bands like No U-Turn and Side Effect. The first ever hip-hop group, ACID, was formed in 2000 by Zayar Thaw (who would later be elected as an NLD legislator) and three other musicians — Annaga, Hein Zaw and Yan Yan Chan. The band had to submit their lyrics, demo tapes, finished recordings and cover art for the approval of the censors (Denby 2012), and they got into trouble for lyrics that were pro-democracy and pro-social justice.[12] The punk bands later used their performances to counter hate speech (Hindstrom 2015), while members of Generation Wave used hip-hop and other art forms to engage young people in politics during the transition (Freemuse 2011). In this volume, Heather MacLachlan provides an overview of changes in the music industry during the early transition period.

The internet's development in Burma was slow and from the start highly controlled. In 1996 the military regime launched its own website, Myanmar.com, as well as a Computer Science and Development Law which wielded an automatic seven to fifteen years' jail term for anyone who set up or had links to a computer network without the prior approval of the state Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) service.[13] The MPT began providing an email service in 1997 and launched the first dial-up internet service in 1999, but the use of these services was limited by their exorbitant cost and access remained out of reach for most Burmese (Chon 2001; Zarny Win 2001). In early 2000 the regime listed a series of regulations for internet users, including prohibiting any writings "detrimental to the interests of the Union of Myanmar" or related to politics, making account holders responsible for all activity on their accounts, prohibiting hacking or other misuse, and requiring permission to publish web pages ("Regulations for Internet Users" 2000).

The government was clearly concerned about the impact of new information technologies. Despite allowing citizens access to email accounts, all messages had to pass through a central server controlled by the military, where they could be held up for hours waiting for the censors to read them (Neumann 2002; Zarny Win 2001). Early internet cafes in Rangoon only allowed access to members, and services were limited to an "Intranet" of government-approved sites. Membership

fees and monthly service charges kept these off-limits to all but the country's elite. Several studies in the mid-2000s found that the regime was actively using filtering and surveillance tools to monitor and censor the internet through its two internet service providers — MPT and the first private provider, Bagan CyberTech (OpenNet Initiative 2005; Villeneuve 2007). The early development of the internet and the rise of Myanmar blogging culture is further detailed in this volume by Kamran Emad and Erin McAuliffe, in the context of privacy risks, as well as by Htaike Htaike Aung and Wai Myo Htut for the telecommunications sector.

2007 Saffron Revolution and 2008 Cyclone Nargis

In September 2007 an estimated hundred thousand monks, students and activists marched in the streets of more than twenty-five Burmese cities and towns calling for democracy, and the protests gained worldwide attention. The military regime declared martial law, banned foreign journalists and suppressed news of the protests. Yet citizen reporters and bloggers used their cell phones and digital cameras to upload information and images to the internet, where they were picked up by exiled media and transnational news networks. The amateur video of the fatal shooting of Japanese journalist Kenji Nagai at close range by a Burmese soldier attracted worldwide attention when it was aired on Japanese and other international television networks. Additional footage of violence against unarmed protestors was smuggled out and aired internationally. In response the military junta shut down official internet access and soldiers began targeting those with cameras (Brooten 2008a). The exiled broadcaster Democratic Voice of Burma used a BGAN (broadband global area network) satellite terminal to access the internet inside the country, thus circumventing the junta's attempts to control information flows (Khin Maung Win, personal communication, 11 September 2017). More than 6,000 people were arrested, including approximately 1,400 monks, between August and October 2007 (ALTSEAN Burma 2007). The figures for the death toll differ; the government claimed only 13 people were killed, the UN human rights envoy on Burma said 31 people had died, while the *Democratic Voice of Burma* reported that 138 people had been killed (Zarni Mann 2013).

Less than a year later, in May 2008, an estimated 130,000 people lost their lives during the devastating Cyclone Nargis, the largest natural disaster in the country's recorded history. The official government death toll was grossly underestimated from the start, as the junta attempted to reduce the catastrophe's political impact, preventing aid workers from reporting on the extent of the damage by keeping them out of the affected areas (Brooten 2008a). The UN estimated that 2.4 million people were affected by the devastation and that by early June 2008 only 1.3 million of these people had received even the most basic assistance, which was inadequate and below minimum requirements (UN 2008). The junta was criticized for its secrecy and obsession with security that delayed responses to the humanitarian crisis by keeping many aid workers and aid out of the country for weeks following the cyclone (Brooten 2008a). Despite the devastation and calls to postpone the nominal constitutional referendum — the first step in the regime's "Seven-Step Roadmap to Democracy" — the vote was held on 10 May in all but the five hardest-hit regions. For these five regions the referendum was postponed, but only until 24 May.

The Saffron Revolution and Cyclone Nargis both had an impact on the media sector. Audiences for Burma's exiled media skyrocketed, and the editors of the more established media — such as Aung Zaw of *The Irrawaddy*, Soe Myint of *Mizzima*, and Aye Chan Naing and Khin Maung Win of the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) — took on new roles as analysts for international news outlets (Brooten 2011a). There was almost no reporting of the Saffron Revolution inside Burma, but during Cyclone Nargis the regime started relaxing its controls.

These two events also triggered an increase in aid and development efforts. In 2008, Myanmar's first indigenous adult training and research institute, Myanmar Egress, founded an in-house media-training centre (IMS 2012). Donor support to many of Burma's exiled media increased, and with it the ability of these media to continue building networks inside the country. This expanded support, along with the transnational pro-democracy movement and technological advances, continued to strengthen the media inside and operating in exile and along the country's borderlands. Nevertheless, this did not happen uniformly, and the larger, more developed groups tended to benefit most, rather than the smaller, ethnic or community-based media (Brooten 2003). These efforts are explored in more detail in Jane Madlyn

McElhone and Lisa Brooten's chapter on media development in this volume.

Many actors, musicians and performers responded to the cyclone by carrying out fundraising initiatives. In August 2008 the Burmese band Iron Cross performed in a concert at the Thuwanah Sports Stadium in Rangoon to raise money for the victims. The audience of fifty thousand was said to be the largest ever in the history of Burma (*The Irrawaddy* 2008). The junta allowed certain artist associations to organize concerts and shows to raise funds, but other groups were banned, such as the Moustache Brothers, a comedy troupe from Mandalay known to be supportive of the pro-democracy movement and whose members had served time in jail for their stinging critiques of the military (Cho 2008; Menendez and Hodgson 2013). A well-known *a-nyeint* comedy troupe, Thee Lay Thee and Say Yaung Zon, toured several countries telling jokes and performing skits that mocked the junta. The junta banned a recording of their performances that became a huge hit after being circulated outside of the country as well as clandestinely inside it on VCD (*The Irrawaddy* 2008).

This overview provides some indication of the historical events and patterns that shaped the country before the quasi-civilian Thein Sein administration began its legislative changes in 2010 and 2011. Contemporary events cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of how this history and its legacies have created both opportunities and challenges for those working to develop, diversify and democratize Myanmar media.

The Media Landscape Today: 2010–Present

When the current period of reform began, the media sector was vibrant but significantly restricted. There were about two hundred weekly and monthly journals and magazines in the private print market, covering news, sports and lifestyle. Many privately owned publications were associated directly or indirectly with high-ranking members of the army, including some individuals who also held cabinet positions (Nwe Nwe Aye 2012). Even then, few were spared the pre-publication censorship rules, and in this environment it was difficult to find truly independent publications. The government, military and a few select

business partners retained control over the broadcast sector. Significant restrictions continued to limit artistic freedoms. The telecommunications sector was stagnant, with exorbitant prices for SIM cards and very little infrastructural development. The internet was less regulated than other media in the country, but access was limited to less than one per cent of the population (Crouch 2016).

It is not surprising that media are now functioning as agents of change, reflecting internal divisions within the country, but their roles remain varied. The military and its former foes in the NLD-led government are struggling to define new power relationships and to change the old ways of doing things, but have challenged many media's efforts to act as agents of restraint, and have in many ways encouraged media to act as agents of stability, reproducing persistent old patterns and habits. At the same time, other media resist change as agents of stability, reproducing persistent old habits and patterns. And while new opportunities are opening up for Myanmar media, there remain significant barriers to their development as agents of restraint and change, independent of state and corporate interests. These include problematic laws, government control of infrastructure, economic challenges, bureaucratic hurdles, restricted access to information, and the rise of online bullying and hate speech. Much of this has been exacerbated by the meteoric nature of recent change, perhaps most obvious in the rapid growth in telecommunications in the country.

Growth in Telecommunications

In 2011 only one per cent of the population was online, but by 2015 Myanmar was the fourth fastest growing telecommunications market in the world (Trautwein 2015). By 2016 the telecommunications sector was the single most important draw for foreign direct investment in the country, raising concerns about other sectors of the economy (Samarajiva 2016). Myanmar was in 2017 considered the fastest-growing smartphone society in the world — an estimated 95 per cent of the population has access to mobile services and 85 per cent of the phones they are using are smartphones (Heijmans 2017). These figures, however, are based on the number of SIM cards purchased. The number

of towers that extend mobile penetration is much more limited, particularly in remote regions (Aung Kyaw Nyunt 2016; Heijmans 2017). As such, only an estimated 40 per cent of the population actually has access to the internet, either through mobile or broadband, although that number is rapidly increasing (Internet in Myanmar 2017). Broadband penetration initially lagged behind mobile but it is now growing quickly. Nevertheless, wired broadband may become increasingly irrelevant as mobile continues to proliferate and prices continue to drop.

This rapid growth in mobile services has largely replaced the need for internet cafes for online communication, although they still function in some areas so that people can charge their phones and connect to wireless internet, as explained by Htaike Htaike Aung and Wai Myo Htut in this volume. In rural areas, many people are now getting their news through online sources, especially Facebook, displacing radio as a primary source of information. Facebook and Viber have become Myanmar's most popular news dissemination and messaging sites. The number of digital media has grown, with popular online news aggregators attracting large audiences. Access to social media on mobile phones has for the first time given people direct access to politicians and other high-profile people, as discussed in this volume by Yan Naung Oak and Lisa Brooten, who explore the use of Facebook by high-profile figures in Myanmar and assess the platform's role in efforts to develop a more diverse public sphere. The rapid rise in social media use has led more people to express their political views, at the cost of promoting intolerance against ethnic and religious communities (Lee 2016), an issue discussed by Sarah Oh and Eaint Thiri Thu in this volume. Another concern is the lack of basic literacy about privacy rights and risks in this new digital age, as discussed in the chapter by Kamran Emad and Erin McAuliffe.

Political Economy of Myanmar Media

To a large measure, the Myanmar media landscape is controlled by military and political figures and their business allies, especially the broadcast and daily newspaper sectors. Which forms of ownership regulation will be introduced and to what extent the state will retain control over infrastructure such as broadcast towers, printing stations

and distribution networks remains to be seen. Key needs include increased transparency regarding media ownership, mechanisms to establish and maintain a source of public information about media operations, opportunities for public input and feedback about the role of media in Myanmar, and regulation that serves the public interest. The Myanmar people have embraced the information age and the recent opening and, despite recent setbacks, many groups are working hard to keep these new forms of access open.

Notwithstanding the dominance of the state and military in the Myanmar media landscape, private media have existed for some time, even though many are owned by cronies of army officials, families of high-ranking ministers or generals, or by people known to be close to them. The political opening has done little to transform the established patterns of highly concentrated ownership. This is demonstrated by the private and independent media outlets that struggle to sustain their operations against the dominance of state-run media and those owned by business elites. Assessing the political economy of Myanmar media is a difficult task because each of the government-crony joint ventures was established without any form of reporting requirement regarding ownership structure or revenues, and because various secondary sources and government websites often report inconsistent information (Smith 1991). This is a research lacuna that needs to be addressed in much greater detail as soon as possible to promote transparency in the media sector. We endeavour here to map the prominent players. In doing so, we distinguish between state-run media, which until recently were military controlled, and private sector media, although these categories are far from exclusive, as already indicated, and their many intersections and relationships need to be mapped out with much more clarity.

One example of the blurring of the state-run/private distinction is in the telecommunications sector. Telecommunication services were first provided by the state-owned MPT, but they were controlled, expensive, and limited to certain areas, much like the subsequent initial access to mobile services and the internet. Until 2013, internet connections were provided by Yatanaporn Teleport, RedLink and SkyNet MPS, joint ventures with the regime that depended on MPT's communications infrastructure (Song 2013). The two sons of

Shwe Mann, the former chairman of the lower house in parliament from the military-backed USDP — Toe Naing Mann and Aung Thet Mann — founded the second private internet service provider, RedLink Communications, in 2008.[14]

In 2013, after the sector was liberalized, two foreign private companies entered the market: Norway's Telenor AS and Qatar's Ooredoo QSC. In January 2017 a fourth licence was awarded to a joint venture between Vietnam's military-run Viettel and two local companies, one of which belongs to the Myanmar army (Reuters 2017). By the end of 2016 there were more than fifteen internet service providers in the country (Internet in Myanmar 2016).

State-run Media

For a long time the military *was* the state in Burma. More recently, however, the state-run media have come under the control of the government, and they need to be considered separately from the military-run media. In the print sector the government owns two national dailies — the Myanmar-language *Kyemon* (The Mirror) and *Myanma Alinn* — and has a joint venture with Global Direct Link to run the English-language *Global New Light of Myanmar*. The government runs and manages the state broadcaster MRTV as well as a variety of state-private joint ventures. Its most notable broadcast joint ventures are with Skynet, started in 2010 and owned by Shwe Than Lwin Media Co Ltd, and with Forever Group, which has run MRTV-4 since 2004 (Nwe Nwe Aye 2012).[15] The government also runs AM radio stations and has joint ventures with a variety of companies that run FM stations, including Zaykabar Co, Shwe Taung Group of Companies and Htoo Group of Companies (Nwe Nwe Aye 2012). The five companies awarded two-year digital television channel contracts in April 2017 to run joint ventures with the Ministry of Information include DVB Multimedia Co Ltd, Mizzima Co Ltd, Young Investment Group Co Ltd, Fortune International Co Ltd and Kaung Myanmar Aung Co Ltd.

The military publishes two dailies — the national *Myawaddy Daily* and the *Yadanabone Daily* in Mandalay — and owns its own television channel, Myawaddy, and radio station, Thazin FM (Nwe Nwe Aye 2012). It also publishes several magazines.

Private Media

The country has seven private national dailies: *7Day*, *Daily Eleven*, *The Voice Daily*, two editions of *The Myanmar Times* (English language and Myanmar language), *The Standard Time Daily* and *Democracy Today*. *Daily Eleven* is part of the Eleven Media Group established by Than Htut Aung in 2000. The group began by publishing sports journals and, since 2005, newsweeklies and bi-weeklies. It was one of the first media outlets to publish a daily, in May 2013 (Meston 2013). The *7Day* daily and weekly publications are owned by Thaung Su Nyein through his media company Information Matrix Co Ltd, which started with a magazine on information technology and now includes a series of popular journals. He is the son of Win Aung, the late foreign minister (BBC 2013). The *Voice Daily* is part of the stable of publications owned by the Myanmar Partners Think Tank Group affiliated with the development organization Myanmar Egress, which first published the *Living Color* business magazine in 1995. The *Voice Weekly* was launched in 2004 and began publishing a daily in 2015. Myanmar Egress founding member, the late Nay Win Maung, was the son of a military officer and was known to be close to the lower house chairman Shwe Mann. He later, however, handed over *Living Color* magazine to Ye Naing Win, whose father is the ex-military intelligence chief General Khin Nyunt (Aung Din 2011).[16]

Set up in 2000 by Australian Ross Dunkley and Sonny Swe, *The Myanmar Times* has had various owners with military and government connections. It has also had a tumultuous history, with both its founders serving stints in prison. In February 2014, business tycoon Thein Tun, widely known as the man who brought Pepsi to Myanmar, became the majority shareholder of the company (*Mizzima* 2014). From the start the company was perceived as pro-establishment, and at times pro-junta, due to its connections with prominent figures in the government. But under the junta it also faced tremendous pressure and censorship (Gleeson 2017). Since Sonny Swe's release from prison in 2013, he has had an active presence in the media sector; first as deputy CEO of Myanmar Consolidated Media Ltd, the owner and operator of *The Myanmar Times*, then as CEO of *Mizzima* and majority shareholder, and now as founder and CEO of Black Knight Media, the owner of Frontier Media. Frontier has steadily become one of the

most respected journalism outfits in Myanmar, with a reputation for tackling taboo topics. Sonny says people still think of him as the son of a general, but that the military has always hated him "for pushing boundaries and revealing the truth".[17]

Shwe Than Lwin owns SkyNet and *Democracy Today*. The publisher for *Democracy Today* is listed as Ko Ko, who is chairman of the Yangon Media Group and also publisher of the *Yangon Times* (Burrett 2017). Meanwhile, a construction company — Three Friends Construction — is a newcomer to the media business, publishing *The Standard Times* (Sandar Lwin 2013).

There are also hundreds of other weekly and monthly journals and magazines. The owner of *Popular Journal* and *Popular News Journal*, Nan Kalayar Win, is the daughter of former Secretary 3 of the SLORC, Lt-Gen Win Myint. The owners of *Snapshot Journal* (Myat Khaing) and *Envoy Journal* (Maung Maung) were close allies of the former Minister of Information and Culture from the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan (Aung Din 2011).

In the broadcast sector, two private companies — Forever Group and Skynet — have well-established joint ventures with the state and, along with state-run broadcasting, dominate the sector. The private broadcast company DVB Multimedia Co Ltd, referenced earlier, continues to broadcast via satellite from Thailand, and is considered the country's only independent news broadcaster. This status, however, may change, as the DVB Multimedia Group is one of five entities to have been awarded digital broadcasting contracts in 2017. These companies' permits will need to be renewed in two years or once the by-laws for the Broadcasting Law have been approved and implemented. The concern is that this partnership may jeopardize DVB's editorial independence.

A unique aspect of Myanmar's media landscape is the presence of formerly exiled media entities that have returned to the country to continue their work. One of the most prominent is the DVB Multimedia Group, along with *The Irrawaddy* and *Mizzima*. Supported, historically, and in some cases currently, by institutional donors, these media are now tackling the challenges of sustainability in a competitive playing field with other private media that had already been established inside the country, and where state, military and crony media have significant advantages.

Mingalar Company Ltd is the largest film distributor in the country, reportedly controlling eighty per cent of the domestic cinema trade (Buncombe and Htusan 2012). It owns six of Yangon's most popular cinemas. Mingalar entered the business in 1999, securing three cinemas in Yangon and two in Mandalay when the military regime eased economic restrictions on some sectors and privatized the ownership of cinema halls (AP 1999). The property developer Shwe Taung Group controls most of the remaining market, along with other newcomers that offer newer and better-equipped cinemas (Nandar Aung 2017). The push to refurbish old cinemas and build new ones has partly been due to the re-entry of U.S.-based 20th Century Fox International. The company pulled out of the country after the 1962 coup. It subsequently struck a deal in 2012 with Mingalar as its local distributor (Buncombe and Htusan 2012). Jane Ferguson analyses the current state of the film and video industry in her chapter in this volume.

The transition has seen some realignment of media ownership, although many of the players remain the same as in the junta era. The overall environment for media and expression, however, has not improved since the election of the National League for Democracy. By most accounts, it has worsened when compared with the initial changes made under the Thein Sein administration.

Thein Sein Administration

After the quasi-civilian government was installed by the military junta in 2011, with Thein Sein as president, changes in the media sector began in earnest. That year, local publications were allowed for the first time to publish articles, interviews and photographs of Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as articles written by her. Pre-publication censorship was abolished in August 2012, along with the censorship body and sixteen loosely worded guidelines for content that had held editors accountable for "sensitive" content deemed harmful to national security or "the dignity of the state" (Kumar 2014, p. 76). Journalists began reporting on previously taboo topics, and the digital space opened up with the liberalization of the telecommunications sector. An Interim Press Council was created. In April 2013 the first private daily newspaper licences — twenty-six in total — were handed out. And in 2014 thirteen dailies entered the market. International news agencies opened offices inside the country

with their own foreign correspondents, although visas were becoming more difficult to obtain and local journalists working with foreign media have come under threat while covering the crisis in Rakhine State (Brooten and Verbruggen 2017; Crispin 2018; Dickinson 2017). The majority of exiled media returned. Susan Banki and Ja Seng Ing provide an analysis of the changes faced by one of these outlets — *The Irrawaddy* — as it made the move back to the country. Ethnic media in the borderlands also began moving back, alongside nascent start-ups publishing and broadcasting in Myanmar and ethnic languages, a transformation which Jane Madlyn McElhone overviews in this volume.

The abolition of pre-publication censorship benefitted the artistic industries. Myanmar hosted its first independent international literary festival in February 2013 (VOA 2013). Filmmakers highlighted themes that were formerly off-limits, including politics and social justice. The film industry had been limited by the 1996 Television and Video Law that required all films and videos to be vetted prior to exhibition, but in December 2011 the Minister of Information and Culture, Kyaw San, announced that censorship of film and video would be relaxed. Films that were previously restricted in the country were subsequently permitted to screen, including *Burma VJ*, about the video journalists who reported on the 2007 Saffron Revolution and the government's response, and *Nargis*, by a group of young filmmakers from the Yangon Film School about the aftermath of the 2008 cyclone and the plight of its victims (Aung Min 2012; Harris 2013). Yet, nudity and sex remained off limits, and the horror genre was often banned (Harris 2013). In this volume, Mon Mon Myat discusses the impact of the Human Rights Human Dignity Film Festival, including films blocked by the film censorship board such as *Sittwe* and *Twilight over Burma*, the latter after the NLD came into power.

The partial relaxing of pre-exhibition censorship for artistic works created a new openness and a freer space for music, comedy and traditional forms of satirical critique that were previously banned, yet bureaucratic hurdles and the highly restrictive legal framework have continued to present challenges (Harris 2013). For example, live music performances required advance permits from multiple levels of government, while public performances have often been controlled through the use of Section 505 of the penal code and Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law (Harris 2013). The

often broad and arbitrary interpretations of the law have muddied the terms by which art has been judged political or offensive. Heather MacLachlan brings to this volume a discussion of changes in the music industry during the transition period. Reflecting on the opening of space for writers and poets, Ma Thida highlights the lingering culture of fear that challenges efforts to promote and defend freedom of expression.

Coverage of the 2015 parliamentary elections, while flawed, was fairer and more transparent than coverage of the 2010 nominal elections staged by the military junta, yet journalists had to contend with significant problems in gaining access and reporting freely. The military regime conducted elections on 7 November 2010, the fifth step of its so-called Roadmap to Democracy. However, the Union Election Commission (UEC), which was directly appointed by the regime, issued restrictions on opposition political parties and media (SEAPA 2011). Political parties not contesting the election were deregistered, including the NLD. In March 2010 the Press Scrutiny and Registration Board issued directives to the media to not publish interviews with opposition leaders or discuss the electoral laws (Kumar 2014, p. 73). Commentary about the 2008 constitution was added to the list of restrictions in July 2010, and in October the regime announced it was not granting press visas to foreign journalists who wanted to cover the elections (Kumar 2014). Local journalists working for foreign media reported being followed and photographed by Myanmar police and security agents (Kumar 2014). Those who tried to evade the authorities were arrested and deported, including Toru Yamaji, the head of the Tokyo-based news agency APF (Reporters Without Borders 2010b). Aung San Suu Kyi was released six days after the elections, on 13 November, an event which was widely attended by the media. But at least ten publications were suspended for between one and three weeks for what the censors claimed was overly extensive coverage of the opposition leader (Nay Thwin 2010). The pre-election coverage of the November 2015 parliamentary elections faced fewer restrictions than in 2010 but it was still lacking in many ways. In her chapter, Carine Jacquet discusses the interactions between the Union Election Commission and journalists during the elections.

A rollback on media freedom and free expression began in 2014 under the Thein Sein administration, a few scant years after the political opening. Many people were charged that year under internet

or peaceful assembly and association laws, and the Committee to Protect Journalists included Myanmar in its 2015 list of the world's ten most censored countries (CPJ 2015). Chapters in this volume on the legal framework and media in the ethnic states highlight the risks journalists face from the military, as demonstrated by the killing of freelance reporter Aung Kyaw Naing (also known as Par Gyi) while in military custody in 2014. That same year, the CEO and four journalists from the weekly *Unity Journal* were convicted under the Official Secrets Act for reporting on a military facility. They were subsequently pardoned in a political prisoner amnesty when the NLD formed the government in April 2016.

NLD-led Government

Despite the change in government, private media continue to struggle to survive in the market. Many outlets have closed down due in part to competition from highly subsidized state media, as well as inexperience and a lack of access to capital. The situation is particularly dire in the ethnic states and regions (MDIF 2018). More advertisers are moving to state media in search of larger audiences and closer ties with the NLD government. The rush to set up new dailies following the country's political opening has been dampened by the harsh realities of sustaining media businesses (Downing 2015). By the end of 2016, the number of dailies had shrunk to six, and a seventh daily was launched in early 2017.

Digital freedom has suffered, with Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law being used to silence critics of the government and the military, while threats against journalists have increased. The media community and observers were shocked when a journalist was murdered in December 2016, despite the NLD being in power. Soe Moe Tun, who worked for *Daily Eleven News* in Monywa, Sagaing Region, was killed while reporting on illegal logging (ARTICLE 19 2016). Access to conflict zones has been restricted, preventing independent coverage of the humanitarian crisis in northern Rakhine State and limiting coverage of the growing conflicts in Kachin and Shan States. Self-censorship remains entrenched. In this volume, journalist Lawi Weng writes about his experiences reporting from the conflict areas, while journalism trainer Ye Naing Moe shares his observations with

interviewers Nai Nai and Jane Madlyn McElhone about the challenges facing journalists in the new political environment.

Apart from the state apparatus, non-state actors — in particular, Buddhist hardliners — have also used the laws to harass individuals. Journalist Swe Win of *Myanmar Now* is among those who have been targeted by the radical Buddhist organization Ma Ba Tha, in his case using Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law. In March 2017, members of the punk band Rebel Riot were pressured to apologize to Ma Ba Tha over a photo posted on their Facebook page that showed them dressed up as Jesus, Shiva and Buddha during their performance. Band member Kyaw Thu Win was quoted as saying that they had been criticized online for "insulting" Buddhism (Hpraw Pan Lee 2017).

The most high-profile case under the NLD administration by far, however, has been the arrest and conviction of the two Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, discussed at the beginning of this chapter. No other case has so clearly encapsulated the disappointment of the media community in the elected NLD representatives. This case demonstrates as well that the biggest test so far of the Thein Sein and NLD governments has undoubtably been the Rohingya crisis.

Media and the Rohingya Situation

More than any other crisis, the communal violence in Rakhine State that first erupted in 2012, and then intensified in 2017, has exposed tensions and schisms in the country and tested the extent and integrity of the political opening, including media freedom, free expression, and journalistic ethics and professionalism. This is especially the case when journalists tackle taboo issues such as religion, ethnic rights, the military and charges of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Journalists' access to the affected areas in Rakhine State has been restricted, leading to reliance on official sources and distorted or incomplete coverage (Brooten and Verbruggen 2017; *Frontier Myanmar* 2016). Few Myanmar media outlets have covered violence committed against the Rohingya, and there is a widespread lack of self-critique among Myanmar journalists who merely repeat the official line (Ye Naing Moe, personal communication, 20 September 2017; see also Myanmar Institute for Democracy 2017). Myanmar media have been highly critical of foreign media, accusing them of an overemphasis on human rights and not enough on national

security. Local and foreign journalists who report critically about the military's operations in Rakhine State face accusations from their peers for exaggerating or false reporting. In her chapter in this volume, Eaint Thiri Thu reflects on how military rule has affected reporting of the plight of the Rohingya and the difficulties journalists face in accessing the truth.

Social media platforms, especially Facebook, have been used to spread rumours and hate speech, provoking violent reactions. The spread of hateful messages and their consequences for the safety of journalists and civilians are especially evident in the violence in Rakhine State, where most of the messages tend to be anti-Muslim or anti-Rohingya (Davis 2017; Wade 2017). Evidence now demonstrates that Facebook was used in a systematic campaign by military personnel (Mozur 2018). Wade (2017) documents the use of seminars and local media to propagandize against the Rohingya, and assesses how the propaganda, "not just in leaflets and statements [by Ma Ba Tha and other nationalist monks], but in domestic media of all stripes, state-owned and private — left little mental space within the Buddhist communities of Rakhine State to consider the Rohingya as anything but menacing" (p. 118). Journalists who use Facebook or Twitter to provide live reports from an incident or press briefing have been subject to online harassment and attacks by those who think the content is sympathetic to the Rohingya. Even journalists from Rakhine working with local media have encountered hostile responses and death threats from the public when covering the conflict on the ground, as they are perceived to be biased (Mratt Kyaw Thu 2017). Sarah Oh writes in this volume about individuals and campaigns that emerged in response to the communal conflict and the surge in hate speech.

Facebook's role in the violence has been much critiqued. During an interview in April 2018, the platform's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, acknowledged that he was concerned about the potential dangers of Facebook misuse in Myanmar (Klein 2018). The interview shed light on his lack of awareness of the situation on the ground. He referenced an attempt to thwart an incitement of communal violence between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar, and praised the effectiveness of Facebook's systems (he specifically used the phrase "our systems") for monitoring such attempts to incite violence. In fact, this particular case was identified and reported by civil society in Myanmar, and it took

several days for Facebook to take action. The civil society groups in Myanmar who initially identified and reported this incident sent an open letter to Zuckerberg, criticizing Facebook's over-reliance on third parties, absence of a proper mechanism for emergency escalation, reticence to engage local stakeholders around systemic solutions, and lack of transparency (Phandeeyar et al. 2018). While Facebook is reportedly continuing efforts to improve its ability to respond to notifications of abuse and to monitor and remove hate speech proactively (Facebook, 15 August 2018), civil society activists remain unconvinced that the company's commitment to improving the situation and ending the resulting violence is on par with its commitment to improving its own reputation.

Capturing the complex and fast-moving Rakhine and Rohingya situation and the media's response to it has been one of the more challenging aspects of compiling this volume.

Assembling This Volume

Assembling *Myanmar Media in Transition* presented many challenges, notably the concern that the information would become outdated by the time of publication. Events and decisions are unfolding rapidly as we pen this introductory chapter, especially involving legal cases against the media and other civil society actors, as well as developments in the Rakhine and Rohingya crisis. But we must at some point stop updating and acknowledge that this work, like all works, is partial. We offer this volume as a panoramic snapshot of the Myanmar media landscape at this point in time, with a level of detail and depth useful as a baseline for building comparative research around the many themes raised. We discuss Myanmar media scholarship in greater detail in the Epilogue.

A significant limitation facing us is that there are few media scholars focused on Myanmar. The country's isolation during military rule had a direct impact on the kinds of research scholars were permitted to undertake, which has resulted in limited academic analysis of media. The academic literature that does exist is scattered and piecemeal. Information on ownership and cross-ownership of media, as well as informal agreements between parties that have characterized the media sector in the country, are difficult to come by. Myanmar journalists acknowledge that writing about media ownership brings with it the risk of criminal

defamation (Human Rights Watch 2016). As a result, literature on the subject is sparse, even in print media. In-depth analyses in English of Myanmar-language media are also rare. This volume is the first in English to bring together empirical and theoretical contributions by scholars on different aspects of Myanmar media. These are complimented by more descriptive pieces by experienced media professionals and reform advocates, whose work helps fill the gaps in the academic literature and provides context. Several chapters are collaborative efforts by academics and practitioners. Despite the political opening, there were interviewees — both local and foreign — who were reluctant to share information on the record, in order not to jeopardize relationships, including with donors or organizations working in the area, as well as out of a fear of reprisals. This is an indication that while legislative change may be possible in the short term, the deeper cultural patterns, such as the culture of fear around speaking openly, will take more time to overcome.

The main purpose of this volume is to document and theorize the changes occurring since the political opening. But, more importantly, the intention is to spark conversations between academics, policymakers and media practitioners and to provide a historical foundation for reflections on the media landscape of Myanmar today and for the future. After decades of forced silence on topics of vital importance, Myanmar media now offer platforms for greater discussion and engagement, yet they are also being used for repressive purposes. This volume amply illustrates that, while media act as agents of change, and are themselves affected by change, they can also act as agents of restraint, holding officials to account, keeping an eye out for corruption. And, as agents of stability, some media, such as Myanmar's state-run outlets, are maintaining the status quo rather than promoting a structural or cultural transition away from business-as-usual. This volume explores all of the phenomena in action during this current period of transition.

Notes

1. The ICC has begun a preliminary examination of the forced displacement of the Rohingya and the international mission's findings on gross human rights violations. The UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution on 27 September 2018 to create an independent mechanism to collect evidence of alleged crimes committed against the Rohingya. See Keaten (2018).

2. Generation Wave is a high-profile political activist youth group.
3. Maung Saunghkha was at the time founding director of the Research Team on the Telecommunications Law and is now the founding director of the free expression non-governmental organization Athan.
4. Ko Ni was also responsible for helping the NLD identify the new position of State Counsellor for Aung San Suu Kyi, who is barred by the constitution from becoming president (Beech 2017).
5. After it was declared illegal, the Committee for the Protection of Nationality and Religion (Ma Ba Tha) changed its name to the Buddha Dhamma Charity Foundation and continued its operations.
6. The members of Burma News International (BNI), who represent ethnic identities, produce content in Myanmar and their own languages, as well as in English. See https://www.bnionline.net.
7. The Indian Mutiny of 1957–58 was one of the biggest, but unsuccessful, uprisings organized by the sepoys (soldiers) against the British East India Company.
8. The paper shut down when the British annexed Upper Burma in 1885.
9. The names of Rangoon, Moulmein and Bassein were changed in 1989 along with the change in the country's name. They are now referred to as Yangon, Mawlamyine and Pathein, respectively.
10. Despite the country's historically high literacy rate, in 1987 the previously reported literacy rate of over 78 per cent was suddenly reduced to 18.7 per cent, ostensibly so that Burma could meet the strict requirements to be considered for least developed country (LDC) status at the United Nations (Smith 1991).
11. The BBS was renamed Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) in 1997.
12. Zayar Thaw was imprisoned for three years in 2008 for founding the youth organization Generation Wave in the wake of the 2007 uprising known as the Saffron Revolution.
13. The text of the law is available at http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/mm/mm012en.pdf.
14. Since the political opening, Shwe Mann has been seen as an ally of Aung San Suu Kyi, especially after he was removed as USDP party chairman before the 2015 elections (BBC 2015).
15. Forever Group was established in 1996 as a graphics training centre and collaborated with the Information Ministry on e-learning and e-book initiatives beginning in the early 2000s (*Mizzima* 2016). Its founder and CEO, Win Maw, is known to be close to the former information minister Kyaw Hsan, who was reportedly also a shareholder of the company (Foster 2013). The owner of Shwe Than Lwin, Kyaw Win, is known to be close to the former president Thein Sein and the military (Foster 2013).

16. Ye Naing Win was arrested after his father Khin Nyunt was ousted from power in 2004. In the 1990s, Ye Naing Wing was made director of the country's first internet provider, Bagan Cyber Tech, which was later renamed Myanmar Teleport.
17. Interview with Sonny Swe, 13 July 2018 in Yangon.

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