

Poetry as Form of Political Activism and Resistance: An Analysis of Contemporary Burmese Poems

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Abstract

This study analyzed five contemporary Burmese poems through the lenses of Mimetic, Marxist, Postcolonial, and Stylistic theories. It centered on the following: (1) the prevailing poetic visions reflected in the poems, (2) the social issues identified from these poems, (3) the representations of Myanmar based on these aspects, and (4) the recurring linguistic elements identifiable in the poems. The analysis adopted a qualitative approach, employing iterative content analysis and thematic analysis of the textual evidence from the poems. The findings revealed that the prevailing poetic visions were displacement, resistance, and activism, all of which are closely interrelated and reflective of the broader socio-political context of the country. In terms of social issues, the analysis identified the following: (1) extrajudicial killings, (2) the struggle for freedom and liberation, and (3) calls for unity and systemic change. These poetic visions and social issues contribute to a paradoxical representation of Myanmar as a conflict-ridden yet resistant society. The recurring linguistic elements, particularly pronoun use and imperative constructions reflected in the poems, point to the poets' reclamation of identity and their call to action, both of which are prerequisites for the notions of resistance and activism. As such, the study provides an integrative analysis emphasizing how the poetic visions, social issues, and representations of Myanmar are not only consistent with the country's socio-political realities but are also actively constructed through the linguistic and stylistic choices appropriated by the poets. The study therefore contributes to the ongoing discussion on the role of poetry as a mechanism for activism and resistance. Finally, the integrative framework adopted in this study highlights how literary theories unpack the socio-political realities of Myanmar as reflected in these contemporary poems.

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Introduction

Literature plays an important role in the society. As history unfolds, it becomes a potent reflection of its many aspects. In fact, M. H Abrams acknowledged this reality when he proposed his Quaternity Theory. He articulated that one among the four ways a literary text, as in the context of this study a poem, can be looked at is through the lens of history in and the context from which it was conceived (van Rooden, 2012). Therefore, the text, a poem for that matter, cannot be separated from its history. Otherwise, there would be a risk of misappropriating its entirety. It is this premise that serves as a guide for this study. Myanmar's rich history, its colonial past, and current socio-political instability have shaped its literary traditions. As such, poetry, within the context of Myanmar, should be understood cognizant of these realities. Suffice it to say, therefore, that poets then become agents of political activism and resistance as a way to challenge the oppressive military regime.

In the contemporary times, it has been in the constant state of conflict and war due to the on-going military rule (Council on Foreign Relations, 2026). As a result of this it has displaced thousands, if not millions, of people—men, women, and children alike. Such displacement has also, by extension, resulted in the proliferation of social issues such as extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and oppression and human rights abuses such as those among women and children done by those who wield power. In fact, the Human Rights Watch in 2023 noted these issues and has since called on the government to cease these abuses and for other international actors to intervene in the country (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d). These socio-political realities have further plunged the country into a state of crisis (King, 2022).

Such a picture of Myanmar provides the appropriate context of for this study as it analyzed the contemporary Burmese poems. The analysis focused on the prevailing poetic visions of these selected pieces vis-à-vis the country's broader context, the social issues that can be extracted from them and how they become an evidence of power dynamics between the Burmese people and the present military rule, how these pieces paradoxically represent Myanmar as a country, and the linguistic elements observed from these pieces as indications of activism and resistance. This is with the assumption that these contemporary poems do not only represent and construct the lived socio-political realities of the Burmese people but take an active role in challenging the status quo against the backdrop of an oppressive regime.

This assertion is crucial as it provides the theoretical gap that the study would like to address. Existing research done on Burmese poetry has relied so much on either language-centric approaches or conference proceedings. The study of Gu (2024) as well as that of Sarkis cov (n.d.) only looked into the concepts of language choices, stylistics, and comparative analysis of Burmese poetry. There were also a few literary anthologies detailing Myanmar's rich literary history like the one done by Moon (2012). While these are significant developments in preserving Myanmar's literary traditions, there is no study that expands the discussion of how contemporary Burmese poetry functions as a medium for political activism and resistance in the context of the socio-political situation of the country. As such, this study adopts an integrative framing

vis-à-vis these poetic texts to uncover not only how they mirror socio-political realities, discuss social issues experienced and lived by the Burmese people, but also, more importantly, how the linguistic choices of the poets are not incidental and random but are part of his stylistic choice for political activism and call to action.

Through this study and the insights that come with it, the poets of Myanmar are given a greater venue so that their voices, now becoming clear, can be heard—not only as a form of literary or creative expression but also of political dissent and call to action. To this end, their voices are not only recognized and amplified but also their literary traditions, in poetic form, are likewise documented and preserved through systematic literary research despite the challenging times.

Research Objectives

The study critically analyzes five contemporary Burmese poems. Specifically; it delves into the following:

1. the poems' poetic visions vis-à-vis the broader socio-political situation of the country;
 2. the social issues that can be extracted from these poetic texts as evidence of tension and power relations between Burmese people and the military rule;
 3. the representations of Myanmar based on these aspects; and
 4. the recurring linguistic elements (pronoun use, symbolism, and imperative constructions)
- found these poems as indications of how poetry is used as a medium for political activism, resistance, and as well as call to action.

Literature Review

This section provides a brief survey of related literatures that speak about the history of Myanmar. This provides a contextual background necessary for a nuanced understanding of the poems chosen for this study. Then, it is followed by the different literary traditions of Myanmar, paying close attention to its poetic tradition.

History of Myanmar

Myanmar is one of the countries situated in the Southeast region of Asia. Over the past decades, it has struggled with a myriad of issues that were consequences of its repressive government which is controlled by the military. Lindsay Maizland, from the Council of Foreign Relations, writes that such repressive government has resulted in widespread poverty and a civil war among ethnic groups (Maizland, 2022, January 31). In addition, the control of the military junta not only transformed the country's government into an exploitative one, but it has also led to the arrest of their former leader, a prominent activist, and a Nobel Prize for Peace awardee, Aung San Suu Kyi (Pletcher, 2025, March 30).

Recently, as the Amnesty International, a humanitarian-international organization, has noted (n.d), the crisis in Myanmar has continued to worsen in the sense that not only are poverty and civil war extensive, there are other interrelated issues—equally disturbing—that have emerged

since the military crackdown in 2023 (Amnesty International, n.d). These issues include extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests, unfair trial, human trafficking, displacement of people among many others.

Having placed these inputs into context, it can be understood that the cause, the heart, of all these is the fact that they are controlled by a military and a repressive regime which has resulted in the epidemic of social issues; and these have affected, certainly, not only their economic development but also the Burmese people in general.

These insights coming from various international organizations are essential to the study as they provide a bigger picture of the nature of literary pieces, not only poems, produced during this time in Myanmar. That is to say that the literary pieces produced, poems for example, in Myanmar are produced against the backdrop of an oppressive military rule and a society plagued with various socio-political issues. Therefore, in this context, Burmese poetry is considered a form not only of creative or literary expression but also of resistance, activism, and political call to action evidenced from its poetic visions, social issues, and stylistic choices.

Literary Traditions in Myanmar

The literary traditions of Myanmar trace their roots from the lithic inscripts that were influenced by the Buddhist kings and religions to the more refined language of poetry following a clever metrical composition (Pe, 1985, January 1). The 19th and 20th century saw a surge on the development of various literary traditions such as Burmese drama, play, novel, short stories, as well as poems that have since explored modern themes.

However, cognizant of the present socio-political situation of the country, its literary traditions have undergone what Byrne (2012) previously mentioned the tectonic shift. From lithic inscriptions and metrical compositions, these literary traditions, poetry in particular, is now tied with political activism (Maung day, 2016). This tectonic shift was the consequential outcome of the oppressive military rule experienced by the Burmese people.

It is in this regard that poetry functions not only as an outlet of creative and literary expression but also as a potent form of reflection of the lived experiences and the narratives of the Burmese people. Suffice it to say, therefore, that these contemporary poems should be understood within this framing in light of their function for discursive resistance.

Related Studies Reviewed

This section outlines the studies done previously that are relevant to the present study's topic and context. It begins with how the previous studies focused more on aesthetics, stylistics, comparative analysis, conference proceedings, as well as politically oriented readings of Burmese poetry.

As already mentioned above, the studies of Gu (2024) and Sarkisov (Sarkisov, n.d.) highlighted the concepts of language choice and stylistics of Burmese poetry without attention to its political nature as well as the socio-political context from which this poetry emerged. Another is the study of Wynns and Linn (2022) which looked at Burmese poetry in relation to the concept of beauty within the context of Western aesthetic theories. The study found out that Burmese

poetry exhibit unique aesthetic perspective and artistic representation.

So far, based on the studies surveyed for this paper, only the studies of Byrne (2012), Renshaw (2020), Rajeev and Vasani (2020), and Ryan and Telles (2022) are socio-political in nature. In the study Byrne in 2012, it asserted that Burmese poetry had undergone a tectonic shift from its focus on beauty and aesthetics in traditional poetry to a more society-focused in response to the situation of the country. On the other hand, the study of Renshaw emphasized how aesthetics and difference in styles in Burmese poetry are a clear response to its socio-political nature. Meanwhile, the study of Rajeev and Vasani paid attention to the Burmese Civil War through the lens of Tin Moe's poems. Finally, that of Ryan and Telles (2022) placed greater attention on the role of social media in political activism and resistance against the backdrop of censorship.

These studies provide a baseline in terms of what has been written so far about Burmese poetry. While they have contributed to the preservation of Myanmar's poetic traditions, it seems that they have applied the literary theories singly and distinctly from one another. This is what sets this study apart from these cited studies in the sense that it aimed to be integrative in its approach. It did not only focus on stylistics or on political orientation alone but an integration of both through the identified literary theories. This is with the hope that this approach would provide a more in-depth analysis of the poems. As such, this research asserts that the theoretical frameworks used for this study (Mimetic, Marxist, Postcolonial, and Stylistics) are interdependent with the aim to unpack how the poems including the stylistic and linguistic choices of the poets themselves mirror, represent, and construct the socio-political conditions of the country.

Theoretical Background

The study is anchored on four literary theories such as the Mimetic Theory first proposed by Aristotle, the Marxist Theory articulated by Karl Marx, the Post-colonial Theory of Edward Said as well as the Stylistic Theory of Charles Bally. As opposed to the previous studies done on Myanmar's literary traditions, the study asserts that these theories, in so far as these contemporary poems are concerned, do not operate or exist in isolation. They, instead, work interdependently to bring out how these poems reflect the socio-political conditions of the country, the power relations and the tensions between the dominant military rule and the minority groups (the Burmese people), and the inherent capacity of poetry as a form of reclaiming identity and an outlet for political activism and resistance through the poets' stylistic and linguistic choices.

The first theory used in this study is the Mimetic Theory first proposed by Aristotle. This posits that a text or a piece, as in this case a poem, is a reflection of the world that it was produced in. Ampo (2022) in her study extended and concretized this view by saying that literature, in general, mirrors a man's (a human being) significant experiences. Such experiences shape the text as to how it ought to be understood and interpreted. As already elucidated previously, the contemporary Burmese poems are, therefore, to be understood as consequential products of the broader socio-political context and the tumultuous times that the country is

in. Such context and time point to the repressive military rule that has resulted in prolonged political and social instability and the emergence of varied and often complex social issues such as extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detention, oppression of women and children. Hence, the theory is used as an interpretive framing to ascertain how these poetic texts, particularly in relation to their themes, mirror the prevailing social conditions of Myanmar. Likewise, the use of the Mimetic Theory also highlights the function of poetry not only for artistic, creative, or literary considerations but also as a potent representation and expression of the Burmese peoples' narratives and lived experiences against the continued threats they experience.

Another related theory employed in this study is the Marxist Theory proposed by Karl Marx. This theory highlights the dynamics between the powerful and the powerless which Marx called the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In that sense, it gives emphasis on the economic conditions which situates the text, or in this case, the poems (Poetry Foundation, 2024). In the study, the Marxist Theory is used to bring out how the social issues extracted from the poems such as extra-judicial killings, struggle for freedom and liberation and challenging the status quo are clear indications of the persistent socio-political tensions and unequal power relations between the military rule as the implementers of an oppressive regime and the Burmese people as the ones resisting from such regime.

In addition, the use of the Post-colonial Theory by Edward Said highlights how the recurring themes of displacement and resistance contribute to the identity-construction of the Burmese people as informed by the broader socio-political context of the country. As such, these themes of displacement, resistance, and political activism, in the context of post-colonial theory, could be seen as a response to the conditions of the peoples such as marginalization, oppression, and resistance.

Moreover, as a supplement to the three cited theories, the study also subscribes to the Stylistic Theory of Charles Bally where the focus is the notion of style reflected in the poets' language choices. Stylistics, or as used in this paper, stylistic theory, is defined as the study of language patterns in texts and of the meaningful relationship between the linguistic choice and literary interpretation (Giovanelli and Harrison, 2022). In this study, the Stylistic Theory is used to emphasize how linguistic and stylistic choices such as pronoun contrast, imperative constructions, and symbolisms reflected in these poetic texts are manifestations of political engagement, activism, and resistance. Therefore, through the lens of Stylistic Theory, the use of these linguistic elements is not superficial, incidental or random but stylistically-intentioned by the poets to construct meaning, negotiate and reclaim their identity, and more importantly, engage the Burmese people—the primary readers of these pieces—for a call to action. Given this, the poets' use of these linguistic elements is not to be considered only in the context of the formal lens but rather this is a proof of how poetic language functions as a form of political engagement.

Having placed these things into context, the study emphasizes the value of adopting an integrative framing in analyzing these contemporary poems. The discussions above highlight how

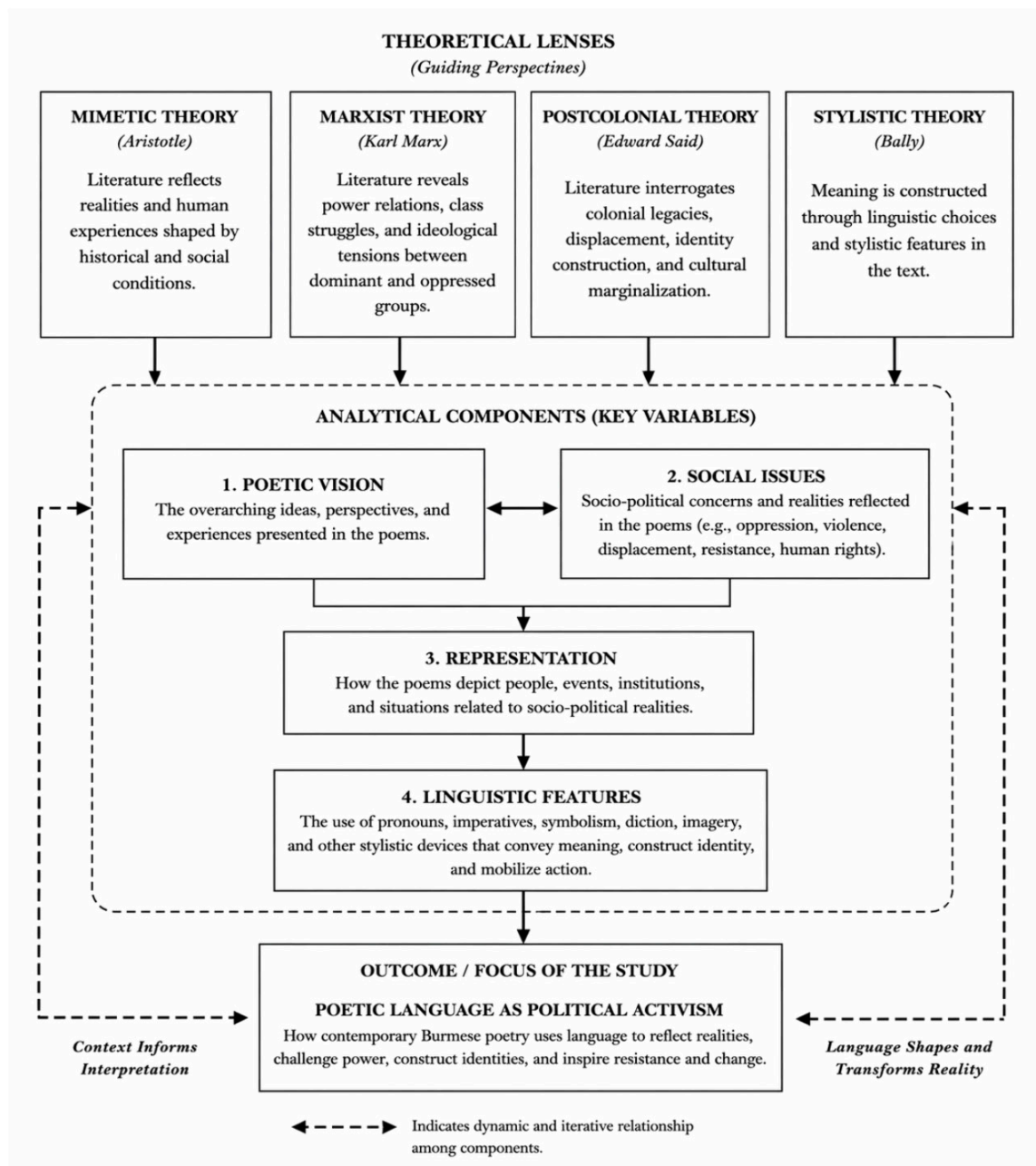
these theories can be applied interdependently to bring out not only the meanings behind these poetic texts vis-à-vis the socio-political contexts of the country but also, more importantly, how the stylistic decisions of the poets as reflected in these texts are manifestations of how poetry functions as a form of political activism and resistance.

Research Framework

Figure 1

Integrative framework on function of poetry as a form of political activism and resistance

The study asserts that the identified literary theories function interdependently to flesh out the poetic visions, social issues, representations of Myanmar, and the use and the recurring



presence of specific linguistic elements reflected in these contemporary poems. At the heart of this framework is the presumption that poetry functions, beyond being literary and creative outlets, as a form of political activism and resistance. The analysis begins with the identification of the poetic vision and the different social issues found in these contemporary poems. Guided by the Mimetic Theory, these poetic visions are understood within the context of the broader socio-political situation of the country.

These poetic visions and social issues facilitate the analysis of Myanmar as both a conflict-ridden yet resistant society. In the lens of Marxism, these representations are a product of the unequal power relations and tensions between the military rule and the Burmese people. On the other hand, these representations also bolster the Post-colonial nature of these contemporary poems such that the recurring themes of displacement, resistance, and activism are to be understood in relation to the lived experiences of the Burmese people being oppressed, excluded, and marginalized.

In addition, the identification of the recurring linguistic elements, in the purview of Stylistic Theory, points to how language is used in order to construct these meanings. Beyond that, language also is used as a form not only of artistic expression but also of discursive resistance and political call to action.

As a synthesis, the framework provides a clear sequence of the study in terms of how the poems were analyzed. The poetic vision and the social issues contribute to the representations of the country; while the identifiable linguistic elements show how meanings were created by the poets and communicated to the readers. Ultimately, the study aims to highlight not only the insight derived from adopting an integrative approach in literary analysis but also how language, in the context of poetry, serves as a form of resistance and political activism.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study uses a qualitative research design, particularly iterative content analysis, to draw out the needed data from the poems considered for this study. The choice of a qualitative research design is appropriate since the only study relied on specific lines from the poems and not objective or quantifiable data to answer its research questions.

Sources of Data

The contemporary poems used for this paper were from a related study titled *Verses of Resistance: Contemporary Poetry in Myanmar* (Ryan & Telles, 2022). The current study however is not to be considered a duplication of their study since their focus was largely on the use of social media (from which these poems were first posted) as a weapon of resistance and activism against censorship. On the other hand, the focus of the current study is poems' prevailing poetic visions, the social issues that can be extracted, the representations of Myanmar based on the two, and the linguistic choices that help shape these elements. Secondary sources such as historical articles, data from international agencies, published research were used and subsequently cited in this paper to bolster its claims and assertions.

Moreover, these contemporary poems were chosen through purposive sampling based on the following justifications: (1) they are relevant to the socio-political context of Myanmar both in terms of themes, social issues, and representations, and (2) the identifiable linguistic elements such as consistent pronoun use and the presence of imperative constructions are present in these poetic texts. Finally, the decision of choosing only five contemporary poems would ensure that the analysis and interpretation would be more in-depth and nuanced based on the identified theoretical perspectives used in this paper.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study systematically followed four phases to answer the specific questions posed in this study. Phase I included the determination of the prevailing poetic visions from these poems. Phase II focused on the social issues that could be extracted from these texts. Phase III was on the representations that could be deduced from these prevailing poetic vision and social issues. Phase IV looked into the identifiable and recurring linguistic elements across the five poems. These phases relied only on a thorough and iterative content analysis of the selected poems to draw out the needed findings.

Data Analysis

Both content and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. In relation to content analysis, the researcher immersed with the language of the poems by reading them closely and thoroughly. In the context of thematic analysis, the researcher came up with initial codes by looking into the dominant and recurring patterns found in these texts to ascertain the different poetic vision, social issues, representations, and the linguistic elements to answer the research objectives. It is important to emphasize at this point that both analyses were iterative to further refine the extracted codes.

In addition, in the spirit of trustworthiness and to establish credibility in the interpretation and analysis, the findings were corroborated with existing scholarly articles, published studies from other researchers as well as documented reports from reputable organizations observing the current socio-political situation of Myanmar. This was done to ensure that the analyses and interpretations were not only coming from the researchers' limited point of view but rather a synthesis of what has been extracted from these poetic texts vis-à-vis what has been written about the country.

Findings/Results

This section elucidates on the findings derived from the analysis of the contemporary Burmese poems. It begins with the prevailing poetic visions from the poems followed by the social issues that can be attributed them. Both the poetic visions and the social issues contribute to a contrasting representation of Myanmar based on these contemporary poems. Moreover, there is also an emphasis on the identifiable and recurring linguistic elements used in these texts that bolster the study's assertion that poetic language serves as a medium for resistance and activism.

Table 1

Prevailing poetic vision

Textual Evidence	Prevailing Poetic Vision
When I was born, I was not a baby like you are. Without a birth certificate, When I was one, I was not a child like you are. Without a nation, Just like a pet. The world I knew has gone, My people were killed and displaced. It's the fourth time I have fled Bangladesh,	Displacement
"Don't let the flag fall, Fight until only your beard remains" say the Bansai T-shirts	Activism
"This is my life and none of your business"	Resistance
Students. We are students! Every home has at least one student	

The table shows the prevailing poetic visions from the contemporary Burmese poems used in this study. These poetic visions, through the lens of the Mimetic Theory, could be interpreted not as separate entities but interrelated concepts that were borne out of the country's broader socio-political condition.

Among the prevailing poetic vision is displacement which can be construed explicitly from the textual evidence. In the first two sets of stanzas lifted, the poems highlight one of the consequences of internal displacement which is othering. Such othering can be poignantly observed in the opening line of each stanza that mark a direct comparison of the speaker as represented by pronoun I and the other as represented by the pronoun you. On the other hand, the second stanza lifted emphasizes the impact of external displacement especially among the refugees. From the perspective of the post-colonial theory, such impact results in the people's marginalization and oppression. It can also be noted in these lines how displacement, whether external or internal, affects one's concept and ownership of identity. In the post-colonial lens, this displacement is situated within the broader socio-political context of Myanmar.

Another prevailing poetic vision is resistance as evidenced in the textual evidence provided. Such resistance is interpreted as a direct response to the recurring experience of displacement.

In the poem, the beard and the flag are used as poignant symbolisms of resistance against the oppressive military regime which has taken control of much of Myanmar's government and society (Maizland, 2022, January 31).

Moreover, aside from resistance, the poems also show activism, again as a response to the experience of displacement. In the first textual evidence, the line this is my life and none of your business shows not only power dynamics from the hostage and the hostage taker but also clear defiance of power through assertive and declarative language. Such defiance can very well be construed as activism in itself. In the second textual evidence provided, the use of the interrogative form and the ownership of identity (as concretized by the line we are students) indicate strong activism. This interpretation supports both the previous assertion of Ryan and Telles (2022) on the role of Burmese poetry in the context of political engagement and the assertion of Mon (2024, November 28) that local armed groups have organically emerged in communities despite the risk of military attacks; and these local resistant groups come from all walks of life: local politicians, party members, public servants, farmers, and most especially.

Tying these insights together, these poetic visions show how language functions both as a form of reflection and of action. The recurring theme of displacement reflects the lived experiences and the narratives of the Burmese people cognizant of their present situation. On the other hand, both resistance and activism point to the power of language beyond being an outlet for creative and artistic expression, but also, more importantly, as a form of discursive resistance and political engagement.

Table 2

Social issues

Textual Evidence	Social Issues Extracted
Beard is the war-torn town of the chin in civil war In the history of chin, beard is the defeated truth	Extra-judicial killings
"Don't let the flag fall, Fight until only your beard remains" say the Bansai T-shirts	Struggle for freedom and liberation
Holding hand in hand together, Let us be united. There will never be a permanent defeat. For the blood in our hearts Is still radiantly red. Education must be cured But not with old wives' tales	Call for unity and systematic change

The table showcases the different social issues extracted from the contemporary poems. Guided by the Mimetic Theory, the presence of these social issues highlights the reflective power of poetry in showing the socio-political struggle of the Burmese people (Ryan & Telles, 2022). Consistent with the studies of Maizland (2022, January 31) and Mon (2024, November 28), these social issues likewise reinforce the present conditions of the country marked by continued political instability, military versus civilian conflict, and human rights concerns.

Among the social issues deduced from these poems is extra-judicial killings which is poetically unpacked in the first textual evidence provided. In the poem, while there is an explicit mention of the words war-torn town and civil war that concretizes the issue, it is important to highlight as well the symbolism of the beard—both as a way to present the conditions of the country where civil war and extra-judicial killings happen but also as a sign of resistance. In the perspective of Marxism, the last line where the beard is metaphorized as the defeated truth highlights the unequal power dynamics and the on-going political tensions between the oppressive military regime and the people at the receiving end of their occupation.

Aside from extra-judicial killings, another social issue inferred from the poems is the struggle for freedom and liberation. This is symbolically but assertively shown in the line “Don’t let the flag fall..”. In this case, the flag becomes a symbol of identity and freedom. It is also important to note that how the line was constructed in declarative form poignantly signals resistance. These, from the mimetic perspective, affirm the observation of World Bank (n.d) on the constancy of war in Myanmar in the hands of an oppressive military regime. Such constancy further exacerbates the struggles of the Burmese people.

Finally, despite these social issues, one cannot also deny the fact that there is that call for unity and systemic change as seen from the lines “Holding hand in hand... let us be united” and “Education must be cured.” These lines highlight both the the power of the youth as well to fight for their freedom as well as of education as a tool for liberation. The symbolism of the blood as the youth’s undying and defiant spirit further emphasizes this call for unity and systemic change. This is also supplemented by the succeeding textual evidence putting premium on curing the educational system. This highlights, in the post-colonial lens, how the oppressive government took concerted effort to weaken and neglect it altogether. In the stylistic view, the use of the imperative phrase “Let us” invites the Burmese people to a shared and inclusive goal of effecting change.

As a synthesis, the identification of these social issues shows the crucial role of poetry not only in reflecting the lived experiences of inequality and oppression of the Burmese people but also in transforming their society towards change despite the backdrop of risks and threats associated with political resistance. This is, again, consistent to Ryan and Telles’ (2022) on the primordial role of literature as a form for political engagement.

Table 3

Representations of Myanmar

Textual Evidence	Representation of Myanmar
Beards looking for a chin like words for a poem Beard is the war-torn town of the chin in civil war The world I knew has gone, My people were killed and displaced.	Myanmar as a conflict-ridden society
Holding hand in hand together, Let us be united.	Challenging the status quo
Education must be cured But not with old wives' tales Education must be cured	
Wash your hands Wash your hands with soap to make sure they are clean	

The table above exemplify two contrasting yet interrelated representations of Myanmar as a country based on these poems. On one hand, it is represented as a conflict-ridden society marked by political instability, oppression, and continued inequality. The mention of the words from the poem such as war-torn, civil war, and the verbs such as killed and displaced provide a mental image of this representation. From the mimetic standpoint, this representation reinforces existing studies done and observations from the international organizations on the present socio-political situation of Myanmar such as those of Maizland (2022, January 31) and from the World Bank (n.d). This also concretizes the tectonic shifts mentioned by Byrne in 2012 emphasizing how the function of Burmese poetry shifted from an aesthetic point of view to a more political-charged one.

However, despite this representation, it is also important to underscore the fact that the same society is also represented as one that which is in pursuit of challenging the status quo. The lines "Holding hand in hand... let us be united," "Education must be cured...," and "Wash your hands...," emphasize a shared goal of action towards challenging the status quo and promoting change. In this case, these phrases highlight not only the inherent capacity of poetry for representation but also, more importantly, for advocacy. From the post-colonial perspective, it appears that these phrases and how they are structured (in imperative form) highlight how the poets emphasize reclaiming the Burmese identity and society, although marked by an oppressive military rule, through education and unity.

As such, it is important to emphasize how these representations do not operate singly. They are interrelated. On one hand, the representation of Myanmar as a conflict-ridden society provides a contextual understanding for the need for resistance and political activism. Applying the post-colonial perspective, the portrayal of Myanmar as a conflict-ridden society does not only affirm how poetry mirrors current lived experiences and narratives but also the fact that domination from the oppressive military rule produces counter-action such as resistance and activism.

Table 4

Linguistic elements

Textual Evidence	Linguistic Feature
I... you..	Pronoun contrast
We are students.	Collective pronoun
“Don’t let the flag fall”	Imperative construction
Let us be united.	Imperative construction (inclusive)
Beard... war-torn town	Symbolism
flag	Symbolism

The table indicates how specific linguistic conventions are used in the contemporary Burmese poems. At the core of these findings is the assertion that these are not only incidental stylistic choices, but they reinforce how meaning, identity, and political engagement are constructed. In that sense, this also highlights how poetic language functions as a vehicle for resistance and activism especially within the broader context of the country’s socio-political situation.

In the post-colonial context, the contrast between the use of the pronouns I and you indicate both division and exclusion. However, the use of the pronoun we indicates collective action and inclusion. This contrast indicates that the word choice is not random but stylistically intentioned and appropriated by the poet to expand meanings of displacement, resistance, and activism.

On the other hand, the use of imperative constructions conveys call to action and mobilization. This highlights how poetry, or literature in general, not only serves as a form of representation or a mirror of socio-political realities but also a medium for discursive resistance and political engagement. In this sense, poetic language does not only function as a way to describe but also for action.

Another feature identified from the contemporary poems is symbolism. The beard functions

as a metaphor of destruction and loss; while the flag symbolizes resistance and activism against the oppressive rule. This highlights the value of linguistic features in showing complex and multi-faceted socio-political meanings. From the Marxist perspective, these symbolisms highlight the unequal power relations between the dominant military rule and the oppressed Burmese civilization.

As a synthesis, these findings reinforce the study's primary assertion that poetry is not only to be construed as a mere creative or artistic expression. It serves as a medium to reflect present lived realities and narratives, as in the case of the Burmese people, as well as a potent venue for resistance and activism.

Discussion

This section elucidates on the insights obtained from the findings of the study. It begins with a rearticulation of the study's premise followed by a discussion on how theories expand the texts' poetic vision, social issues, representations, as well as the linguistic elements.

At the heart of this study is its assertion that poetry does not only serve as a form of creative or artistic outlet but also as a medium for political activism and resistance. It adopts an integrative framework of four literary theories to emphasize how they do not operate singly but as a unified framing in order to further understand these texts. This is what sets this study apart from other published studies so far surveyed in this paper.

Applying the mimetic theory, the findings highlight how poetry mirrors the lived experiences and narratives of the Burmese people. These findings, particularly that of displacement, activism, and resistance are consequential outcomes of the broader socio-political conditions of the country. The application of the mimetic theory in these contemporary poems further affirm the observations of the international agencies such as the United Nations and previous studies done by Maizland (2022, January 31) and Mon (2024, November 28). Likewise, the use of the mimetic theory in these poems concretizes the assertion of Ryan and Telles (2022) on the primordial role of poetry for resistance and activism.

The findings also subscribe the Marxist Theory which highlights the issue of power relations and dynamics. In the chosen contemporary poems, the use of figurative language such as the symbolism of the flag as reclaiming of identity and the beard as resistance further highlights the role of poetic language in showing the unequal dynamics between the oppressor which is the military regime and the oppressed which is the rest of the Burmese population. Again, as mentioned, poetry becomes not only as an escape from reality but becomes the reality itself showcasing how the continued occupation of the military has exacerbated human rights violations and other socio-political issues.

Moreover, in relation to the post-colonial perspective, it is to be noted that the central and recurring theme of these poems is displacement. In this case, the poems become a venue where identity is not only shown but also negotiated. In the same way, the stark contrast on the use of the pronouns I, you, and we emphasize how exclusion happens, as a result of displacement, within the Burmese society as shown in these poems on one hand and the value

of inclusive language in making poetry a tool for call to action and change on the other hand.

In addition, the stylistic theory applied in this study in terms of how the poets appropriated specific linguistic elements to effect meaning. For example, the use of pronouns both highlight exclusion because of displacement and inclusion in emphasizing collective action. On the other hand, the use of imperative constructions shifts the role of the poems from being reflective venues to venues where call to action and participation happen.

Tying these insights together, the use of these theories primarily highlights the study's contribution to existing studies by applying an integrative framework. As mentioned, the study treats these theories not as single and distinct perspectives but as a unified one. Ultimately, this integrative framing bolsters the insight that poetic language is not only for the sake of reflection but also, more importantly, for action within the greater socio-political context of Myanmar.

Conclusion and Implications

The study analyzed the contemporary Burmese poems in relation to their poetic visions, the social issues found in them, their contribution to a particular representation of Myanmar within the broader socio-political situation, and the recurring linguistic elements that highlight how they function as a form of political activism and resistance.

Based on the findings, the prominent poetic visions were displacement, resistance, and activism. In terms of social issues, the issue of extra-judicial killings, the country's struggle for freedom and liberation, as well as challenging the status quo were extracted from these texts. These poetic vision and social issues facilitate a paradoxical representation of Myanmar as both a conflict-ridden yet resistant society. The recurring and identifiable linguistic elements from these contemporary poems affirm the role of poetry not only for creative and literary expression but, more importantly, as an outlet for discursive resistance, political activism, and civil call to action. These findings are consistent with existing reports and international observations such as that of Maizland (2022, January 31) and Mon (2024, November 28).

Overall, the study did not only systematically document the poetic traditions of Myanmar against the backdrop of continued censorship and of the risks associated with resistance and activism but also, rather equally, contributed to the ongoing discussion regarding the important role of literature, particularly poetry, in voicing out the lived experiences and in reclaiming of the distinct identity of the Burmese people.

Finally, the study has also a broader implication to how literary theories are applied to unpack literary pieces. With the integration of the Mimetic, Marxist, Postcolonial, as well as Stylistic Theories into a single integrative framing, the study aims to highlight how they operate interdependently to make full sense of these poetic texts. As already mentioned, while other studies have focused on applying literary approaches singly and distinctly to Burmese literary traditions, this study has highlighted the value theoretical integration towards full understanding of Burmese poetry vis-à-vis the Burmese people's experiences reflected in it.

Ethical Approval

The study only relied on content analysis of the pre-selected poems. As such, it had no human participants. In view of copyright, the researcher invokes Fair Use Policy, a widely accepted doctrine worldwide, that allows for copyrighted materials to be used without permission from the author for teaching and scholarship as in this case.

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