

The Relationship among Pluralism, Social Cohesion, and Arts: An Avenue for Peacebuilding in Myanmar

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Abstract

Conflicts and natural disasters have had a significant impact on the people of Myanmar throughout history, and they are becoming more intense now. The violence against civilians and the intensified armed conflict that followed the February 2021 proceedings were unbelievable turns of events for all Myanmar citizens, and as a result, the right to express oneself is being denied at various levels. Clearly, these situations resulted in physical destruction, income loss, and negative mental health outcomes for many people, all of which have a long-term negative impact on the country's prosperity and peacebuilding processes. Nonetheless, as a result of the situation, various forms of art, such as short stories, poems, songs, films, paintings, cartoons, and drawings, emerged as a way of expressing resilience and unity.

This study aims to explore the roles of the arts in promoting pluralism and social cohesion, as well as how to promote peacebuilding through various types of arts in Myanmar. An inductive approach was used by conducting the qualitative, in-depth interview with the artists to explore the influences of the arts on pluralism, social cohesion, and relationships among them in order to better understand their thoughts and behaviors and to suggest ways to promote peacebuilding in Myanmar contexts. The study interviewed artists from seven forms of art who are based in Myanmar and presented their unique art in these challenging times. To validate the analysis, this study utilizes a non-probability purposive sampling technique. A non-quota approach was used to interview 22 participants and interviews were transcribed using template analysis and the coding method.

Our findings shed light on key themes concerning the connections between pluralism, social cohesion, and the arts in the context of promoting peacebuilding in Myanmar. The findings include identifying the artists' current set of roles and values in their arts and cultures, assessing their artworks' contribution to enforcing pluralism and social cohesion, and investigating how arts and cultures can be instrumentalized for the promotion of pluralism and social cohesion at the individual, community, and institutional levels. Individual-level of changes contains motivations, beliefs, norms, and behavioral performances; community-level changes consist of intergroup bindings, tolerance, interdependency among different groups, intergroup relationships, group behavior, and solidarity; and the institutional-level of changes involve laws, policies, structures, and decision makings.

The findings showed that team-based artworks have many benefits for pluralism and social cohesion, although current situations are not favorable. The results also point out that giving chances to exchange ideas, thoughts, and perspectives; educating and empowering youths; and allowing freedom to think, create, and perform arts have significant advantages to bringing out peacebuilding through the arts. We hope that this research conveys how the role of arts and culture in promoting pluralism and social cohesion can be promoted and how to instrumentalize peacebuilding in more effective ways.

Keywords – Peacebuilding, Pluralism, Social Cohesion, Arts, Myanmar

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Introduction

Throughout history and currently, conflicts and natural catastrophes have had a profound influence on the people of Myanmar. Myanmar has experienced one of the longest periods of internal conflicts and militarization since its independence in 1948, and the situation further worsened under the 1962 military coup (Kramer, 2015) and the 2021 coup d'état (Rocha et al., 2021). Myanmar residents found the brutality against civilians and the escalating armed conflict that followed the February 2021 proceedings to be incredible developments (Rocha et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2023), and as a result, the freedom of free expression is being restricted on numerous levels. According to the result of the Global Peace Index (GPI) in 2022, Myanmar is now ranked 139 out of 163. The GPI covered 99.7% of the world's population and measured peacefulness in societies based on three domains: the level of societal safety and security, the extent of ongoing domestic and international conflict, and the degree of militarization (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023). It also proved that Myanmar has high-risk of peace and security measures in the global context.

Not only this, but Myanmar is reaching and becoming one of the poorest countries in the region with \$1,209.9 GDP per capita in 2021 due to significant volatility and uncertainty economic downturns, electricity outages, trade and foreign restrictions, shortage of some key inputs, and frequent changes in rules and regulations in the country (World Bank, 2021; 2023). Due to the political unrest, many of the citizens including artists are becoming refugees and asylum-seekers, or internally displaced persons because of their political stands and just because of their personal security risks. Referring to the UNHCR (2023), Myanmar has now 1.27 million refugees and asylum-seekers, 1.35 million internally displaced persons, and 6 hundred thousand stateless people. Together, people in the countries faced many limitations and restrictions owing to the impact of political turmoil. These events undoubtedly caused physical damage, lost revenue, and adverse effects on many people's mental health, all of which have a long-term detrimental effect on the nation's economic and peacebuilding efforts (World Bank, 2021; 2023). Nevertheless, the crisis gave rise to a number of artistic mediums, including short tales, poetry, music, films, paintings, cartoons, and drawings, as a means of demonstrating resiliency and solidarity.

Unsurprisingly, there is some evidence that accepting and recognizing the diversity of the arts can promote pluralism (Bartel & Kwong, 2021; Uidhir & Magnus, 2011); that the arts play important roles in social cohesion in communities (Baumann et al., 2021; Lee 2013; Otte 2019); that pluralism can encourage social cohesion (Kamble & Bouchon, 2016; Jenson, 2019; Jansen et al., 2006; Levine & McCourt, 2018); and that pluralism and social cohesion can also lead to a peaceful society (Söderström & Olivius, 2022; Takedan, 2021). However, in a nation like Myanmar, where complicated concerns and problems like mass executions, arbitrary detentions, torture, sexual assault, severe limits on free speech and assembly, and other constraints against humanity exist (Hassan, 2023), the pluralism and social cohesions through the arts have not been brought up. Therefore, this paper would like to explore the roles of the arts in promoting pluralism and social cohesion, as well as how to promote peacebuilding through various types of arts in Myanmar.

Literature Review

Pluralism Aspects

Numerous definitions of pluralism exist now and have been used in the past (Levine & McCourt, 2018). The straightforward definition of pluralism, according to Jenson (2019), is an ethical commitment to recognize and appreciate differences rather than underplaying or eradicating them in representations and actions. Additionally, he added that pluralism is defined as an ethic of respect that cherishes human differences, which implies that in order for it to be effective, it must overcome conflict and division in order to guarantee inclusion and

participation (Jenson, 2019). No one knowledge system, discipline, theory, or technique may claim exclusive access to the truth, which is what epistemological pluralism means (Levine & McCourt, 2018). Since each perspective of pluralism has its own shortcomings, it is crucial to employ a variety of theoretical and methodological views in the study of peace (Söderström & Olivius, 2022).

Social Cohesion

Émile Durkheim, a sociologist, first used the phrase social cohesiveness (1897) to explain how members of a society are interdependent on one another and share resources. Contemporary scientific discourse describes social cohesiveness as an indication of connectedness in society that centers around degrees of connection and integration, civic participation, and identity, despite the fact that a precise conceptualization is still missing (Chen et al., 2006; Schiefe, & Van der Noll, 2017; Silveira et al.; 2022). Trust, identity or a sense of belongingness, and cooperation or willingness to cooperate and help are some of the recurring themes in the literature on social cohesiveness (Chen et al., 2006). According to Silveira et al. (2022), social cohesiveness is comprised of trust, belonging, social contact, and social involvement. Other similar dimensions of social cohesion proposed are social mobility, social capital, social inclusion (OECD, 2011), belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, and legitimacy (Jenson, 1998).

Approaches to Peace

According to Galtung (1964), positive peace is the absence of structural violence whereas negative peace is the absence of human violence and conflict. These have been the two primary types of peace used in the field for years since Galtung articulated the distinction between negative and positive peace in peace and conflict studies. However, over the past few years, there has been growing discussion and recognition of the need for a more complex conceptualization of peace that can encompass the wide range of real-life scenarios that exist between the ideal-typical negative and positive peace categories (Davenport et al. 2018; Jarstad et al. 2019; Wallenstein 2015). Although the idea of peace is adaptable, linked to many noble objectives, and rooted in ideals of a just society, its precise meaning or the nature of its elements is hardly understood analytically. In order to examine the complex nature of peace, Jarstad et al. (2019) have presented a paradigm that views peace in three distinct ways: as a reality or condition in a specific location; as a web of interactions; and as ideas or discourses about what peace is or should be.

Peace and Pluralism and Social Cohesion

According to earlier research, social cohesiveness and pluralism can promote peace and lessen violence (Jenson, 2019). There are relationships among arts and social cultures, pluralism, and social cohesion. For instance, the arts play important roles in social cohesion in communities (Baumann et al., 2021; Lee 2013; Otte 2019); accepting and recognizing the diversity of the arts can promote pluralism (Bartel & Kwong, 2021; Uidhir & Magnus, 2011); and pluralism can encourage social cohesion (Kamble & Bouchon, 2016; Jansen, 2019; Jansen et al., 2006; Levine & McCourt, 2018). There is also research that highlights social coherence and pluralism by pointing out that they can result in a peaceful society (Söderström & Olivius, 2022; Takedan, 2021). As such, this paper seeks to present different perspectives on peace via the arts and cultures in order to advance conceptual understandings of peace, pluralism, and social cohesion in light of the complicated, shifted character of peace. We contend that, despite the adverse conditions, plurality and social cohesiveness may be encouraged through the arts.

Methods

This study used an inductive approach by conducting a qualitative, in-depth interview with the artists to explore the influences of the arts on pluralism, social cohesion, and relationships among them in order to better understand their thoughts and behaviors and to suggest ways to promote peacebuilding in Myanmar contexts. The study interviewed artists from four forms of art who are based in Myanmar and presented their unique art in these challenging times. A pluralism questionnaire was developed based on the ethical commitment to both respect and value definition by Jenson (2019); the social cohesion questionnaire adopted the dimension of trust, belonging, and cooperation by Chen et al. (2006); and a peace framework was used based on the concepts of Jarstad et al. (2019)'s situational peace, relational peace, and idealized peace. A detailed qualitative protocol is attached in the appendix. To validate the analysis, this study utilizes a non-probability purposive sampling technique. A non-quota approach was used to interview 22 participants, and interviews were transcribed using template analysis and the coding method.

Template Analysis

In order to support peacebuilding in Myanmar, this template study highlights essential topics on the connections between pluralism, social cohesion, and the arts. The semi-structured interview's demographic information is shown in Table 1. Direct quotes, each template, and the summary of the template analysis are offered in subsequent parts. The analysis includes identifying the roles and values that the artists currently hold in their arts and cultures, evaluating how much their artworks contribute to upholding pluralism and social cohesion, and examining how arts and cultures can be used to advance these goals at the individual, communal, and institutional levels. Motivations, beliefs, norms, and behavioral performances are found at the individual level of change. Intergroup ties, tolerance, dependence on other groups, group behavior, and solidarity are found at the community level of change. Laws, policies, structures, and decision-making are found at the institutional level of change.

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Semi-Structured Interview

No.	Gender	Type of Artist	Product of Art	Current Contributions	Years of Experience
1.	Male	Digital Artist	Digital Art	Design (Brand Logos, Packaging, Edutainment Books and Character Concept Art)	11 years
2.	Male	Fine Artist	Paintings/ Fine Arts	Watercolor Mini Paintings	25 years
3.	Female	Script Writer & Author	Novel/ Script Writing	Buddha Teaching Books	50 years
4.	Male	Singer/ Composer	Music	Wedding Presenter (MC)	8 years
5.	Male	Sculpture and Painting	3D Paintings (Combination of sculpture and painting)	3D paintings of Sculpture/ Art Exhibition	10 years
6.	Male	Singer	Songs & Music	Singing Songs at Ceremonies for Mental Healing and Community	About 30 years

				Development at IDP Camps.	
7.	Male	Guitarist	Music	Music Teacher via Online	Not Mention
8.	Male	Singer/ Composer/ Music Arrangement	Songs/ Singer/ Melody Arrangement/ Music Teacher	Singer/ Composer/ Music Arrangement/	15 years
9.	Male	Singer/ Composer	Singer	Singing Songs and Distribute on Social Media	11 years
10.	Female	Painter	Painting	Gallery Show	Not Mention
11.	Male	Player/ Guitarist	Music	Music Teacher	19 years
12.	Male	Singer/ Composer/ Music Arrangement	Songs/ Background Music for Film	Songs, Background Music for Film, Music Teacher	15 years
13.	Male	Singer/ Composer	Songs	Christian Songs	11 years
14.	Female	Painter	Painting & Installation Artworks	Gallery	8 years
15.	Female	Poem	Poem	Write Poem for Magazines	10 years
16.	Male	Video Documentarist	Documentary	Producing Documentary on Humanitarian Development	8 years
17.	Male	Composer & Guitarist	Composing Songs & Giving Guitar Training	Giving Guitar Training/ Lost job	33 years
18.	Female	Painter	Painting & Graphic Design	Graphic Design for Women's Lead Organization	Not Mention
19.	Female	Painting	Paints	Painting & Teaching Arts	6 years
20.	Female	Writing	Individual Publishing	Published Books	8 years
21.	Male	Cartoon	Cartoon/ Design	Drawing Cartoon for Newspaper and Journals for both Local and International	6 years
22.	Male	Cartoon	Cartoon/ Design/ Painting	Painting/ Graphic Design	16 years

Assessing Current Situation

Respondents indicated up to this point, getting a job offer had been challenging due to the present instability of politics. Additionally, the country's laws and regulations make it challenging to perform the arts, which discourages the creation of new works of art and raises security threats for individuals. Especially social impact targeted arts were able to perform more limited compared to entertainment arts. Despite the severe restrictions and limitations, some people are still doing what they can through covert methods or just for their own entertainment. On the other side, other respondents indicated that they needed to shift jobs in order to provide for their families during this challenging period. Another disadvantage would be economic downturns, which would result in fewer international consumers and higher prices for buying art supplies owing to rising inflation rates. There were very limited spaces for artists to perform their art, and instrumentalize their artworks for social issues. Additionally, artists have lesser platforms for cooperation, engagement for artworks, and limited space for capacity building. Civil society organizations were also decreasing in hiring artists and instrumentalized arts for their programs. Finally, many artists were almost paralyzed in the current context, not being able to identify what to do, what they should and could be doing to respond to the social needs of the country. The followings are some of the possibilities and difficulties that the artists in Myanmar have currently addressed as outlined in Template 1 and the responses that follow:

“I am doing digital art: storybooks, character concepts, packaging, and logo designs. Even covid the pandemic, I could create artwork with health guidelines but later it was difficult, especially in 2021. Later 2022, I got jobs again for TV commercials”.
(Interviewee 1, Age 36, Digital Artist)

“I started learning art in 1996. Understanding Cultures and Arts (a-nu pyin- nyar) is also confusing in Myanmar. Art was created by the trends and the interests of others. Currently, artists are not able to do as they wish under limitations and guidelines. Youths understand more about arts but the audiences did not understand the art and conservatives. Their interests are based on the popularities of famous artists, not on the real creation of artwork. Doodle arts and graffiti arts need to be promoted for youths’ creating artworks. Art is also limited by religious norms like nude art should not be allowed.”
(Interviewee 2, Age 44, Fine Artist)

“Since I was young, I did not like injustice in society. All religions have common things that are good to practice in reality but it depends on an individual's concern. Currently, I am teaching Buddha sermons to youths. I have to plan, design a curriculum and publish books and handouts. My main distribution is Abhidhamma especially 10 daily practices for good purposes named ပုညတိရိယာ ဘဝ ပါး - Daily Practical Moral values of Abhidhamma.”
(Interviewee 3, Age 78, Writer)

“Current environment and situation for creating songs and music are not supportive and challenging. My emotions are also not really in a good mood for creating songs. The music market and promotion through collaborative work are also not going well. Currently, I am doing wedding MC- for my family's basic needs and daily needs. As I am doing performances through voice such as radio announcer, MC, and background speaker like a freelancer. But each market has changed and it's really hard to handle it as it also includes personal safety issues.”
(Interviewee 4, Age 32, Singer & Composer)

“Raw materials for creating Artwork are expensive because of inflation rates in Myanmar and Art works' prices are not profitable as there is no purchasing from foreign art market for 3 years. From Art Show, the local art market gathers artwork at the local price as investing in art for business. My artworks are my own creations and a combination of Sculpture and painting. I just create my artwork as I wish. My creations involve anger with hot color, pain with dark color, calm with cool color; those are based on my emotions.” (Interviewee 5, Age 49, 3D Artist)

“In 2019, I entertained with music on counseling and motivation at Kachin IDP with Karen youths from HlaingBwe. We, singer Saw Phoe Khwar and I participated in creating music for peace. As I am currently at the Camp, I cannot do any music but I sang songs at the 2021 Christmas event with youths from camps.” (Interviewee 6, Age 59, Singer)

Template 1. Assessing Current Situation: Artists’ Artistic Responses

1. Current situation of artists

1.1.Opportunities (5 occurrences)

- 1.1.1. More time to create art for leisure (3 occurrences)
- 1.1.2. New career opportunity under the shifting condition (1 occurrence)
- 1.1.3. Have seasonal job opportunity (1 occurrence)

1.2.Challenges (10 occurrences)

- 1.2.1. Increased prices of art materials (4 occurrences)
- 1.2.2. Loss of foreign customers due to the political situation (1 occurrence)
- 1.2.3. Lower art-related resources (1 occurrence)
- 1.2.4. Personal security risk (1 occurrence)

Artist’s Perspectives on Pluralism and Social Cohesion

Artists’ responses indicate that they have very limited experience of learning what pluralism and social cohesion means. However, the values and perspectives they witnessed as of them are supportive and not contrary to pluralism development agenda, although artists could not respond to pluralism and social cohesion development agenda in a theoretical, conceptual and strategic way. According to the respondents, pluralism and social cohesiveness are about recognizing the needs of others and struggle, as well as implementing democratized principles. They also think that empathy and respect for one another, which are critical components of pluralism and social cohesiveness, may be fostered and motivated by the arts. However, there are three main difficulties that artists are currently facing: a lack of knowledge and understanding of the principles and dogmas of different faiths and cultures, human rights, and civic education; a lack of artistic freedom as a result of political unrest; and a lack of opportunities for learning from one another in the current political climate. Even though there are certain points, we all require a setting that enables us to advance diversity and social cohesiveness, learn from history, respect individuality, consider other cultures and faiths, and apply democratic ideals that may be presented and put into effect under adverse conditions. The following template analysis of the artist's views on pluralism and social cohesiveness is offered along with relevant direct quotes:

“When I was at school, there were friends of different races like Pa-O, Shan, Kachin, Mon, Rakhine, and Muslim friends. I think it is better to make friends with them as I know better about their drawings from different perspectives, experiences, and cultures.

I am from Ayeyarwaddy and share and exchange our living styles and life difficulties with them.” (Interviewee 1, Age 36, Digital Artist)

“In Myanmar, people need to understand diverse cultures and different religions and it is also important not to mix those things in art. Conservative thoughts, ideas, and perspectives need to be abolished like “tha-kin-myoe-hae-do-Bamar” သာဓကိယိးလော့ နိဗ္ဗာန. Today youths have global concepts and an understanding of diversity. The art industry needs youth powers and participation as their thoughts are free and have no boundaries. We should give spaces and promote youths’ participation”. (Interviewee 2, Age 44, Fine Artist)

“In my opinion and from my experiences, there were gaps in understanding Concepts and Dogma on diverse cultures and religions in our society. People are sensitives. A common understanding is needed and equality is also important in this matter. Discriminated communication should not be practiced through patriotism (loving their own race, place, or region) among diverse groups. The common understanding, mutual respect, and empathy are needed and we should have the willingness to treat each other equally.” (Interviewee 3, Age 78, Writer)

“I think religious diversity and religious riots happened very often in Myanmar because of brainwashing by ancestors and the dark era without media transparency. But, later, by reading books and media transparency, youths can overcome the brainwashed ideas on religious diversity and understand human nature like there are good and bad people in different diversities. Art is free and is needed not to be limited by political concern.” (Interviewee 4, Age 32, Singer & Composer)

“Actually, art creation was transparent and free before the coup. I think it was changes in today's youths' ideology and mindsets in religions and diversity, like no religious discrimination and skin colors in youth networks and mindsets. Youths have power and if youths have opportunities and supportive situations for their free creations, the country will develop more. There are limits and boundaries for youth participation and equal opportunities in the current situation of Myanmar.” (Interviewee 5, Age 49, 3D Artist)

“About diversity, it is not a problem if we accept democratic norms. If we respect and obey democratic cultures and values, there will not be discrimination on skin color, gender, poor and rich. After 1962, democratic norms and values vanished and because there was no chance to teach citizenship knowledge like civic education, different religions, and perspectives were not accepted and became enemies. Religion was used as a tool for political purposes.” (Interviewee 6, Age 59, Singer)

Template 2. Artist’s Perspectives on Pluralism and Social Cohesion

1. Diversity, plurality, and social cohesion on individual and collective rights of different groups of people including minorities.

1.1.Perspectives on the concept

- 1.1.1. It’s about individual understanding and practicing the democratized values (1occurrences)
- 1.1.2. It’s about learning from each other’s lifestyles and difficulties (1 occurrence)
- 1.1.3. Art can raise and motivate empathy and mutual respect (1 occurrence)

1.2.Challenges to applying the concept

- 1.2.1. Poor understanding and knowledge of the concepts and dogmas of diverse cultures and religions, human rights, and civic education (3 occurrences)
- 1.2.2. Lack of freedom in art creation due to political unrest (3 occurrences)
- 1.2.3. No opportunities to learn from each other in this current political situation (3 occurrences)

1.3. Threats to pluralism and social cohesion

- 1.3.1. Discrimination between religions and ethnic diversities, untrust each other (2 occurrences)
- 1.3.2. Patriotism, Lack of common understandings, and wide knowledge of diversities (1 occurrence)
- 1.3.3. Conservative thoughts and brainwashed ideas on religions and diversities (1 occurrence)
- 1.3.4. Personal safety in creating and promoting arts (1 occurrence)
- 1.3.5. Political unrest (1 occurrence)

1.4. Ways to promote pluralism and social cohesion

- 1.4.1. Need equal space and equal opportunities for diverse groups (2 occurrences)
- 1.4.2. Individual mutual understanding, respecting diverse cultures and religions, and practicing democratic values (2 occurrences)
- 1.4.3. Require the situation that allows us to do it (1 occurrence)
- 1.4.4. Learn from history, promote social cohesion among diversities, creating are relating to it (1 occurrence)

Contributions of Arts and Cultures on Pluralism and Social Cohesion

Artists' responses indicate that artists are not understanding how arts are one of the fundamental resources for promoting pluralism and social cohesion. Some respondents' responses can be interpreted as they are undermining their arts' role in promoting pluralism and social cohesion. Some responses indicated that some artists have low capacity to measure how their arts are contributing to pluralism and social cohesion. These do not mean that artists are not supporting pluralism and social cohesion, rather they are not able to map and measure the impact of their performance because they have limited capacity in strategic intervention by arts in social affairs. The responses indicate that artists were performing their artwork with the purpose to support social wellbeing which in fact promoted pluralism and social cohesion. Based on the respondents, current trust has been abolished because of inadequate individual moral standards and manners, as well as a lack of knowledge and restrictions on the creation of art. Due to a lack of mutual respect and understanding, political turbulence that poses a risk to one's personal safety, and a lack of moral duty, these findings undermine a sense of belonging. This leads to a number of cases of lack of collaboration in various matters. However, there is a piece of good news to respond to pluralism and social cohesion through artistic creation. Under this political unrest, developing new inclusive arts, performing inclusive arts, teaching inclusive arts, and producing team-based artworks can be done during this time. The template analysis and direct quotes of the contributions of arts and cultures to pluralism and social cohesion can be seen in the following:

“I think art has freedom based on our feelings and ideas. There is no boundary in creating art among diversities.” **Trust:** *“I do not think trust relies on arts but it depends*

on an individual's behaviors and actions.” **Belonging:** “In this current situation, art has limitations on themes, places allowed, frames, and rules such as policies, and guidelines. I made T-shirt designs, illustrations, and logos with the diversity themes for different ethnicities.” **Cooperation:** “I have friends from different backgrounds. But we argued about creating designs and got to a common agreement for making designs from different perspectives.” (Interviewee 1, Age 36, Digital Artist)

“Myanmar has different contexts in pluralism and diversities through conflicts. The concept of Nationalism needs to be understood well in Myanmar. Among the Burmese, there are conflicts. Non-Burman Ethnic diversities in Myanmar should get opportunities and leadership roles. Youth participation should be motivated. We also should give space to differently-abled. I have experience grading arts of autism. It was professional ideas and creation of the artwork and we did not know that was autism’s artwork.” **Trust:** “Trust is based on Understanding each other. Individual Stances should be respected and accepted by each other. We need to practice getting a common agreement among different groups. Cultivate generation to generation. It is not possible to have harmonized living through diversity all the time.” **Belonging:** “If we understand each other and trust each other, we can relate and communicate well without doubts.” **Cooperation:** “If we understand each other and trust each other, we can cooperate and work together.” (Interviewee 2, Age 44, Fine Artist)

“In our society, we need to promote equal treatment of each other. People should treat others the way they like to be treated. The common understanding, mutual respect, and empathy need to be raised in our society.” **Trust:** “I think Trust can be built by individual dignity, moral values, and behaviors even in a team building. Advantages takers are not truthful to others, even team leaders in the workplace. We need to practice acceptable morals and behavioral values of religious core values in our society. Individuals and groups should practice mind purification and core values of religions.” **Belonging:** “I think it is also related to building trust in an individual's performance and dignity. If a person is trustful and easy to communicate with one by one, group to group. We can learn moral ethical values from books and religions.” **Cooperation:** “From my experiences, youths are able to communicate well and have broad networking in doing practical work. Youths have abilities to build team spirit and unite to perform their responsibilities. But supporting plans and distributions of equitable benefits based on their efforts are required.” (Interviewee 3, Age 78, Writer)

“For a singer, the audiences or fans are really important. To get trust and respect from the audiences took time to build but can easily damage in a few minutes.” **Trust:** “As we have limitations in creating and launching our art pieces to audiences, it is impossible to receive trust and respect from the fans as some truths are hidden by an artist because of limitations. If audiences do not trust and think my artwork is not honest then they will not trust the artist because of his/her artwork. So, for me, I need freedom in the creation of music to build trust not only in my artwork but also in me.” **Belonging:** “During the crises in our country, it is not possible to create music broadly and collaborate with

professional artists because of safety concerns. Different stances of various artists on this current situation in Myanmar also impacted creation of art freely and understanding among diversity. I am also not happy when I hear from my audiences who are currently in trouble for daily survival.” **Cooperation:** “It was not easy to collaborate with one another freely in the music industry as it has different perspectives and stances could not support to trust and respect each other. Even though I prefer to cooperate with famous professional singers, the situations and circumstances are not really supportive.” (Interviewee 4, Age 32, Singer & Composer)

“I just create my artwork with my own feelings and emotions. There wasn't any intention to persuade the audience. The audience has different perspectives and can feel my artwork in their different dimensions. I just accept the way they see and feel in my artworks.” **Trust:** “I am satisfied if the audience feels something based on their understanding of art.” **Belonging:** “I accept and respect whatever they feel and see in my artworks either in a good mood or bad mood.” **Cooperation:** “As I do not have any intentions and incentives to the audiences, they may feel free and can conclude their own perspective on it. I like it as it shows that art has no limits.” (Interviewee 5, Age 49, 3D Artist)

“I created songs and music with a music band of diverse backgrounds such as Christian musical instrument players, Buddhist composers, and Muslim players. The ones who love music never hurt the other person.” **Trust:** “It starts from thoughts, if the thoughts change, then the behaviors will change and become aggressive. It depends on the individual's empathy and religion policy like 969.” **Belonging:** “If we sing a song with common feelings like singing, We’re the World, we can understand the others’ feelings.” **Cooperation:** “Individual Ego such as I do the right thing! I am right! can destroy cooperation. As you know, I am ready to apologize for my mistakes even to the younger ones on our team. I just would like to share my good experiences with the youths like you to become a smart generation or society for the new generation.” (Interviewee 6, Age 59, Singer)

Template 3. Contributions of Arts and Cultures on Pluralism and Social Cohesion

1. What are challenging ideologies, behaviors, movements, policies, and structures harming trust, belonging, and cooperation against pluralism and social cohesion? How to overcome them?

1.1.Challenges on Trust

- 1.1.1. Poor individual moral values and manners (3 occurrences)
- 1.1.2. Poor understanding and limiting to create art (2 occurrences)

1.2.Challenges on Belonging

- 1.2.1. Lack of mutual respect and understanding (3 occurrences)
- 1.2.2. Political unrest (2 occurrences)
- 1.2.3. An untrustful society with poor moral obligation (1 occurrence)
- 1.2.4. Personal security risk (1 occurrence)

1.3.Challenges on Cooperation

- 1.3.1. Political unrest (2 occurrences)
- 1.3.2. Lack of team-based artwork creations (1 occurrence)
- 1.3.3. Poor acceptance and adaptability (1 occurrence)

1.3.4. Poor communication skills (1 occurrence)

1.3.5. Individual ego (1 occurrence)

1.4. Ways to Respond through Artwork

1.4.1. By creating new inclusive arts under low profile (9 occurrences)

1.4.2. By performing current inclusive arts (2 occurrences)

1.4.3. By teaching inclusive arts (2 occurrences)

1.4.4. By creating team-based artworks (1 occurrence)

1.4.5. By practicing religious beliefs (1 occurrence)

1.4.6. By doing nothing for personal safety (1 occurrence)

Approaches to Peace

Firstly, the ability to empathize, the desire to live in peace with different people, and the flexibility to produce and perform art in a wide range of subjects, locations, and circumstances are some of the ways that artworks may promote social cohesiveness and situational peace. Secondly, through executing team-based artworks and allowing artists to express themselves freely, the function of artworks may also help to foster harmony in relational peace. Thirdly, the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and perspectives on arts and cultures among different cultures can enhance the idealization of peace. Additionally, educating and empowering young people about international techniques, ideas, perspectives, and knowledge can also help to promote peace. The relevant template and answers are listed below:

“Art named A-nu-pya-nya has a meaning of peace and combination. It has a sense of working together as much as we can, like drawing together and helping together. Art censor board culture was in the art industry before 2015. There are limitations on art themes in which policies affecting arts are not allowed and also have limitations on youth participation. Between 2016 to 2019 was transparency on art themes and youths’ participation and art networking. But after the coup, the old methods are trying to apply again.” “Art can connect with each other, especially youths networking and understanding more about working together senses or concepts. Individual talents could combine for better artwork as teamwork. Group talents and teamwork could get group success.” “I worked with an NGO for making pamphlets, fliers, and storybooks of ethnicities through workshops by gathering ideas from different ethnicities. I had to discuss and exchange ideas on creating posters with them in which they prefer to show their cultures through the arts. We made posters and books for environment awareness, traditional costumes, and parenting knowledge for ethnicities.” (Interviewee 1, Age 36, Digital Artist)

“We need a peaceful mind to create art based on peace. Now, we do not have a supportive environment and conditions to create artwork peacefully. We need empathy for others and understanding of the current situation of Myanmar” “Realism of Art (started in the 17th century) describes the happening situation in society based on social, economic, and political points of view. We have difficulties and are not able to reveal realism art during this crisis. There were limitations in creating and communicating in the art industry. I think creating art should not deal with religious norms.” need to build human

society through understanding and building trust in each other in a positive way. There are also people who do not have a sense of human nature and behave like wild animals. Real artists have peaceful living and simple thinking like Artist-Paw Oo Thet.” **(Interviewee 2, Age 44, Fine Artist)**

“People need to understand the real meaning of PEACE, soft power for willingness to have physical and mental mindfulness through art is required. All artists have the responsibility to raise people's empathy and willingness for peaceful living among diversity. The level of understanding and feelings of art can change people's thoughts and perspectives on peaceful living.” “I think the creation of art must give a meaningful message more than entertainment only. The art committee has responsibilities to raise collective artwork from individual professional work. But the art committee in the Myanmar art industry needs to put their efforts into it.” “From my own experiences, youth participation in art is required. The art committee should hold a special event for dialogues and talks among diverse groups for exchanging thoughts, ideas, and perspectives rather than doing so for show. The artists in Myanmar need spaces and guarantees for freedom of creating arts.” **(Interviewee 3, Age 78, Writer)**

“In my opinion, creating a quality song needs collaboration of music bands like Chin Youths' creation of "We Are the World". Artists outside of Myanmar can do well but inside Myanmar, there is a risk of gathering the respective actors of music arrangement like singers, guitarists, and other musical instrument players even if we can do it, we are not in a supportive environment, and safety condition. We have to take a risk, perhaps we can be arrested like that. Limitations inside Myanmar.” “It depends on the artist's free, real, and transparent creations to relate artists and audiences or artists to artists. To build Public trust, artists need to create their artworks based on reality. But artists' realistic creations also depend on the country's situation. We did not have a safe environment and conditions to express art freely.” “For me, I would like to create a masterpiece of art works by collaborating with professional music creators like We Are The World. But there are limitations of gathering participants and expenses on music arrangement, safety environment, and situation.” **(Interviewee 4, Age 32, Singer & Composer)**

“The situational supportive environments are quite important. Today Myanmar is not in safe and supportive situations and conditions for peacebuilding.” “Today Myanmar needs youth participation. There are no opportunities for youths and also oppression on youth powers and participation.” “Empowering Youth networking and participation will make peacebuilding as they have global insights, perspectives and knowledge unlike conservative adult leaders.” **(Interviewee 5, Age 49, 3D Artist)**

“We, Ko Saw Phoe Khwar and other friends from different religions Muslim, Hindu, etc. celebrate the New Year interfaith music show with Christian dhamma songs at Asia A Lin Yaung worship center in Pyin Oo Lwin annually from 2015 to the coup of 2021. There were awarding prizes for the ones who participated and were outstanding in peace

initiatives from CBOs and CSOs. Ko Saw Phoe Khwar, Thet Shwe Win, and others were awarded. But today Myanmar in domestic situations does not support doing so.” “Music can relate one to another in many different ways but not in this political situation in Myanmar. We need stability, rules of law.” “Among groups, If we have the benevolent real willingness to peace, we can build peace even by repeating poems. Not only with music but also with other artworks like poems, novels, and pictures can promote peace but music can promote unity as it can raise the common emotions and motivate us to participate easily.” (Interviewee 6, Age 59, Singer)

Template 4. Approaches to Peace

1. Approaches to Peace

1.1. Do you think the role of artworks, facilitating social cohesion, contributes to Situational Peace? If so, in which ways?

- 1.1.1. Arts can promote people’s empathy and willingness for peaceful living among different diversities, but the situation is not favor (4 occurrences)
- 1.1.2. Freedom to create and perform art in different themes, places, and contexts is required and significant in peacebuilding (1 occurrence)
- 1.1.3. Youth artists have potential and can initiate peacebuilding (1 occurrence)

1.2. Do you think the role of artworks, facilitating social cohesion, contributes to Relational Peace? If so, in which ways?

- 1.2.1. Team-based artworks can promote relational peace (3 occurrences)
- 1.2.2. Need to allow artists to express themselves freely (3 occurrences)

1.3. Do you think the role of artworks, facilitating social cohesion, can enhance Idealization Peace? If so, in which ways?

- 1.3.1. By exchanging ideas, thoughts, and perspectives on arts and cultures among diversities (2 occurrences)
- 1.3.2. By educating and empowering youth on global techniques, ideas, perspectives, and knowledge can build peace (2 occurrences)
- 1.3.3. By allowing free to think, create, and perform arts have many benefits on peacebuilding (2 occurrences)

Findings

Respondents indicated that getting a job offer has been challenging due to the present instability of politics and the country's laws and regulations. Additionally, the country's laws and regulations make it difficult to perform the arts, which discourages the creation of new works of art and raises security threats. Despite the restrictions, some people are still doing what they can through covert methods or just for their own entertainment. Additionally, economic downturns could result in fewer international consumers and higher prices for buying art supplies. According to the respondents, pluralism and social cohesiveness are about recognizing the needs of others and struggle, as well as implementing democratized principles. However, there are three main difficulties that artists are currently facing: a lack of knowledge and understanding of the principles and dogmas of different faiths and cultures, human rights, and civic education; a lack of artistic freedom as a result of political unrest; and a lack of opportunities for learning from one another in the current political climate. The most important details in this text are that current trust has been abolished due to inadequate individual moral standards and manners, as well as a lack of knowledge and restrictions on the creation of art.

Additionally, there is a lack of mutual respect and understanding, political turbulence that poses a risk to one's personal safety, and a lack of moral duty. However, there is good news to respond to pluralism and social cohesion through artistic creation. Artwork can promote social cohesiveness and situational peace, foster harmony in relational peace, and enhance the idealization of peace. Additionally, educating and empowering young people about international techniques, ideas, perspectives, and knowledge can also help to promote peace.

Limitation

There are certain drawbacks in this study that need to be noted, despite the fact that the findings are intriguing and current. First, this research focuses on the capacity of artists in terms of awareness, capacity, and their artworks' impact on pluralism and social cohesion. This research does not cover how media, civil society organizations, and social and political agencies are instrumentalizing arts and cultures in promoting pluralism and social cohesion. Therefore, these research findings will only highlight artists-related information and insights. Second, non-probability purposive sampling employing semi-structured interviews is utilized to get the information; however, other alternative methods may be employed in future studies to evaluate a more complete picture of the perspectives and psychology of artists. Third, it should be noted that our sample size, which included 22 responders, is obviously small to accurately represent all artists in Myanmar. Since the majority of artists are already abroad, it was challenging to locate ones who would actively engage in the country's present political climate. However, our research helps to better understand how social cohesiveness and pluralism relate to promoting peace via arts and cultures in contemporary Myanmar. Fourth, while we focus primarily on the circumstances and perspectives of Myanmar artists, future research should broaden the scope of the study to include additional contexts in order to give a more comprehensive knowledge of plurality, social cohesiveness, and the arts. Fifth, Undoubtedly, further study is required to shed light on this interesting and complicated phenomenon.

Conclusion

As a conclusive short recommendation, since it was observed that artists' art performances are randomly happening to support pluralism and social cohesion, it would be highlighted that there are three needs identified for the development of arts and cultures for promoting pluralism and social cohesion. First, current civil societies in Myanmar should respond to the need for capacity building of artists, not just for art skills, which they are qualified in, but in peacebuilding skills, human rights awareness, social mobilization strategies, social cohesion tactics, and the country's political and social contexts and landscape. Second, arts-related civil society organizations should be promoted and initiated to facilitate the development of a more strategic performance of artists aiming to promote pluralism and social cohesion by mobilizing societies, raising contextual issues, and transforming public opinions, trust, and collaborations among diverse communities in Myanmar. For example, creating artists' platforms where they can work together for social change. Finally, current civil societies should be strengthened in their program development for art-based programming so that the arts will be more instrumentalized in social mobilization and different kinds of advocacy from policy changes and grassroots social changes, with clear targets, activities, processes, outputs, and visions for promoting pluralism and social cohesion.

In summary, artists' roles and arts-based programs should be initiated and developed among civil society social programs addressing the promotion of pluralism and social cohesion. The results demonstrated that team-based artworks offer several advantages for pluralism and social cohesion, despite unfavorable current settings. The findings also show that there are major benefits to promoting peacebuilding via the arts from providing opportunities for the

sharing of ideas, views, and perspectives; to educating and empowering young; and enabling freedom to think, produce, and perform the arts. We hope that our research demonstrates how the importance of the arts and culture in fostering social cohesion and pluralism may be fostered, as well as how to more effectively instrumentalize peacebuilding.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Questionnaire Protocol

As a Myanmar artist, you are kindly invited to provide responses based on your own opinions and direct experiences. We guarantee that all interview responses will be used solely for this study and will be kept strictly confidential. Please keep in mind that the interview will last about an hour. This interview intends to audiotape and/or take notes during the interview session in order to preserve all relevant data for future analysis. We would like to express heartfelt gratitude for your thoughtful contribution to this interview session.

Demographic Data

1. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Rather not to say
2. Age
 - a. < 20 years
 - b. 20 – 25 years
 - c. 26 – 30 years
 - d. 31 – 35 years
 - e. 36 – 40 years
 - f. 41 – 45 years
 - g. 46 – 50 years
 - h. 51 – 55 years
- i. 56 – 60 years
- j. > 60 years
3. Type of Artist
 - a. Specify_____
4. Products of Artist
 - a. Specify_____
5. Years of Experiences
 - a. Specify_____
6. Current Product [from 2021]
 - a. Specify_____

A. Assessing Current Situation: Artists' Artistic Responses

1. Have you experienced any challenges or opportunities due to this current situation as a Myanmar artist?

Prompts:

1.1.**Challenges:** Are there any challenges regarding this current situation, regarding *the role of artists and artworks for pluralism and social cohesion*?

- **If Yes:** What are they? Please explain.
- **If No:** Why not? Please explain.

1.2.**Opportunities:** Are there any opportunities regarding this current situation?

- **If Yes:** What are they? Please explain.
- **If No:** Why not? Please explain.

2. Are you able to produce and publish your art during this time?

Prompts:

2.1.If Yes: What are they? How did you produce? What are your concerns/purpose?

2.2.If No: Why? What are your concerns/purpose?

Artist's Perspectives on Pluralism and Social Cohesion

3. What are your perspectives on diversity, plurality, and social cohesion in Myanmar?

Prompts:

- 3.1. What are the major diversity lines, fragmented aspects, and disconnected relationships in Myanmar?
- 3.2. Your opinion on the freedom of association of different civilian groups: religious, political parties, ethnic organizations, tribal organizations, CSOs, CBOs, etc. of different groups of people?
- 3.3. Threats to pluralism and social cohesion?
- 3.4. What can be the way to build a peaceful Myanmar with different ethnic, religions, races, etc.?

4. What kind of perceptions and behaviors, individual to collective, should we develop, maintain and promote in order to promote social cohesion and pluralism?

Prompts:

- 4.1. **Trust:** *between the state and civilians, between different civilian groups*
 - 4.1.1. How can we build trust?
 - 4.1.2. What is the status of trust currently in Myanmar?
 - 4.1.3. The history of trust in Myanmar?
 - 4.1.4. The future of trust?
- 4.2. **Belonging:** *between the state and civilians, between different civilian groups*
 - 4.2.1. How can we promote inter-belonging, sense, and institution?
 - 4.2.2. What are the current status and the history of belonging?
 - 4.2.3. What kind of future in terms of belonging?
- 4.3. **Cooperation:** *between the state and civilians, between different civilian groups*
 - 4.3.1. How can we build cooperation among different civilian groups, institutionally and functionally?
 - 4.3.2. What are the current status and the history of cooperation?
 - 4.3.3. What kind of cooperation in the future?

Arts and culture's contribution to Pluralism and Social Cohesion

5. **Trust:** *between the state and civilians, between different civilian groups at the conceptual, communal, and institutional level*

- 5.1. Through which kind of artwork, and what kind of concepts have you contributed to building trust? Targeting which kind of communities?
- 5.2. Through which kind of artwork, what kind of concepts have you contributed to building people's willingness to cooperate and participate in social and political affairs, out of diversity? Targeting which kind of communities?
- 5.3. Through which kind of artwork, what kind of concepts have you contributed to building trust in political, social, and religious institutions? Targeting which kind of communities?
- 5.4. Through which kind of artwork, what kind of concepts have you contributed to institutional policy and structural changes, and at which levels, to foster trust? targeting which kind of communities?

6. **Belonging:** *between the state and civilians, between different civilian groups at the conceptual, communal, and institutional level*

- 6.1. Through which kind of artwork, what kind of concepts have you contributed to building inter-belonging? Targeting which kind of communities?

- 6.2. Through which kind of artwork, what kind of historical, contemporary, and futuristic narrative framing have you contributed to building inter-belonging? targeting which kind of communities?
- 6.3. Through which kind of artwork, what kind of concepts have you contributed to institutional policy and structural changes, and at which levels, to foster inter-belonging? targeting which kind of communities?
7. **Cooperation:** *between the state and civilians, between different civilian groups at the conceptual, communal, and institutional level*
- 7.1. Through which kind of artwork, what kind of concepts have you contributed to develop or enforce people's political and social participation? targeting which kind of communities?
- 7.2. Through which kind of artwork, and what kind of social mobilization have you contributed to the institutional change? Targeting which kind of communities?

Approaches to Peace

6. Do you think the role of artworks, facilitating social cohesion, contributes to **Situational Peace**? If so, in which ways?
- Absence of violence and fear of violence.
 - Freedom of movement.
 - Predictability is the possibility to trust the current situation and make life choices based on it.
 - Institutions and norms for non-violent conflict management/resolution.
 - Freedom, openness. Possibility to have a voice, contribute to change in society, and criticize things that are wrong.
 - Legitimate political order, forms of governance.
7. Do you think the role of artworks, facilitating social cohesion, contributes to **Relational Peace**? If so, in which ways?
- Behavioral interaction Non-domination, Deliberation, AND Cooperation
 - Subjective attitudes toward the other Mutual recognition AND Mutual trust
 - The idea of a relationship Legitimate co-existence OR Friendship
8. Do you think the role of artworks, facilitating social cohesion, can enhance the **Idealization of Peace**? If so, in which ways?