

SYNOPSIS :

BURMA

**« PEOPLE'S DESIRE » and
« RESISTING TO CENSORSHIP AND PROPAGANDA »**

Two photo stories by
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After influential readings, we leave Burma, we decided to go to Burma to make one of our first stories. Our goal was to make photos to testify and raise awareness of violations of human rights by the Burmese military regime.

This first story hardly succeeds. Apart from exceptional periods of popular uprising, everything is organized to give the illusion of a "peaceful" scenery, the one of the "land of a thousand pagodas". the access of a number of places and regions is forbidden to foreigners: the vicinity of the house of Aung San Suu Kyi, the slums around Rangoon or "conflict areas" with ethnic minorities.

Yet, behind this staging, words come back repeatedly in the accounts we collect : "censorship", "fear", "supervision", "silence"...

If the purpose of dictatorship is to seek to remove any social space and any autonomous form of expression, dissenting margins exist yet. Over the meetings and multiplying stays in Burma, we realize that far from being passive and submitted to the oppression of the military junta, a "covert resistance" is organized every day. Certain dress codes, the use of the color red in a painting or metaphors in a short story... are all signs of protest.

Therefore, these are the cultures that the power dismantles but they are reborn, these stories of lives diverted but not destroyed and those who resist their way every day that catch our attention. We forget gradually our desire to testify in a political situation to emphasize the human aspect and staff lived under dictatorship. Yet the daily routine of life is not easy to catch, shying away as soon as we try to focus on it.

Year after year we find the same people. On the shores of Mandalay, says Kyaw Win, over the years, life in her neighborhood, a shantytown that the army seeks to destroy. After each demolition, however, people return to rebuild their homes. On a visit to another, though some stories have changed, others remain static or are repeated over and over again. Like the one of the Moustache Brothers, famous actors Mandalay arrested several times as he joked about the policy of the junta during performances. Like the one of all former political prisoners forced into exile to avoid another arrest.

The context requests to take many precautions in order not to endanger people who agree to testify. According to the law "Emergency Provision Act" used to convict political prisoners in Burma, "giving negative views of the country" to foreigners is punishable by many years' imprisonment. The interviews often take place in private, sometimes in the far end of a teashop, always on the sidelines. Whatever the place, you should not be supervised, monitored or listened to.

As our itinerary in Burma is guided by these encounters, our way of approaching photography changes. Understanding that a series of images is primarily the story of a look, a journey and a personal interpretation of situations and people, we wander in the streets of Rangoon in search of scenes, signs, glances and attitudes that express our feelings vis-à-vis these Burmese stories. In series such as People's desire, one of the most recent presented in Chapter 1, rather than trying to "capture the reality", we pull out what we feel watching.

It seemed therefore important to say "we" and this "we" becomes a way to reveal our doubts, show and assume the fragility of our point of view.

Generally speaking, the evidence presented here and those who were published in the book "Burma, dreams under surveillance" all express a deep desire for change. A number of factors, including the international context or dissension within the military institution itself intervene in the economy that will produce an evolving situation. However, this change will depend primarily on the capacity of this plural society to unify. The weapons of the "dominated" are not always weapons that are weak and ineffective. This is the meaning of what Aung San Suu Kyi and others call a "spiritual revolution" and a gathering around shared values so that Burmese society will be able to unite against this minority which holds power. We must therefore remain vigilant, in the forthcoming years, this conscience of a dynamic society. We must ask ourselves already on the "aftermath". What will happen during the transition ?