



 | **MA**  
**Cry of silence**

A film by The Maw Naing

Myanmar, South Korea, Singapore, France, Norway, Qatar  
2024 — 74min — 16:9 — 5.1 — Burmese



**BUSAN**  
**International Film Festival**

WORLD PREMIERE in Busan International Film Festival 2024  
New Currents Competition

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## LOGLINE

Mi-Thet, a young Burmese woman who works in a garment factory, faces an urgent strike organized by her colleagues, which reminds her of her deep trauma. By learning about the recent history of her country, she decides to act.



## SYNOPSIS

Yangon, Myanmar, in 2022, is in the midst of a civil war following the military coup on February 1, 2021.

Mi-Thet, a young Burmese woman, is working in a garment factory in Yangon, far from her native village. Wages have not been paid for the past two months, and a group of workers are leading a strike. But soon, the strikers are attacked by the henchmen of the military regime, leaving Mi-Thet terrified by her past trauma.



## CREW

### Director

The Maw Naing

### Scriptwriter

Oh Young Jeong

### DOP

Tin Win Naing

### Editor

Nicolas Bancilhon

### Line producer

Nwe Oo Way

### Chief sound editor and Sound design

Mathieu Farnarier

### Re-Recording mixer

Si Thu

### Art director

Zaw Moe

### Make-up and Costume

Thidar (Sfx)

### Producers

The Maw Naing - One Point Zero

Oh Young Jeong - Plus Point One

### Co-producers

Jeremy Chua - Potocol

Charlotte Guénin - Massala

Marie Fuglestein Læg Reid,  
Ingrid Lill Høgtun, Linda Bolstad  
Strønen - DUO film

Jean-Baptiste Bailly-Maitre  
- Alpha Violet Production



The Maw Naing was born in 1971 in Myanmar. He is a poet, installation artist and filmmaker.

He studied filmmaking at the Yangon Film School in 2005 and at FAMU Film School in Prague in 2008.

He was the first Myanmar filmmaker in almost 50 years to present his feature at the international festival when his film *The Monk* was selected at Karlovy Vary film festival in 2014.

One of his first short films *Again and Again* (2005, Myanmar) is based on one of his poems.

It won the Special Mention Prize at Zebra Poetry IFF in Berlin, 2008.

His other short film *Between the Pages* (2010, Myanmar) is in the permanent collection at the

Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan, 2017.

His co-directed documentary *Nargis: When Time Stopped Breathing* (2011, Myanmar and Germany)

that was screened at CPH: DOX and IDFA festivals. It has won four prizes, was screened over 20 times at international film festivals.

His debut feature film *The Monk* (2014, Myanmar and Czech Republic) premiered at Karlovy Vary.

It has won three prizes and was screened 50 times at international film festivals.

His second feature film *MA – Cry of Silence* (2024, Myanmar, South Korea, France, Norway, Singapore and Qatar) premiered at Busan IFF.

The Maw Naing is also currently working on his third feature, *Aung Who Wanted to be Aung and Then Wanted to be a Nun*.



## BIOGRAPHY

The Maw Naing

# FILMOGRAPHY

The Maw Naing

## The Monk

Fiction, Feature |  
Myanmar, Czech Republic |  
93 minutes, 2014  
In competition - Karlovy Vary  
International Film Festival 2014  
NETPAC Award  
Festival International des  
Cinemas d'Asie de Vesoul 2014  
Official Selection - Busan  
International Film Festival 2014  
Official Selection - International  
Film Festival Rotterdam 2015  
Official Selection - Locarno  
Open Doors 2018

## Nargis: When Time Stopped Breathing

Documentary Feature |  
Myanmar, Germany | 90  
minutes, 2010  
Official Selection - International  
Documentary Film Festival  
Amsterdam 2011  
Official Selection - World Film  
Festival Montreal 2010  
Official Selection - CPH:  
DOX2010  
Special Mention Regards Neuf -  
Visions du Reel, Nyon 2020  
FIPRESCI International Critics  
Award - Mumbai International  
Film Festival 2012



## Between the pages

2010, Fiction, 13 minutes

## Evening

2009, Fiction, 13 minutes

## Are not as

2006, Fiction, 15 minutes

## Again and again

2005, Fiction, 15 minutes





## Q&A WITH THE MAW NAING

**Jeremy Chua:** *First, tell us a bit about your background - what influenced you to become a filmmaker and how did you start your filmmaking practice (especially so in Myanmar where you grew up under military dictatorship) ?*

**The Maw Naing:** I was in high school during the 1988 uprising in Myanmar. My friends and I took part in street demonstrations against the military dictatorship at my hometown. The military responded with violence and some of us were arrested or even killed.

I escaped to Yangon and started writing poetry and learning to paint. I wanted to express ideas that I couldn't directly address in political discourse. Poetry, art and filmmaking became my mediums for expression. Some

ideas fit best as poems, others as installations, and some as films. I have since published six collections of poetry, and have exhibited in solo and group shows as an installation artist. My literary and visual art practice eventually evolved to filmmaking and I had the opportunity to be exposed to cinema when German and Czech filmmakers came to Yangon to conduct workshops at the Alliance Française compound. I also did an exchange programme at FAMU.

My first feature film is "The Monk". It premiered in 2014 at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. It was the first time in over 50 years that Burmese independent cinema was shown outside of the country. "MA - Cry of Silence" is my second feature film that I developed during the time of democratic government. I chose to explore the subject of personal freedom, women's rights and labour rights. However, the 2021 coup prevented our efforts to create freely.



**JC:** *“Ma – Cry of Silence” is your second feature film, and it has a very different perspective and tone on Myanmar society as compared to your first (“The Monk”). What made you and your writer Youngjeong write this story?*

**TMN:** I wanted to observe a new subject and aesthetic that was different from my first film. I started researching on female garment workers from a factory compound near my home. It was an extraordinary story because a group of women had set up an encampment to strike against unpaid salaries. This was unheard of before. I often saw the women in their colourful clothings enter and leave the factory. I became very curious to understand about these women and I collected their stories through audio interviewing recordings. I knew that their

story needed to come from a woman’s point of view, that was when I decided to invite one of my best friends, Youngjeong Oh (an artist from South Korea), to write the script. She has a background in visual art and psychology and having lived in Yangon, understood the Burmese society and its oppression.

We both wanted to tell the story of ordinary women, and through their struggle, reveal a darker history of Myanmar’s closed system. We can’t talk about these women’s lives without addressing the socio-political context and problems. There are generations of people who lived their whole lives only knowing military dictatorship. This transforms a society.

**JC:** *The script is a dramatization of your observation and research of a real women's strike at a garment factory and you have integrated contemporary and historical open source archive material of military action in Myanmar. What is the thought process behind this juxtaposition ?*

**TMN:** When writing the story, Youngjeong and I knew that we wanted to show the women lose to the powerful military system. We wanted to create a glimmer of hope in women who would sacrifice and rebel against their oppressors, but ultimately, their cause is destroyed by the police, the military, the lack of resources and opportunities. There is no law that protects the weak, and many are trapped in this cycle of hopelessness. Our story is very dark, very noir : but this is the reality of Myanmar.



Our country’s history is plagued with military coups. The use of archive is a reminder of this recurring violence over four decades. Whenever people protest, the military responds with brutality. They have no shame to murder a protestor on the street. They speak with the gun. We felt that the archive gives a reflection of the real situation of Myanmar, and a stronger emotional provocation of the film’s themes. The stakes in our country are so high even for basic human rights.

*JC: You often work with non-professional actors. They bring a sense of minimalism, naturalism and authenticity that are signatures of your filmmaking style. Can you share why you choose to work mainly with non professionals and what is your working process with them ?*



**TMN:** My approach to cinema is to depict the realness and rawness of life. Burmese mainstream cinema is full of plot twists, over acting, and over written dialogues. I trust my film to be told by non professional actors who have lived the life of the characters I write about. This story in particular is based upon a real group of women strikers. Hence, I wanted to honour them with the same authenticity of spirit and bring their fragility and vulnerability into a powerful cinematic presence.

Three of the main cast in the film are former garment factory workers. They also participated in street demonstrations in 2021 against the military coup. Some of their friends were also killed on the street. There is a solidarity between us when we decided to make this film

together. They did so despite the immense risk.

I use natural lighting and real locations in order for the bittersweet raw texture of Burmese life to be captured by the camera. I don't like perfection when making film. I don't consider my film as entertainment. I want the audience to ask questions and feel uncomfortable with the status quo.

*JC: How difficult was this film to shoot ? What kind of obstacles did you face ?*

**TMN:** The film was made late 2022 during the end of the covid pandemic and rising tension between the People's Defence Force against the military. The film industry production had totally stopped for two years.

Film equipment was moved to neighbouring cities. Services and studios were closed due to the danger. Two of my crew members who were part of my preproduction recce in 2019 to shoot a teaser were killed in action against the military.

We shot the film surrounded by urban warfare. Electricity was regularly cut, and bomb blasts occurred around our factory location. We often had to stop and stay silent whenever the civil war erupted nearby. Military blocked roads and searched vehicles.

We faced limitations for exterior shooting, we also faced rejections from factories and dormitory locations who originally approved our filming during our preproduction in 2019. Many of what you see in the film are improvised sets from the art department. Even the way we shot the film had to change to embrace these limitations.

In Myanmar, people have lived under the military closed system for a long time. We've been suffering in so many different ways. I am interested to expose their unexplored trauma, hesitation and fear of our own people. I base the story on the women who are heavily oppressed by the social patriarchy. But they try to get and fight back for their rights. Women worker's strikes first appeared in 2012. At that time, I was busy making my first feature film *The Monk*. These strikes came as a positive shock to me, because they were the first women who dared to attempt this kind of movement in Myanmar. I could observe the situation closely, because my house is located near the industrial zone in Yangon, Myanmar. Since that time, I have been interested in those who are weak but brave. I wanted to

know more about these women and what their day-to-day lives were like. I observed that huge numbers of women covered whole roads, coming and going from these factories every early morning and late night. I visited their strike camp and heard their real stories. I started to interview them to collect more information, and I got to know their various backgrounds. Many came to Yangon from other regions, each for her own reason. And, I realized that most of their backgrounds were linked strongly with the various kinds of disparity in Myanmar that I had explored with my previous art. I decided firmly that I should tell their story with the language of film. When I was planning to develop this story, I knew that I wanted to show this story from the women's perspective even though I'm a man. I wanted to

tell their story carefully and truthfully and avoid causing them any additional hardship. So I requested one of my best friends, Youngjeong Oh, to write the script. She has a background in art and psychology and understands the filmmaking process. Eventually, we could work together on this project to tell a deep and strong story of Myanmar women workers. In this story, we see the ordinary Myanmar women's lives, but also through this story we can see how these lives are connected to the overall scope

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

By The Maw Naing



of Myanmar's history as a closed system. We can't talk about these women's difficult lives without addressing the social and political problems Myanmar faced in its four decades under military dictatorship that led to these difficulties.

Our principal photography was delayed by the pandemic in 2020, and when Covid 19 became more stable in Myanmar, we made plans for the production schedule for 2021. But on 1st February 2021, the coup happened and we postponed production again. We joined the demonstration against the military junta on the street of Yangon. Within two years many people were arrested and killed after the coup. Gradually the civil war intensified around the whole country. A year later we want to tell what really happened in

Myanmar and our feature story is still up to date after the coup. So we decided to start the production in 2022 among different kinds of challenge, difficulties under the junta. I like to use the real places like dormitories, factories and filming on the street among the public. However after the coup, these locations became restricted and bringing film equipment into public spaces became dangerous. We tried our best to finish the production in Yangon despite regular street bomb blasts and gun shootings. Then I left as soon as possible for Bordeaux, France, in October 2022, for the film's postproduction.



## PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

By Oh Young Jeong



I have a background in art and psychology, and my work as an artist involves exploring and expressing psychological, philosophical, and social themes through different art mediums. As everyone knows, Korea has developed democracy through enduring and defeating three dictatorships. Especially significant was the democratization movement of 1980, which took place in my hometown of Gwangju, where I was born and raised. I was well aware of the terrible experiences my family and neighbors had endured. I also

grew up witnessing and participating in numerous resistance movements led by ordinary people to develop society in Korea. These experiences of mine are also connected to director The Maw Naing, who directly participated in the democratization movement of Myanmar in 1988. We had a similar experience regarding the consensus of how people in our surroundings suffered in the past. I realized that the Burmese people are also facing similar hardships to those experienced in Korea in the past, where oppression under dictatorship was prevalent for a prolonged period of time. As a woman and as a citizen of the world, I felt we should speak out about the issues plaguing our society. In 2016, I moved my office to Myanmar to learn more about the reality these women faced,

and I started writing the script and producing this film. People learned about anxiety and fear through the frustration and loss that they had to experience during the long period of military dictatorship. They had experienced and learned that when someone resists power, their lives collapse into poverty, families fall apart, and the daily pleasures they normally enjoyed become distant dreams they may never have again. Long-standing social repression by military force remained unresolved, forcing ordinary people to endure non-generic, complex emotions such as anger, depression, and helplessness, while unfairly sacrificing in their daily lives. The trauma has been deeply rooted in society for a long time. As time passed, the lives of ordinary citizens continued to be



stuck in a vicious cycle that was passed down through generations. Meanwhile, those with the power of lawlessness and injustice increasingly exerted control over society through force and economic power.

Among them, women were considered the weakest members of society. Women were easily used as instruments of sacrifice, yet at the same time, they simply lived each day in silence. They all had something to protect and a dream for the future. People must survive, so they couldn't give up hope. There were also people who were willing to risk their lives for a better future. I wanted to focus on those who are standing up against their deep trauma in this story.

We know that there are individuals who continue to move forward and persevere in

their lives, somewhere in the world. And I believe that those people's efforts will change this world for the better. So, I wished that they, too, could hear our voices and know that people still believe that the world does not turn away from them, and that they are not alone. Through this film, I also hope that we can take a step together towards the peaceful world they dream of.

## CONTACTS



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# MA – Cry of silence

ONE POINT ZERO presents

in co-production with PLUS POINT ONE, MASSALA, POTOCOL, DUOfilm, ALPHA VIOLET PRODUCTION  
"MA - CRY OF SILENCE"

with SU LAY, KYAWT KAY KHAING, KO NANDA, NAY HTOO AUNG, THIDAR

with the support of SINGAPORE FILM COMMISSION, the NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE REGION in partnership with the CNC, HBF HUBERT BALS+ EUROPE, SØRFOND  
AIDE AUX CINÉMAS DU MONDE - CNC - INSTITUT FRANÇAIS, VISIONS SUD EST with the support of the SDC, PURIN FONDATION, BROT FÜR DIE WELT, DOHA FILM FUND

sound THU YA ZIN mixer SI THU sound design MATHIEU FARNARIER editor NICOLAS BANCILHON, DOP TIN WIN NAING

produced by THE MAW NAING and OH YOUNG JEONG co-produced by CHARLOTTE GUÉNIN, JEREMY CHUA, MARIE FUGLESTEIN LÆGREID, INGRID LILL HØGTUN, LINDA BOLSTAD STRØNEN, JEAN-BAPTISTE BAILLY-MAÎTRE

world sales ALPHA VIOLET

directed by THE MAW NAING, written by OH YOUNG JEONG

