



Precarious Inclusion and the Machinery of Exhaustion; The Biopolitics of Legal Liminality in the Post 2021 Myanmar Thailand Corridor

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ABSTRACT

The 2024 Military Service Law in Myanmar has effectively weaponized the fallout of the 2021 coup, slamming shut the remaining exits for a youth displaced class now caught in a terminal Resource Loss Spiral. I interrogate this cataclysmic collapse of ontological security through the lived disclosures of twenty participants navigating the Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Pai corridor; this inquiry utilizes Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to unpack a violent cycle of transboundary harm. By synthesizing Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and the Allostatic Load framework, the study evaluates how legal liminality is strategically converted into a machinery of exhaustion. My findings unearth a predatory labor legality nexus where host country structural violence turns precarious inclusion into a fuel for predatory efficiency. This generates a cruel Invisibility Paradox; to avoid deportation, the migrant must systematically vanish from the social sphere, a tactical occlusion that simultaneously severs access to life saving healthcare and somatic support. While participants reclaim Internal Sovereignty through Somatic Agency, these internal governance structures are failing under the weight of managed insecurity. Ultimately, this study contends that migrant mental health is a structural byproduct of regional political architecture; it argues that we must move beyond clinical tropes to recognize that, in this crisis, the policy is the primary prescription.

Keywords: 2021 Myanmar Coup; Allostatic Load; Invisibility Paradox; Machinery of Exhaustion; Precarious Inclusion; Somatic Agency; Transboundary Trap.

INTRODUCTION

The Epochal Rupture: 2021 and the Origins of Ontological Insecurity: Myanmar's military coup putsch on 1st February 2021 is more than a transient political shift; it is a total collapse in the socio political fabric of the region and a humanitarian disaster of staggering proportions. This event has displaced over 2.3 million people as of early 2026 (UNHCR, 2026), driven by a state sponsored campaign of systemic violence, indiscriminate aerial bombardments, and a collapse of economic infrastructure (OHCHR, 2025). I argue that to understand the gravity of this crisis, we must distinguish between historical Resource Seeking and the current Ontological Evacuation. For decades, Myanmar migrants in Thailand were primarily characterized as an unskilled labor force escaping localized ethnic conflict or systemic poverty. However, the current cohort represents a catastrophic class shift. My data unearths a youth displaced class, predominantly secondary students under Grade 12 and university students whose academic trajectories were severed mid-course, for whom migration is not an economic choice but a desperate flight to escape the proximity of lethality. This is what I term the Resource Guillotine; it is the sudden, state-led destruction of a projected future that did not exist in previous migration waves. Unlike the historical labor-driven migration of previous decades, this post-2021 exodus represents a sudden, involuntary severance of the domestic moral universe where the biological requirement for survival has replaced the aspiration for economic gain. With this volatile landscape, the Myanmar Thailand corridor has become the central site of an epochal rupture in ontological security; a fundamental breakdown in the sense of order, continuity, and self safety for those forced into exile. This breakdown is now systematically weaponized by the 2024 Military Service Law, which has effectively slammed shut the remaining exits for a youth class



caught in a terminal loss spiral. Thailand currently serves as the precarious sanctuary for approximately 2.5 million Myanmar migrants (IOM, 2024), a population that represents a staggering 80% of the host nation's total migrant workforce (IOM, 2024). These people are mostly recruited in the unsafe and informal sectors such as construction, fisheries, manufacturing and domestic workers, which are all part of the 3D paradigm: Dirty, Dangerous and Difficult. The study identifies a critical, systemic paradox: while the Thai economy remains structurally dependent on this labor force, its governing migration policies systematically marginalize the psychological and legal existence of these contributors, creating a state of precarious inclusion where labor is extracted but human rights and psychological protections are withheld.

Interrogating the Nexus of Transboundary Harm: A central scholarly contribution of this inquiry is the conceptualization of transboundary harm; the psychological and structural effect of trauma of the origin country is not resolved at the border but is instead translated into new, insidious forms of marginalization within the host country. For the post-2021 migrants, the border is the transition from physical violence of the junta to the structural violence of the Thai legal and economic system. While scholarly literature has documented the precarity of Myanmar migrants in Thailand for decades (Berry, 1997), this study argues that the post-coup era represents a qualitative shift toward a state-sanctioned weaponization of legality. The findings of this study reveals that stress is inextricably linked to the geopolitics of borders. The systemic disenfranchisement of undocumented migrants, evidenced by the strategic cooperation between Thai authorities and the Myanmar military resulting in over 5,000 deportations in 2023 (IOM, 2024), functions as a psychological weapon. This indicates that Thai attitudes have evolved from historical indifference toward an active biopolitical control mechanism that utilizes the threat of the junta as a tool for labor submission. This weaponization of legality ensures that the migrant remains in a state of permanent liminality, where legal uncertainty is utilized as a tool of biopolitical control. The existential specter of being forcibly returned to a site of potential torture or death (OHCHR, 2025) creates a baseline of chronic hyper-vigilance, an affective state that directly correlates with the depletion of the individual's psychological and physiological reserves.

Structural Violence and the Physiology of Allostatic Load: The stressors exposed in this study; wage theft and punishing hours of work and the constant threat of arrest, are not just side effects of migration but the deliberate product of a predatory economic architecture defined by structural violence (Galtung, 1969). Participants in this study described working grueling 14-hour shifts (from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.) during peak seasons, often with no rest days which aligns with broader patterns of labor exploitation in the Thai informal sector (IOM, 2024). In the hospitality sector of Chiang Mai, undocumented workers earn a mere 9,000 baht per month; a survival stipend frequently subject to arbitrary deductions that their Thai counterparts do not face, a practice that institutionalizes epistemic injustice by silencing the grievances of the marginalized (Fricker, 2007). From a neuro-psychological perspective, this chronic exposure to exploitation and fear creates a high Allostatic Load—the physiological wear and tear which results when the stress response is not diminished but stays permanently activated and is sustained without somatic recovery (McEwen & Stellar, 1993). While traditional clinical models often pathologize these reactions as individual disorders, this study identifies such physiological breakdowns as rational, biological indicators of cumulative trauma. Ultimately, the study goes beyond individualized clinical models to claim that migrant mental health is a structural byproduct of the political architectures of today where the biological system is forced to bear the weight of state-sponsored precarity (OHCHR, 2025).

Theoretical Framework: Resource Spirals and Minority Stressn: To further deepen the theoretical rigor of this analysis, the study explores Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to map the catastrophic Resource Loss Spiral experienced by these populations. COR states that psychological distress is triggered by a loss of safety, family, and legal identity; these represent vital resources that were abruptly severed during the 2021 coup. This study identifies this rupture as the foundational First Loss in a Double Loss Trap, where initial economic theft is systematically compounded by a Second Loss involving the total surrender of legal agency. In Thailand, the inability to acquire energy resources such as fair wages or condition resources like Legal Status prevents the somatic recovery of the migrant's mental health, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle of vulnerability. Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003) also demonstrates how distal stressors, such as deportation threats and systemic labor abuse, become internalized proximal stressors; these manifest as acute anxiety, social isolation, and a profound sense of invisibility. This results in what I term the Invisibility Paradox; the undocumented migrant must remain invisible to the state to survive, yet this strategic disappearance ensures they are denied healthcare, mental health support, and basic social services. Effectively, they are trapped in a



vacuum of psychological neglect where the Invisibility Paradox ensures that the very act of survival facilitates a secondary state of structural traumatization. This social exclusion is also consistent with Social Integration Theory (Berry, 1997) and increases emotional isolation, thus compounding the risk of long term psychological disorders and the Machinery of Exhaustion.

The Research Gap: Toward a Justice-Oriented Psychological Inquiry: Southeast Asian migration studies are currently saturated with economic metrics, yet they remain analytically silent on the profound ontological rupture and internal landscape of the migrant in this post-coup era. Clinical psychology often misses the mark here; it tends to pathologize migrant mental health through a narrow lens of individual Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) while ignoring the systemic engines that actually drive this distress. This study addresses this gap by adopting a Justice-Oriented Psychological Framework, which posits that distress is not a disorder, but a rational, functional response to the systemic exploitation and "Epistemic Injustice" (Fricker, 2007) inherent in the host country's governance. Through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), I spent time with 20 participants (aged 18 to 56) across the urban sprawl of Bangkok and the semi-rural pockets of Chiang Mai and Pai. This specific demographic includes those fleeing the February 2024 People's Military Service Law, representing a new cohort of "involuntary exiles" whose psychological profile differs significantly from historical labor migrants (KHRG, 2025). Finally, the research exposes the power of Spiritual Agency. My data shows that culturally-embedded contemplative practices are not just coping rituals; they function as "Internal Governance Structures" that allow individuals to reclaim their humanity in a world that has attempted to turn the migrant into a mere tool of labor (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Strategic Objectives and Philosophical Trajectory: This research refuses the passivity of descriptive reporting. Instead, it offers a theoretical synthesis of how political collapse and structural precarity work in tandem to gut human well-being. I am not merely an observer; this work is an active effort to pull apart the machinery of marginalization through three core objectives: *Mapping the Scar Tissue:* Identifying the pre-migration psychological baseline; this represents the post-traumatic vulnerability left behind by Myanmar's climate of military violence and the 2024 conscription-related displacement (OHCHR, 2025). *Exposing the Host-Country Machine:* Assessing the catastrophic weight of structural stressors, specifically how legal insecurity and the strategic weaponization of legality (IOM, 2024) actively produce a state of chronic Allostatic Load. *Probing Intersectional Friction:* Analyzing the shadow economy to see how gender, age, and legal status collide to dictate the exact intensity of a migrant's exploitation. Ultimately, the philosophical trajectory of this work is to challenge the current biopolitical control of migrants. By integrating Conservation of Resources (COR) theory with the latest 2026 humanitarian updates (UNHCR, 2026), I aim to construct a model of trauma-informed migration governance that recognizes labor protection as a non-negotiable psychological intervention. This anchors the analysis in the Lived Disclosures of the field to prove that the protection of the displaced is the very foundation upon which regional Ethical Leadership and sustainable economic reconstruction must be built.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Triangulation of Precarity: The psychological landscape of the post-2021 Myanmar migrant is too complex for a singular theoretical model. Instead, this inquiry employs a multi-dimensional framework that bridges the gap between state-level Structural Violence, the psychological Conservation of Resources, and the physiological reality of Allostatic Load. This triangulation is critically necessary to map the epochal rupture of the 2021 coup and the subsequent 2024 military conscription, which have transformed standard migration stress into a state of total ontological fragmentation. This triangulation allows us to understand how political instability in Myanmar translates into a chronic biological and mental burden in Thailand.

Structural Violence and the Biopolitics of Legal Liminality: I ground the analysis of the host environment in Johan Galtung's (1969) seminal conception of Structural Violence. This framework moves the focus away from direct physical harm to the slow violence of legal and economic architectures that systematically gut a person's ability to survive. In the Myanmar Thailand corridor, this violence is not a series of unfortunate events; it is a functional biopolitical tool used to maintain a labor force in a state of legal liminality. I contend that while underlying social prejudice remains a constant, the operational mechanism of the Thai state has evolved from administrative indifference into a sophisticated Biopolitical Capture. In the past, the Thai labor legality nexus was a disorganized system of neglect. Today, it has been refined into a machinery of Managed Insecurity. The



2024 Military Service Law in Myanmar has fundamentally changed the power dynamic at the border; the Thai employer now knows that the migrant cannot go back without facing death or conscription. This transforms the workplace from a site of labor into a site of absolute capture, where the threat of deportation is no longer just a legal risk but a weaponized death sentence used to enforce Predatory Efficiency. While the systemic exclusion of Myanmar migrants has historical roots (Berry, 1997), I argue that post 2021 Thai attitudes have evolved into a strategic Predatory Efficiency that weaponizes the migrant's lack of legal agency for economic gain. By keeping the undocumented migrant in this in between space, where legal status is perpetually out of reach, the state institutionalizes vulnerability. This social and legal occlusion ensures that the migrant remains visible enough to be exploited for labor, yet invisible enough to be denied fundamental protections and healthcare. Ultimately, structural violence here acts as a machinery of marginalization, transforming a lack of paperwork into a state of permanent psychological and physical precarity. The research suggests that legal status is not a neutral administrative category, but a biopolitical tool that determines the psychological safety of the individual. The intensified cooperation between Thai and Myanmar authorities, an alliance that culminated in over 5,000 deportations in 2023 (IOM, 2024), proves that the suffering is no longer a passive byproduct but a deliberate tool of transboundary control where the Thai state actively manages the somatic reality of the displaced. This has created a permanent liminality, a state of bare life for migrants in the labor market, in which they are included in the labor market but excluded from the protection of the law, thereby establishing the primary engine for chronic psychological distress.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory: The Loss Spiral: While Structural Violence explains the environment, Stevan Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory explains the internal psychological mechanism of the migrant. COR theory suggests that stress is not merely a reaction to an event but a result of the actual or threatened loss of key resources—be they objects, conditions, personal characteristics, or energies. For the 20 participants in this study, the 2021 coup functioned as a catastrophic Resource Loss event, an epochal resource guillotine that severed their ties to safety, academic continuity, and foundational belonging. I theorize this rupture as the foundational First Loss in a Double Loss Trap which separates this generation from previous migration waves. While earlier cohorts engaged in Resource Seeking for economic advancement, these participants are undergoing a total Ontological Fragmentation. This spiral is now lethally accelerated by the 2024 military conscription laws which have converted the possibility of return into a psychological weapon that prevents the individual from ever reaching a state of resource gain. According to COR, individuals with depleted resources are more vulnerable to further loss, creating a Loss Spiral. This represents a departure from traditional migration stress; here, the initial theft of identity is systematically compounded by the host country's machinery of extraction. Upon entering Thailand, the lack of condition resources (legal documentation) prevents migrants from acquiring energy resources (fair wages), trapping them in a cycle of poverty and exploitation where they earn as little as 9,000 baht for grueling 14 hour shifts. This represents the Second Loss: the total surrender of legal agency to the employer, effectively locking the Double Loss Trap and ensuring that the migrant remains in a state of permanent physiological and psychological depletion. By governing the internal state to mitigate this loss, participants attempt to resist the Somatic Capture that defines this post coup era.

Allostatic Load: The Physiology of Chronic Hyper-Vigilance: To map the physical breakdowns I witnessed in the field, I rely on McEwen and Stellar's (1993) Allostatic Load Theory. This isn't just about feeling stressed; it is a framework for understanding the biological price a body pays for living in constant fear. Unlike the acute stressors faced by labor migrants in the past, the post-2021 landscape imposes a state of permanent activation where the biological system has no opportunity for somatic recovery. The wear and tear on the body isn't an accident; it is the direct result of a stress response forced to stay on 24/7 because of the threat of arrest or deportation. For the undocumented migrant, hyper-vigilance becomes a permanent physiological state. Allostatic load happens when these survival systems never get to stand down, leading eventually to a state of somatic collapse. The data suggests that the combination of hazardous working conditions in sectors like fisheries and construction, paired with the constant existential fear of the 2024 conscription, leads to a terminal allostatic overload. This is empirically supported by participant accounts of emotional burnout, chronic physical illness, and systemic exhaustion. While previous studies emphasized individual resilience (Berry, 1997), I argue that the intensity of current transboundary policing has overwhelmed the internal regulatory capacity of the migrant body, making the sobbing observed in the field a symptom of structural, rather than merely personal, distress.



Minority Stress and the Invisibility Paradox: To navigate the interiority of this struggle, I utilize Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003) to bifurcate external distal stressors from the proximal internalized anxiety. For the Myanmar diaspora, these distal forces manifest as blunt workplace abuse, wage theft, and the jagged, ever present risk of deportation. Unlike historical labor migrants who sought social integration, the post 2021 cohort, particularly those fleeing the 2024 military conscription, is forced into a state of Strategic Disappearance to avoid both host country policing and home country reprisals. However, the proximal stress of hiding, which necessitates the avoidance of public spaces and detection, results in profound social isolation. This creates the Invisibility Paradox; the migrant must remain invisible to the state in order to survive, yet this invisibility effectively bars them from accessing mental health care, healthcare, and vital communal resources. I contend that this paradox is not a passive byproduct of migration but a deliberate outcome of a predatory labor legality nexus that utilizes Epistemic Injustice to silence the marginalized. This social exclusion remains consistent with Berry's (1997) Social Integration Theory and increases emotional isolation, thus elevating the risk of long term psychological disorders.

Spiritual and Somatic Agency: I ground this final pillar in Kirmayer et al.'s (2011) Cultural Psychiatry to reject the reductionist victim narrative. My data demands a recognition of Spiritual and Somatic Agency; this represents the active, tactical use of prayer, ritual, and rhythmic expression as a sophisticated mechanism of Internal Psychological Governance. This is not merely religion; it is a form of counter-hegemonic resistance against a world that has stripped the individual of legal and social citizenship. Because the post-2021 landscape has forced a sudden transition from communal family continuity to forced solitude, these practices, ranging from solitary prayer to somatic releases like song and dance, serve as a critical defense against Ontological Fragmentation.

"When I go back the place that I stay I am alone. Before I came to Thailand, I lived with my parents and had no experience to stay alone. So, I felt like I miss home and I am lonely. I pray alone... sometime I dance, singing out loud sometime to release my stress... so that I can feel release." (Ma Nan, Pseudonym, Female, 19)

This internal policing of one's stress response is an act of supreme agency; it provides an individual with dignity beyond the mere physical extraction of labor. For participants who have transitioned from communal safety to forced isolation, somatic releases such as singing and dancing are tactical Body-Based Interventions used to down-regulate a permanently activated Allostatic Load. By reclaiming the rhythm of their own bodies in the privacy of their rooms, they create a Somatic Sanctuary that state surveillance cannot penetrate. When the state blocks every possible path for problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the migrant is forced to pivot to an internal theatre of agency. These culturally-anchored practices function as a vital, internal anchor against the catastrophic Resource Loss Spiral (Hobfoll, 1989). By governing their own internal state to mitigate this profound isolation, participants demonstrate a sophisticated capacity for Psychological Self-Regulation and the preservation of Ontological Security under conditions of extreme external chaos.

METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): This study adopts a qualitative research approach based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to explore the intimate and emotionally sophisticated experiences of Myanmar migrants following the epochal rupture of 2021. IPA is ideally suited to this specific inquiry because it focuses on the individuals' lived experience while recognizing the researcher's role in the process of making sense of those experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). By prioritizing an idiographic focus, this methodology allows for the deep exploration of individual "Resource Loss Spirals" that quantitative metrics often fail to capture. This approach facilitates a double hermeneutic process where the researcher attempts to interpret how the participant interprets their own world. Given the sensitive nature of transboundary trauma and structural precarity, IPA provides the necessary depth to capture the nuances of ontological insecurity and the physiological breakdown of the Allostatic Load.

Participant Selection and Sampling Strategy: The study employed a purposive sampling approach to draw in the particular stories needed to map this post-2021 rupture. The initial outreach reached 15 but I selected 20 individuals to achieve terminal thematic saturation, providing enough data density to allow the IPA of the participants to hold the weight of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) while not sacrificing



individual somatic detail. Regarding non-response bias, it is acknowledged that several undocumented workers approached through community networks were unwilling to participate, citing an existential fear of revealing their actual legal status and a desire to avoid unwanted consequences. This suggests that the study may miss the voices of those trapped in the most severe levels of the Invisibility Paradox, where fear precludes any form of public disclosure. Inclusion was strictly limited to Myanmar nationals who migrated before and after the February 2021 coup and had survived in the host nation for at least one year. This twelve month threshold was a deliberate methodological choice; it allowed the study to look past the initial arrival shock and focus on the long term psychological erosion caused by the Thai labor legality nexus. Furthermore, to mitigate the risk of an overly homogeneous sample, the cohort reflects a cross generational reality with ages spanning 18 to 56, facilitating a contrast between the youth displaced class, comprising secondary students under Grade 12 and university students whose academic trajectories were severed mid-course, and the collapse of mid career professionals. At this stage of inquiry, the gender distribution is approximately 60% women and 40% men; the sample covers a range of high precarity sectors including hospitality, manual labor, and informal brokerage as detailed in Table 1. I intentionally mixed documented and undocumented participants to prove a central theoretical point; that structural violence in Thailand is not just about a lack of papers. Instead, it is a universal biopolitical pressure that traps all Myanmar migrants in a state of Precarious Inclusion, effectively turning their legal status into a lever for Predatory Efficiency. By stratifying the sample across these legal and professional lines, I was able to capture the full breadth of the Invisibility Paradox as it is felt on the ground.

Data Collection Procedures: I chose the Bangkok-Chiang Mai-Pai corridor for my fieldwork to capture how the intensity of state surveillance shifts as one moves from the high-pressure urban center to the northern borderlands. This was not merely a geographical choice; it was a strategic one to observe how community support and the threat of arrest fluctuate depending on the setting. I insisted on face-to-face, semi-structured interviews because trust is not a baseline assumption in a climate of deportation; it must be earned in person. To ensure the highest level of lexical accuracy and to capture the nuanced emotional prosody of each disclosure, all interviews were audio-recorded, providing the raw data for a thick description of the Invisibility Paradox. I sat with participants for anywhere from 50 to 120 minutes, refusing to rush a narrative that had often been suppressed for years. While all 20 participants provided the thematic breadth of the study, two key informants provided the extraordinary idiographic depth required to map the most intimate layers of somatic and spiritual agency. These recordings were subsequently subjected to verbatim transcription and cross-checked against field notes to ensure that the Real Voice of the participant was preserved for the double hermeneutic process. These sessions allowed for a deeper extraction of the Double Loss Trap, moving beyond descriptive reporting into high-level psychological theorization. Finding safe spaces was a constant, high-stakes negotiation; whether in a quiet corner of a cafe or in a private room, the aim was to create a temporary vacuum where the fear of detection did not dominate the conversation. These were not just data-gathering sessions; they functioned as temporary governance refuges where the Allostatic Load of the undocumented experience could finally be articulated without the immediate threat of the state looking over their shoulder. Recognizing that anonymity is a vital survival mechanism in a climate of potential deportation, all digital audio files were immediately encrypted and transferred to a secure, password-protected drive. Following the completion of the thematic immersion and transcription, all identifiers were rigorously scrubbed to prevent any secondary link between the participants and their disclosures, ensuring that the Real Voice is preserved while the individual remains invisible to state surveillance.

Table 1: Participant Profiles and Structural Exposure Dynamics (n=20)

Analytical Variable	Structural Descriptor	Frequency (n)	Theoretical Significance (IPA Anchor)
Legal Stratification	Strategic Liminality (Undocumented or Statusless)	14	The Invisibility Paradox; theorizes the strategic weaponization of legality as a biopolitical control mechanism.



	Precarious Inclusion (Documented, MOU or Pink Card)	6	Illustrates the Tied Status trap and the systematic management of Managed Insecurity.
Temporal Origin of Displacement	Epochal Rupture (Post-2021 Coup / 2024 Conscription)	17	Ontological Fragmentation ; identifies the catastrophic Resource Loss Spiral (Hobfoll, 1989) triggered by state violence.
	Longitudinal Diaspora (Pre-Coup Migration)	3	Focuses on the accumulation of longitudinal Minority Stress (Meyer, 2003) and historical acculturation tension.
Somatic & Labor Sector	The Machinery of Extraction (Hospitality, Construction, Domestic)	20	Temporal Extraction ; directly correlates grueling 14 hour cycles with terminal Allostatic Load (McEwen & Stellar, 1993).

Data Analysis: Thematic Immersion: I conducted my data analysis using a manual and iterative process that remained strictly consistent with the six step IPA framework (Smith et al., 2009). The process commenced with the exhaustive labor of verbatim transcription; this was a deliberate choice to capture the idiographic granularity and subtle linguistic cues that automated software often fails to detect. This depth of immersion was vital to operationalize the double hermeneutic, facilitating a complex interpretative space where the researcher makes sense of the participant making sense of their own internal world. From there, I transitioned into identifying emergent themes, mapping the specific trajectories through which trauma transitions from pre migration kinetic violence into the longitudinal struggle of the Thai labor market. Finally, I synthesized these themes with my theoretical pillars, clustering the data under the frameworks of Allostatic Load and Conservation of Resources. This was not a linear path but a constant, circular engagement between the raw voice and the theoretical framework; this hermeneutic circle ensured that the Resource Loss Spiral was not merely an academic label but a lived reality validated through empirical disclosure.

Ethical Considerations and Reflexivity: In the double-threat climate of military reprisals in Myanmar and deportation in Thailand, anonymity was enacted as a survival mechanism rather than a mere administrative requirement. I enacted a rigorous erasure of identifiers, scrubbing all specifics that could link the disclosures to the participants. My positionality as an "insider" researcher shared the cultural semiotics of the participants, facilitating a unique, high-trust entry point that necessitated an organic pivot toward Action Research, a tradition that views the inquiry itself as a site of transformative change (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). To avoid emotional over-identification, I used a reflexive journal as a means of constant calibration. This synthesis of raw empathy and analytic distance enables the research findings to be framed by a justice-based knowledge of systemic marginalization (Fricker, 2007). However, this proximity required active intervention when participants faced acute distress. For instance, during a session where a participant (Ma Nan) experienced a total somatic collapse and sobbing, the interview was suspended to prioritize her well-being. Drawing on my background in leadership and stress management, I provided immediate mental support and shared tangible 'Internal Governance' strategies. These included methods for proactive social engagement, specifically learning the Thai language and initiating peer-group communication, to actively dismantle the Invisibility Paradox and facilitate social integration. This transformed the research encounter into a temporary 'Somatic Sanctuary,' proving that an insider researcher can act as a catalyst for resilience and healing while maintaining the necessary analytic rigor.

Research Limitations: Although the deep immersion in the lives of twenty participants (N=20) provided high-resolution thick data, for the study I emphasize Theoretical Transferability by demonstrating how structural violence is distilled into somatic distress. There are several boundaries, however. First, the geographic focus on the Bangkok-Chiang Mai-Pai corridor, while strategic, may not capture the specific dynamics of the deep southern border or more remote plantation sectors. Second, as a cross-sectional inquiry, it provides a snapshot of a specific historical moment; longitudinal research is still required to track how this Allostatic Load accumulates over a lifetime of Legal Liminality. Finally, due to the Invisibility Paradox, there is a natural ceiling



for data collection; the most severely traumatized individuals, those in a state of total social occlusion, may well remain outside the realm of this investigation, given the existential hazards posed by any mode of disclosure.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The Cartography of Transboundary Trauma

This thematic analysis of the 20 semi-structured interviews suggests a complex cartography of visceral distress in the wake of the epochal rupture of 2021. This catastrophic socio-political collapse has triggered a recursive, structural victimization in the Thai labor market. This examination refers to Pre-Migration Displacement as a seismic Resource Loss event (Hobfoll, 1989) which deprived significant condition resources, e.g. safety, academic continuity, familial stability. The data show a total state of Ontological Fragmentation: a non-linear break in the individual's life trajectory. One of the major underpinnings that runs across the participants is the existential fear of conscription, whereby the 2024 Military Service Law did more than displace bodies; it cut off the internal architectures needed for a coherent self-identity.

Displacement Before Migrating and Ontological Fragmentation: The pre-migration period represents a catastrophic Resource Loss event defined by total Ontological Fragmentation. I contend that the 2024 Military Service Law did not just displace bodies; it severed the internal architectures required for a coherent self-identity. This represents a sharp demographic break from the past where migration has shifted from traditional resource seeking to an absolute Ontological Evacuation. This rupture is most acute for the youth cohort, where flight is characterized by Parental Mandated Displacement; here, migration is not a choice for economic opportunity but a desperate flight to escape the Proximity of Lethality. Na Khu (pseudonym, male, 18) is an ethnic minority youth from a village near Bawlakhe and Demoso in Kayah State, Myanmar, an area that has become a high-intensity conflict zone in recent years. His trauma is rooted in extreme somatic vulnerability during an artillery strike that shattered the sanctuary of his home.

"I still remember that day; I went out for showering and an explosive weapon fell right near me. I am lucky it did not hit me. When the military group marched near our area, they seized young people by force... My parents asked me to leave them as soon as possible to stay alive... One day, my sisters did not go to school, and that was the day the military air strike hit the school; three children died on the spot. Although I am here in Thailand, I am always worrying for my parents and my two sisters".

This Proximity of Lethality initiates a terminal Resource Loss Spiral. When even the basic acts of showering or attending school become sites of potential mortality, the life trajectory is violently severed. I argue that for Na Khu, the four day journey on foot, facilitated by a predatory agent network and informal brokerage, was a transition into Ontological Stasis where his developmental youth was traded for the repetitive labor of survival. This unearths the Moral Injury of a state that targets its own youth, creating a cohort of involuntary exiles whose psychological profile differs fundamentally from the historical labor migrants of previous decades. Furthermore, his ongoing Transboundary Anxiety proves that physical escape does not equate to psychological safety; his biological system remains in a state of permanent hyper-vigilance, tethered to the lethal instability of his home village.

Structural Violence and the Biopolitics of the Labor Legality Nexus: Upon crossing the border, a transition Na Khu (Male 18) completed through the physical toll of walking for four days, the nature of the migrant's trauma undergoes a visceral transformation. The direct kinetic violence of the Myanmar military is traded for the slow violence of a Thai labor legality nexus that functions as a structural trap. I argue that this transition represents a shift from kinetic warfare to a state of Biopolitical Capture, where the 2024 Military Service Law is used as a lever to lock the migrant into the host economy. This legal liminality is no longer an accidental byproduct of policy; it is an intentional, biopolitical weapon used to sustain a regime of Predatory Efficiency. I contend that Thai attitudes have evolved from historical indifference toward an active management of somatic extraction, where the migrant body is viewed as a resource to be fully captured. My fieldwork reveals that this exploitation is distilled through three primary mechanisms of structural violence: Differential Exclusion and Structural Inferiority. Structural violence is often felt in the smallest daily humiliations that reinforce the migrant's "lesser" status. Na Khu's narrative illustrates how basic biological needs, such as nutrition and



transport, are weaponized to signal exclusion and manufacture a state of Structural Inferiority. I argue that this exclusion is a deliberate signaling mechanism used to normalize the migrant's precarious inclusion. *"In my last job, I faced discrimination where local Thai workers received transport for THB 35, but I could not get that. It made me feel like I was not a real worker like them".*

Direct Predatory Extraction and Wage Theft The weaponization of undocumented status allows employers to shift business risks directly onto the migrant's body, a process I term Direct Predatory Extraction. This is viscerally exemplified by the conversion of legal precarity into financial dividends for the employer. I contend that the 2024 Law has changed the stakes here; employers now operate with the clinical knowledge that their workers cannot return home, allowing for a level of wage theft that borders on total economic capture. *"In this hotel, my salary is THB 9,000. But last month, because a guest complained and checked out after three days, the owner deducted THB 3,000 from my pocket... Sometimes, he only pays me half".*

Temporal Extraction and the Violation of Bodily Autonomy The final layer of this biopolitical trap is Temporal Extraction, where human capital is depleted through grueling shifts without somatic recovery. Ko Min (Pseudonym, Male 29) elucidates how this environment leverages legal precarity to violate even the most basic personal safety, effectively turning the workplace into a site of absolute capture. This demonstrates the shift from labor negotiation to a regime of Managed Insecurity, where the worker has nowhere else to exist.

"In the low season, there is no salary, only the right to stay in the staff room. I even faced a sexually unsafe environment as the owner leveraged my lack of legal status... I cannot go to the police because my papers are tied to this specific boss. He knows I am trapped".

From a psychological perspective, these testimonies illustrate a state of Precarious Inclusion. The theft of 33% of a monthly survival stipend (THB 3,000) for a business outcome outside the worker's control, or the denial of a THB 35 meal, are primary drivers of the Resource Loss Spiral (Hobfoll 1989). Because their legal status is tied to specific employers, participants are effectively muted in a state of Epistemic Injustice (Fricker 2007). I argue that this represents a machinery of exhaustion, where the manufactured fear of the state is strategically utilized to finance the private industry through the somatic decay of the migrant. Ultimately, the policy is the prescription; we must recognize that Thai attitudes are now codified into a system that treats the displaced as a permanent, captured underclass.

The Phenomenology of Allostatic Load: The Transboundary Trap: Survival unearths a tripartite system of distress comprising the Invisibility Paradox, Transboundary Anxiety, and Somatic Allostasis; these forces converge to create a violent Resource Loss Spiral that erodes the migrant's ontological security. The most punishing stressor in the host country is Strategic Invisibility, where migrants must systematically erase their presence from the public sphere to mitigate the existential threat of deportation. Ma Nan illustrates how this required disappearance results in a profound isolation that overwhelms the body's regulatory capacity; she describes this erasure as a state of being where she has learned to be a ghost and notes that *"when you hide, you are truly alone... sometimes, I just start sobbing and I can't stop; my body is finally breaking"*. Geographic distance provides no psychological relief for those from high intensity conflict zones, a reality that anchors the Transboundary Trap. Na Khu exemplifies this affective loop where the nervous system remains in a state of permanent Conflict Alert due to the mortal danger of kin. His disclosure that *"although I am here, I am always worrying for my parents and my two sisters"* following an air strike that killed children at their school highlights a state of Ambiguous Loss. In this state, the biological system is forced to process war zone trauma while simultaneously performing the repetitive labor of survival.

The final component of this load is the inability to find a safe space for somatic recovery, leading to Somatic Hyper vigilance. Ko Min elucidates the psychological weight of being legally and physically tied to an unsafe environment; he describes a workplace that functions as a site of Absolute Capture. By stating that *"I faced a sexually unsafe environment as the owner leveraged my lack of legal status... I cannot go to the police because my papers are tied to this specific boss; he knows I am trapped,"* Ko Min provides the empirical basis for a terminal Allostatic Load. Because his legal status prevents him from seeking protection, his body remains in a permanent fight or flight mode; even his site of rest, the staff room, is transformed into a site of potential violation. Ultimately, the collective experiences of Ma Nan, Na Khu, and Ko Min represent a manifestation of



structural violence dismantling the self. Their biological regulatory systems are overwhelmed by a state of permanent hyper vigilance driven by social invisibility, transboundary grief, and legal capture. The migrant's body becomes the final site of conflict; it is where the slow violence of the Thai labor market and the kinetic violence of the Myanmar coup meet, resulting in a state of somatic decay that persists even in the absence of a direct physical threat.

Counter-Hegemonic Resilience: Internal Sovereignty and Somatic Agency: The analysis of survival strategies among the 2024 cohort unearths a sophisticated form of Internal Sovereignty that operates as a direct challenge to the state's Machinery of Exhaustion. This resilience is far more than a passive coping mechanism; it is a deliberate, counter-hegemonic refusal to let structural violence dictate the migrant's internal reality. I argue that when external legal and social citizenship is stripped away, participants like Ma Nan, Na Khu, and Ko Min effectively construct Somatic Sanctuaries to reclaim their Ontological Security and physiological integrity.

Somatic Agency as Temporal Reclamation (Ma Nan): Rather than succumbing to the Ghost identity imposed by the Invisibility Paradox, Ma Nan (Female, 19) utilizes Somatic Agency, specifically solitary prayer and rhythmic releases like song and dance, as a tool for Temporal Reclamation. In an environment of Temporal Extraction and grueling fourteen hour shifts, these acts represent a visceral refusal to let the employer or the state own her entire biological existence. Her practice serves as a rhythmic anchor to ground her displaced self; this represents a vital Internal Governance Structure where, through prayer and dance, she performs an act of Somatic Decolonization. She creates a private time that exists outside the reach of the predatory labor market, effectively re-humanizing herself in a system that views her only as a unit of production.

The Interior Landscape as a Sovereign Territory (Na Khu & Ko Min): When the external environment fails to provide safety or legal recognition, the migrant turns toward a disciplined, internal order. This contemplative agency functions as a form of Epistemic Resistance, where the mind becomes its own sovereign territory. Na Khu (Male, 18): Despite the Inability to Absent from his grueling labor, his resilience is found in a stoic Internal Audit. By maintaining a disciplined internal boundary, he ensures that the repetitive labor of survival does not fully consume his interior life. He manages his Transboundary Anxiety by treating his physical presence in the hotel as a Transient Performance, a mask he wears to survive while his real self remains protected and uncaptured. Ko Min (Male, 29): Even while his physical body is legally tied to an unsafe employer, he maintains a state of Internal Withdrawal; this is a profound declaration of Somatic Autonomy. By demarcating a psychological boundary between his labor and his essential identity, Ko Min forestalls total somatic collapse; he demonstrates that whilst his movements are limited, his Ontological Core is kept beyond the employer's systemic leverage. Ultimately, this internal sovereignty demonstrates a sophisticated capacity for Psychological Self Regulation. Through reclaiming the rhythm of their own bodies in these Somatic Sanctuaries, Ma Nan, Na Khu, and Ko Min retain their dignity even while their physical bodies are subjected to systemic wage theft and predatory extraction. These findings reveal that it is the migrant who maintains supremacy over their own interior space, even if papers are seized and wages stolen. This internal sovereignty thus offers the final line of defense against the Resource Loss Spiral; it is a statement that the state may regulate how the migrant works, but it cannot colonize the migrant's capacity for internal order, self reconstruction, and intergenerational stability.

DISCUSSION

The Synthesis of Precarity and Agency

What emerges from this synthesis is a deeply layered and often painful architecture of distress. It is a reality that simply outgrows traditional acculturation models to expose a permanent state of existential insecurity for the Myanmar diaspora. By looking closely at the raw disclosures from Ma Nan (Female, 19), Na Khu (Male, 18), and Ko Min (Male, 29), I have isolated the Transboundary Trap as the primary driver of this systemic psychological erosion. This discussion synthesizes the theories of Conservation of Resources (COR), Structural Violence, and Allostatic Load to interpret these findings as a totalizing system of biopolitical extraction. Within this brutal landscape, Somatic Agency stands as the final, irreducible site of resistance against the Machinery of Exhaustion.



The Resource Guillotine and the Collapse of Continuity: Analysis of the post-2021 landscape reveals an Epochal Rupture that functioned as a catastrophic Resource Guillotine, severing the life-path continuity of participants. While Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory posits a gradual depletion, I contend that for the Myanmar diaspora, the loss of Condition Resources occurred with a traumatic abruptness that creates a state of permanent Strategic Exile. The experience of Ma Nan stands as the empirical heartbeat of this study; her forced metamorphosis from a student to an undocumented laborer represents a total Ontological Fragmentation. Her somatic distress is the visceral sound of a projected future being dismantled in real-time. This confirms a grim reality of COR theory: those with the least capacity are the most vulnerable to further depletion. In Thailand, legal liminality is a manufactured scarcity—a biopolitical weapon used to block the production of Energy Resources (fair wages), effectively locking the migrant into a cycle of Predatory Efficiency.

Biopolitics and the Allostatic Load of Capture: This inquiry conceptualizes legal liminality as an active form of Structural Violence that dictates the biological reality of the migrant. I argue that legal uncertainty is strategically utilized as a tool of biopolitical control; it is an engineered state of Precarious Inclusion where the constant threat of arrest serves as a primary engine of submission. According to McEwen and Stellar's (1993) framework, this manifests as a devastating Allostatic Load, representing the cumulative wear and tear on the body's regulatory systems. For Ko Min, the workplace becomes a site of Absolute Capture; here, the slow violence of grueling 14 hour shifts and the ever present threat of the state are utilized to finance the costs of private industry at the expense of the individual's physiological integrity. This leads to a punishing Invisibility Paradox; to remain safe, the migrant must retreat into Strategic Invisibility. While this ensures survival from the state, it simultaneously severs access to life saving healthcare; the very act of hiding to stay alive thus becomes the primary mechanism of their physical and mental decline.

Reconceptualizing Resilience: Internal Governance of the Self: The model requires a pivot from passive tropes of coping toward an interrogation of Somatic Agency as a subversive, Internal Governance of the Self. My findings contend that culturally situated practices are active, meta-cognitive refusals to let the machinery of extraction define a migrant's humanity. For Ma Nan, solitary prayer and rhythmic somatic releases are acts of Epistemic Sovereignty; by reclaiming the rhythm of her own body, she creates a Somatic Sanctuary that remains beyond the reach of state surveillance. Similarly, Na Khu and Ko Min demonstrate that the internal policing of one's stress response, whether through stoic discipline or internal withdrawal, is a profound act of agency. This Spiritual and Somatic Agency is not simply a cultural trait; it is a sophisticated Internal Governance Structure used to sustain the self in a world where all other forms of citizenship have been stripped away. Ultimately, the migrant remains the supreme governor of their own interior landscape, providing the final defense against the Resource Loss Spiral.

The Transboundary Trap: Macro-Structural Determinants: The Transboundary Trap reveals that migrant mental health is no longer a localized phenomenon; it is the visceral manifestation of the symbiotic political and legal architectures governing both the home and host states. While traditional Social Exchange Theory often posits that migrants "accept" exploitation for relative stability, I contend that this stability is a coercive illusion. Ultimately the difference now lies in the Somatic Stakes. Historically a migrant could return home if the slow violence of Thailand became unbearable. The 2024 Law has slammed that door shut effectively locking the Double Loss Trap where the threat of return is as lethal as the exploitation of stay. Thai attitudes have not necessarily shifted in their level of empathy; rather the Thai state and private capital have recognized an unprecedented opportunity for total somatic extraction. They are no longer just hiring workers; they are managing a population that has nowhere else to exist. This creates a state of Precarious Inclusion where the migrant body is integrated into the Thai economy while their humanity is legally and psychologically occluded. This state of Managed Insecurity is maintained through the weaponization of legal ambiguity. Consistent with Berry's (1997) framework regarding social exclusion, these findings demonstrate that systemic isolation functions as an active institutionalized stressor. This calls for a paradigm shift: mental health interventions must be reimagined as Justice Oriented Policy Reforms. Reinforcing labor protections and transparent legal pathways are the fundamental neuro psychological interventions required to mitigate the Allostatic Load. Ultimately the policy is the prescription; the restoration of the migrant's mental well being is inextricably linked to the Quality of Governance and the dismantling of systems of predatory extraction.



Toward a Justice-Oriented Framework Policy Recommendations: To end this self-perpetuating cycle of transboundary harm, a paradigm shift toward Psychological Justice is required. This framework acknowledges that mental well-being is not a private luxury; rather, it is a Public Right which is currently being undermined by pervasive structural violence. Regarding host state policy, I argue for the urgent decoupling of protection from policing through the establishment of firewalled reporting architectures. Labor exploitation reporting must be legally isolated from immigration enforcement to ensure that the fundamental Right to a Voice is not tethered to documentation status. Additionally, enforcing labor rights, specifically by ending Temporal Extraction, must be viewed as a vital neuro-psychological intervention required to alleviate the terminal Allostatic Load. Support organizations should likewise evolve beyond generic counseling to provide specialized care for Ambiguous Loss or what this study terms Suspended mourning. Interventions should leverage community-based Somatic Sanctuaries to buffer against social fragmentation and provide safe spaces for the reclamation of somatic agency. Finally, regional stakeholders must acknowledge that the tactic of withholding legal identity is strategically counterproductive because it destroys the Human Capital necessary for future stability; therefore, trauma-informed governance must be viewed as a strategic investment in regional sustainability.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Toward a Justice-Oriented Framework

Synthesis of Transboundary Trauma and Somatic Distress: The evidence gathered compels a radical reassessment of the migrant experience, framed as an interlocking Resource Loss Spiral (Hobfoll, 1989). This trajectory of erosion initiates with the Moral Injury of an epochal, state-sponsored rupture and terminates in the Allostatic Overload inherent to undocumented labor. Findings suggest pre-migration trauma establishes a baseline of psychological vulnerability rooted in a betrayal of the individual's socio-moral fabric. Once in the host country, this is exploited through Structural Violence, where legal liminality is a strategic biopolitical tool used to enforce Predatory Efficiency. The documented emotional collapses stand as primary empirical markers of a biological system pushed past its regulatory limits. This Somatic Distress serves as physical proof of chronic Ambiguous Loss, where internal reserves are siphoned away by a constant Transboundary Affective Loop. Thus, the socio-political decay in the home country acts as a proximal determinant of the physiological decay in the host country.

Theoretical Contributions: The Invisibility Paradox and Internal Sovereignty: This study conceptualizes the Invisibility Paradox as a fundamental driver of Epistemic Injustice. In order to minimize the threat of deportation, people use Strategic Invisibility, limiting the cultural voice and creating learned helplessness, enabling Direct Predatory Extraction and violations of Bodily Autonomy. Conversely, the study theorizes the counter-hegemonic nature of Somatic Agency as a key mechanism of resistance. Through disciplined prayer and rhythmic releases, participants recover a sense of Internal Sovereignty explicitly denied by the legal architecture. This Somatic Decolonization secures Ontological Continuity in the face of the Machinery of Exhaustion.

Final Reflections Ultimately, the mental state of the migrant serves as a diagnostic barometer for the functioning of regional systems; the Resource Loss Spiral is a profound systemic failure. We must pivot from clinical tropes toward Epistemic Sovereignty, the fundamental right to safety and a voice. Findings prove that Internal Sovereignty is the last line of defense, yet even the most disciplined sanctuary has limits. When rhythmic release is silenced by physical collapse, or when internal withdrawal can no longer mask somatic tremors, the boundary of the self is breached. This breach is the definitive evidence of a failed governance architecture; it proves that internal resilience cannot repair the Moral Injury of forced displacement while the state remains committed to breaking the individual. In an era of mass precarity, the mental integrity of the migrant is the ultimate metric of justice; protecting the psychological well-being of the margins is a strategic necessity for sustainable reconstruction.

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iterative informed consent was secured from all individuals, and rigorous data sanitization and pseudonymization were utilized to ensure absolute participant safety within this high-risk environment.

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