

Getting By, Finding Hope: Oral History and Everyday Life of Myanmar Ethnic Nationalities in Baguio City, Northern Luzon, Philippines

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Abstract

This community-centered ethnographic and historical inquiry examines how Myanmar ethnic minority nationalities in Baguio reconstruct hope and negotiate everyday life amid the enduring effects of displacement, trauma, and reconfigured belonging. Focusing on Karen, Chin, Kachin, and other members of communities shaped by civil war and forced migration, the paper interrogates how life is reconstituted through ordinary practices such as ritual, work, education, storytelling, and communal interaction within an urban Philippine setting. In doing so, it situates these lived experiences within the longer presence of Myanmar nationals in Baguio since the 1980s, contributing to a historical understanding of their evolving demographic, cultural, and social footprint in the city.

As a preliminary phase of a broader project, the study engages five students and adults currently residing in Baguio who have experienced displacement in Myanmar and who consent to participate in oral history interviews and community workshops. Through in-depth life history narratives, participants reflect on formative childhood memories, trajectories of migration, and contemporary processes of adaptation in Baguio, including schooling, labor, religious practice, and everyday local encounters. These narratives are complemented by participant observation in neighborhoods and community gatherings, alongside facilitated storytelling sessions that foreground resilience, cultural continuity, and the articulation of preferred identities.

Moving beyond reductive trauma-centered frameworks, the study conceptualizes hope as an active and relational practice embedded in kinship networks, faith communities, educational aspirations, and mutual aid. By embedding oral history within the textures of urban everyday life, the project contributes not only to boarder Southeast Asian studies, but also to the development and trajectories of “Myanmar Studies” in the Philippines, foregrounding Baguio City as an emergent site of diasporic knowledge production and historical engagement.