

Case Study

The Death of Female Protestor Ma Kyal Sim (Angel)

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 20 April 2022 (Updated: 21-MAR-2022)

Warning: This report contains graphic imagery

Key Event Details

- **Location of incident:**
 - Crossing of 30th and 84th street, Chanayethazan, Mandalay
- **Date/Time of incident:** March 3, 2021, between 1200 and 1300
- **Number of people killed:** [38](#); alleged by the media
- **Number of people injured:** Unconfirmed
- **Attribution:** Military/Police *almost certainly* responsible based on visual evidence of other killings that day.
- **Myanmar Witness conclusions:**
 - Utilising open-source investigation techniques, Myanmar Witness has identified Angel at a Mandalay protest before she was shot, and her journey post-head injury. She died after being shot in the head allegedly by Myanmar security forces. Angel's grave site also suggests further tampering post-death by security forces, possibly to extricate incriminating physical evidence.
 - These coordinates were identified through the comparative analysis of User Generated Content (UGC) alongside satellite imagery, news, social media imagery, and eye-witness testimony.
 - The death of Angel continues a worrying trend of individuals being both injured and killed in protest events against the Myanmar Military.

Executive Summary

On 3 March 2021, 19-year-old Ma Kyal Sim (also known as Angel) was one of 38 people that died in Myanmar when the military intervened with force during a protest in Mandalay in order to suppress protest. The United Nations special envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, [described](#) this day as the “bloodiest day since the start of the coup on 1 February”.

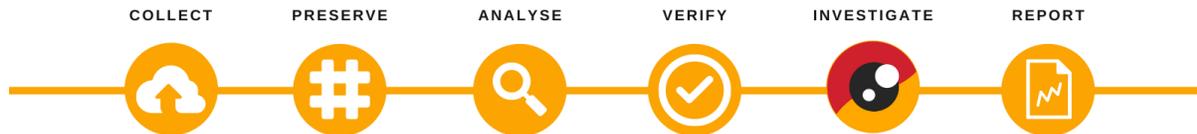
The death of Angel, and her involvement in the anti-coup protest movement, has been extensively reported on by international media, including the [New York Times](#), [BBC News](#), and [Reuters](#). Myanmar Witness has also verified her involvement with the anti-coup movement by investigating her related social media. Myanmar Witness contributes to the coverage of Angel’s death through the investigation and verification of events on the ground in the moments leading up to, and after, Angel’s death. This case forms part of a wider exploration on the killing of anti-coup protesters by the Myanmar military, with particular focus on the gendered aspect of such killings.

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Methodology

Myanmar Witness follows a methodology of digital preservation and rigorous, replicable analysis. Digital evidence is collected and archived in a secure database and preserved with hashing to confirm the authenticity and prevent tampering.



Geolocation is conducted using open source online tools such as Google Earth to match satellite imagery with visual features in the images. A high burden of proof is required to match imagery and geolocations are required to be cross-checked and peer-reviewed.

Chronolocation is typically conducted by analysing UGC timestamps to determine hard end limits for the possible time frame. This can then be followed with contextual analysis, for example comparing against known indicators such as events or clocks visible, weather, and shadows. Shadow angle is determined after geolocation and its orientation is used to determine the position of the sun and thus time.

Timeline of Angel's Death

The following timeline shows an overview of the established facts collected on the events that happened around the death of Angel. The evidence, footage and verification process will be shown in further stages of this report.

Last Identified User-Generated Content (UGC) Showing Angel Alive

- **Date:** 03 March 2021
- **Time:** Around 1200
- **Location:** Mandalay, Chanayetharzan, 21.977417, 96.077528
- **Comment:** Last piece of UGC identified by Myanmar Witness showing Angel alive

Angel Wounded or Dead

- **Date:** 03 March 2021
- **Time:** After 1200 but before 1300
- **Location:** Mandalay, Chanayetharzan, 21.974444, 96.077278
- **Comment:** Images of Angel either wounded or dead on the back of a motorcycle

Images of Angel Dead

- **Date:** 03 March 2021
- **Time:** From 1400 onwards (Myanmar time)
- **Location:** Unknown

- **Comment:** First images of Angel's corpse appearing on social media identified by Myanmar Witness

Funeral/Memorial Service and Burial

- **Date:** 04 March 2021
- **Time:** Unknown
- **Location:** Ceremony - [Yunnan Buddhist Temple](#); Cemetery - [Ayeyeiknyein Cemetery](#)
- **Comment:** Footage of Angels funeral service

Possible Disturbed Burial Site

- **Date:** 05 March 2021
- **Time:** Unknown
- **Location:** Cemetery - [Ayeyeiknyein Cemetery](#)
- **Comment:** Images and videos which indicate Angel's burial place was disturbed

Angel and the Anti-Coup Movement

According to [Reuters](#), Angel was an expert in martial arts as well as a dancer at a Mandalay dance club. Myanmar Witness also identified a YouTube [channel](#) run by Angel. A video included in such showed Angel wearing the same t-shirt as the one she wore when she was killed. Several posts on Angel's identified Facebook page indicate that she publicly opposed the military coup of 1 February 2021 and relates to her background in the anti-coup movement. Myanmar Witness have archived this content, but have redacted links to such from this report to preserve the safety of her friends and associates.



Figure 1: Posts from Angel's Facebook account demonstrating her opposition to the 1 February 2021 coup.

Verifying the Events Surrounding Angel’s Death

Build-up to Angel’s death

Identified user-generated content (UGC) from 3 March 2021, shows that Angel joined the anti-coup protests in Mandalay, alongside multiple other protestors. She was wearing a black shirt with the text “everything will be okay” in English (Figure 2). This t-shirt is the aforementioned shirt identified as being worn by Angel in a Youtube video available on her personal channel.

Images were also identified of a key card that Angel allegedly wore with her blood type and a note that she would like to donate her useful organs (Figure 2). A post on Angels’ Facebook account from 28 February 2021 correlated with the inclusion of this information in Figure 2, as it stated her intention to donate her organs in the event of her death. Myanmar Witness believes she was aware of the threat to her life and took these precautions knowing she may get injured or die.



Figure 2: (Left) Angel at the protest. (Right) a closeup of her lanyard displaying her vital medical details.

Myanmar Witness has documented several images and videos from social media that show Angel during the anti-coup protest movement on 3 March 2021. The majority of this content was taken on the crossing of 30th and 84th street, Chanayethazan in Mandalay, where protestors gathered and were surrounded by police and armed forces.

The situation at the start of a video posted by [Democratic Voice Burma](#) (DVB) shows the protestors looking for cover, the police and security forces lining up, and water and smoke – potentially teargas – being used against the protestors. Myanmar Witness has geolocated the scene depicted in this footage to 21.977429, 96.077563.

The following list includes content identified by Myanmar Witness depicting Angel before her death. Figure 3 below shows a composite overlay of this content.

- A video of Angel chanting “We are not going to run,” she yelled, in a video recorded by another protester. “Our people’s blood should not reach the ground.” (21.977407, 96.077534)
- Two photos of Angel during the protest.
- A video of Angel and other protesters, low at the ground, retreating away from the smoke - possibly teargas - being fired at them (21.977429, 96.077563).
- A photo of Angel and other protestors low on the ground on the crossroad with barricades and smoke in the background (21.977331, 96.077534).
- A video of Angel running away from the sound of gunshots, appearing to fall over blocks on the road (21.977227, 96.077500).

The Death of Angel

Angel died after being shot in the head during the 3 March protests. Images uploaded to social media show Angel being driven away on a motorbike, wounded or possibly dead, with blood appearing on her and in her hair. This image was geolocated to around 21.974442, 96.077284. Using the people and buildings in this image to calculate shadows, a window of time can be estimated and derived from the images. They show that they were taken around midday, sometime after 1200 but before 1300. Her injuries suggest what has been reported, that Angel was shot in the head while attending a protest.



Figure 4: Geolocation of the motorbike ride following Angel's injury or death. She is seen here with a head wound from being shot.

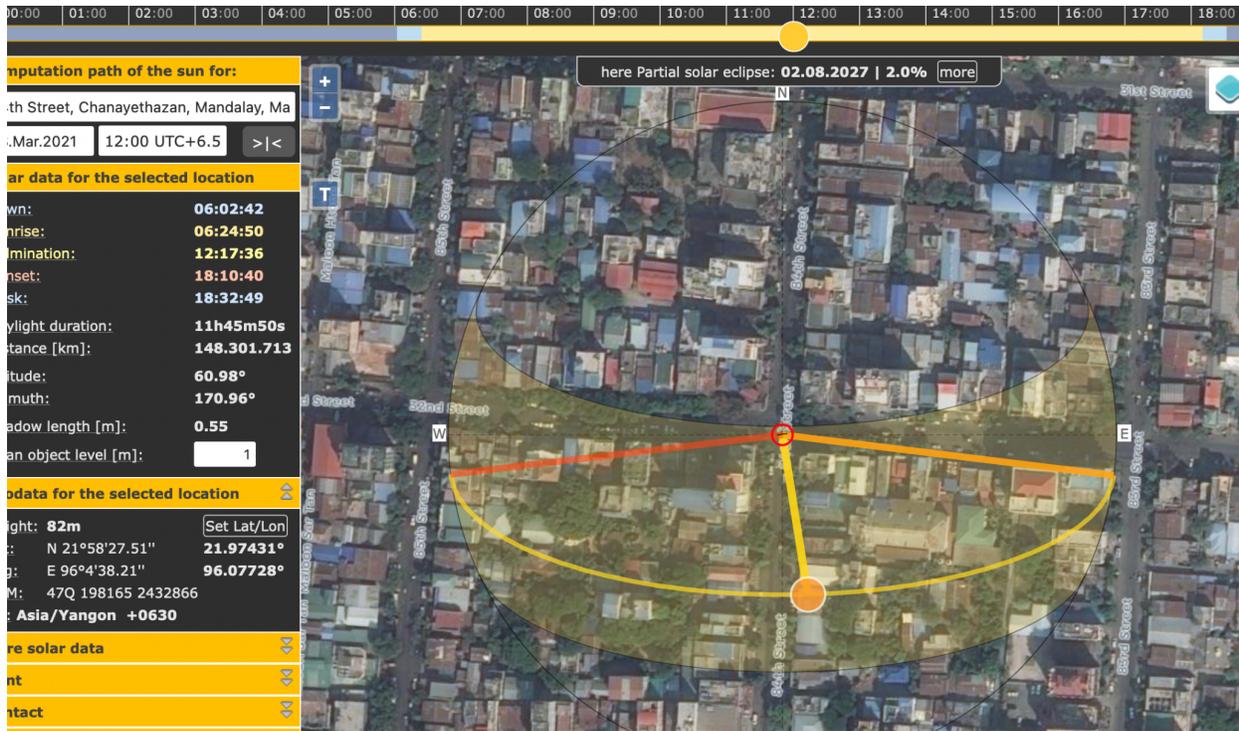


Figure 5: Chronolocation of the image using shadow analysis in SunCalc.

The images of Angel on the back of the motorbike do not show if Angel had died already, but from 1345 local time images of Angel's body started to appear online, meaning Angel had died before this time.



Figure 6: Angel's corpse seen with bloody bandages over her head.

Later, images appeared of a memorial site in the middle of the street, not far from where the protests happened. This might indicate that she died or was shot here, between the barricade and the images of Angel wounded on the back of a motorbike.



Figure 7: Memorial site in the street, believed to be at or near the location where Angel was shot.

After Angel's Death

Footage and images uploaded by [BBC World](#), [Radio Free Asia](#) and elsewhere online show Angel's ceremony, reported to have taken place the day after her death, on 4 March. These images have been geolocated by Myanmar Witness at the [Yunnan Buddhist Temple](#) in Mandalay. Many people gathered outside as her body was brought to the car, so she could be buried at the Ayeyeiknyei cemetery.



Figure 8: Geolocation of the gathering for Angel's memorial service at Yunnan Buddhist Temple.



Figure 9: Geolocation of the car departing the memorial service with Angel's body.

After the Funeral

[CNN reports](#) and social media posts claim that Angel's body had been exhumed from her grave in the [Ayeyeiknyein Cemetery](#) just hours after the funeral. A military [newspaper](#) and [Voice of Myanmar](#) have also claimed there was an investigation on Angel's body by security forces. State news media [Global New Light of Myanmar](#) (GNLM) seemingly confirm these reports with statements by Myanmar's police that claim this exhumation was directed in order

to conduct an autopsy and determine Angel's cause of death. They claim they had gained permission from a judge, but the specifics were not volunteered. According to CNN an eyewitness saw around twenty people with guns enter the graveyard between 1600 and 1900, implying suspicious circumstances and explicitly stating that a military vehicle was present. The person at the gate who let them in was allegedly 'not [to] inform anyone about it' according to CNN's coverage.



Figure 10: Angel's grave seen covered with cement after being tampered with in the night.

Footage uploaded by [Eleven Media](#), [Voice of Myanmar](#) and elsewhere online, show Angel's grave covered with cement and surrounded by a pile of flowers and paper signs with her name from the ceremony. As well as razor blades, rubber boots, shovels, and gloves can be seen (Figure 11). Alongside these objects, there also appears to be stains of blood. Since the tampering must have occurred more than 24 hours after Angel's death – and due to post-mortem lividity – if the blood stains came from Angel's body during this process it is likely to have been from an invasive procedure. The presence of a bloody brick, with blood concentrated down the leading edge, (Figure 12) suggests the blood may have been from impact and could possibly have been used by security forces on Angel's head. This possibility could explain the presence of other evidence including surgical tools and gloves found at the site.



Figure 11: Evidence left after her grave was tampered with, including surgical equipment and gloves.



Figure 12: (Left) the original photo; (right) Magenta-optimised photo to highlight blood stains. Brick found next to Angel's grave with bloodstains on it and on the ground. The blood stain pattern is strongest on the long edge and may have been from impact. This suggests that the brick may have been used to crack open her skull. Also note the surgical gloves.

The military announced on [Myanmar Radio and Television](#) (MRTV) and [Myawaddy News](#) (MWD) that neither they, nor the state police, were responsible for Angel's death. The police also released a statement through [GNLM](#) that they had determined that the bullet had not come from a police bullet, saying: "The lead piece found in the head was a type of ammunition that can be fired with a shotgun with 0.38 round of ammunition...", (Figure 13) adding that this ammunition is "different from the riot control bullets used by the Myanmar Police Force". The possibility of Angel's body having been tampered with, potentially using a brick on her head, also coincides with this state narrative focus on bullets used in the shooting, as they would be targeting her head where it might be possible to retrieve a bullet and dismiss the state narrative determining no security force accountability in Angel's death.



Figure 13: Image used in an article by the pro-government outlet GNLM showcasing the type of bullet they determined had killed Angel.

GNLM also said that although “the security guards on duty at the time of incident were in a face-to-face position to the crowd, the injury was in the back of the deceased”. This is true, however video footage geolocated by Myanmar Witness, believed to show the moment Angel was hit, demonstrates her running away from the police line as gunshots can be heard. She is seen falling to the ground, away from the police, with the back of her head facing them at around 21.977227, 96.077500. Myanmar Witness cannot confirm that Angel was shot in this footage, as this fall could also be from tripping over the bricks present in the footage.



Figure 14: Police line (red) firing at the crowd with Angel (yellow) running away and falling, possibly after being hit. She was facing away at the moment she fell which would be in contradiction with the official claims if her fall was due to being hit by a bullet.



Figure 15: Angel's grave, along with her death date and name.

Conclusion

The open source analysis conducted by Myanmar Witness clarifies and verifies many of the events surrounding Angel's death. The suspicious circumstances surrounding the presumed exhumation of the body from the grave coupled with evidence linking the security forces to other shootings that day strongly suggests the involvement of security forces in the killing of Angel. Myanmar Witness therefore concludes that the military or police were almost certainly responsible for her death and may have taken additional measures to tamper with evidence in a bid to prevent further investigation. This report is one of many by Myanmar Witness documenting violence against women in Myanmar and demonstrates the violence used against civilians exercising their right to freedom of assembly and association.