Can you imagine Clive Palmer and Tony Abbott sharing a bunk bed in a dormitory? Would Tony be annoyed by Clive’s snoring? Or would Clive be irritated by Tony’s early morning workout?

Well, there’s a place on earth where parliamentarians do live in dorms. Let me take you to Nay Pyi Taw, the new capital of Myanmar, formerly known as Burma. In 2010, after two decades of rule, the military decided to transform itself into a civilian government. But the parliament it created is overwhelmingly controlled by the pro-military party and ethnic minorities are co-opted into the parliament, to create the appearance of diversity and legitimacy while containing them in the dormitories to control their movements.

Co-optation is an effective strategy to maintain political order.

So what is co-optation in simple language? It means making your opponent part of your group. Here’s an example. How does Australia co-opt its neighbours? Well, by offering development assistance such as scholarship at the universities.

But co-optation is not that simple in Myanmar.

These colourful mannequins in the Myanmar parliament represent over 100 ethnic nationalities. The ruling party expects ethnic MPs to be silent, like these mannequins. But can it do that?

My research looks at how ethnic parties respond to co-optation strategy of the ruling party.

During my fieldwork, I stayed with ethnic MPs, observed their work and enjoyed sobering midnight interviews in their dorms. I was able to observe their strategies up close and personal and noticed how they were manipulating the ruling party.

My research argues that ethnic MPs are able to divert the co-optation strategy not only for their interest but also for democratic reform not by confronting but by building trust. Interestingly, sharing dorm with the ruling party proves to be effective because of the friendship networks it created - probably not what the ruling party was expecting, right?

My research will be an important contribution to the countries in transition proving that being co-opted is not a bad idea after all.

So Clive, if Tony wants to co-opt you, let him sleep in your bunk beds. Obviously, he’ll have to be on top.