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Making Myanmars

Language, Territory, and Belonging in Post-Socialist Burma

Mary P. Callahan

In the 1990s, an elite-level struggle over political power in Burma remapped the politics of belonging and language in the country for the first time in over a century. National borders did not change, but an internal divider that marked off the unquestioned political center from its attendant margins suddenly became permeable and contentious. First established as a colonial administrative simplification in the late nineteenth century, this boundary between the central areas and what became known as the "Frontier" or "Excluded" areas demarcated where politics happened, who could be what kind of citizen or subject, and which language would animate struggles for power throughout the twentieth century. After political independence in 1948, the colonial-established distinction between center and margins persisted until just after the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, which sprang up mostly in the central region. The uprising toppled the weak Burma Socialist Program Party regime, but the struggle for control over the successor state took several years to play out. Along the way, the seemingly solid barrier between the center and frontier became porous, destabilizing the spatial logic that had characterized and pacified political conflict in the modern era. After 1988, ethnic minority populations long held in ambivalent categories of lesser citizenship and territory that rarely crossed the central state's radar screen became potentially formidable threats to those in power in the center. As a result, populations in these formerly more marginal areas began to find their behavior and language under the optic of the central state, and the century of the latter's disinterestedness was replaced by the demands and commands of citizenship in an authoritarian political system. This process has produced a range of new kinds of contacts, negotiations, enterprises,

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trespasses, and struggles, all of which challenge the spatial logic of power that mapped politics in Burma in the colonial and postcolonial eras.

Among these new interactions and struggles is an unprecedented state-engineered redefinition of the terms of belonging in Burma. This redefinition entails the most concerted government effort at minority assimilation and disempowerment in the twentieth century and has at times endangered those who conduct their affairs outside the home in an indigenous language other than Burmese (the language the regime now calls "Myanmar"), the language of the centrally based ethnic-majority group that comprises about 65 percent of the national population. This state's language requirement has become especially clear in the realm of education. For example, in the 1990s, the teaching of the ethnic minority, Mon language in southern Burma, an area where a former rebel group (the New Mon State Party (NMSP)) concluded a cease-fire agreement with the military junta in 1995, became a dangerous enterprise. Thein Lwin writes that "the teachers of the Mon language and literature run the risk to be punished by the [Rangoon] government authorities. Some teachers have been arrested." In 1998, the government shut down 120 Mon schools, stranding 6,000 students. Subsequent negotiations between the New Mon State Party's education committee and the junta led to the reopening of the schools, but "the teaching of the Mon language and literature was not officially allowed."[1] In most regions beyond the center where the government has established any kind of authority, non-Burmese languages may be studied only in the first few years of education, but not after fourth grade or outside of school hours. Religion, too, has been a target of this linguistic intolerance by the regime. For example, in 1991, two Mon Buddhist monks and a Rangoon University lecturer were arrested for trying to promote usage of Mon, a historic language by which Buddhism was introduced to Burma.

Until the 1990s, the central state may have proclaimed the intention of making Burmese the only public language across the territory that spanned to the British-drawn borders, but it never committed any significant resources, political will, or criminal sanctions to back up such a proclamation in geographical areas beyond the colonially designated central region. This chapter attempts to explain why all this changed after the pro-democracy uprising in 1988. The chapter begins by explaining how the elite-level political struggle

[1] Thein Lwin, "The Teaching of Ethnic Language and the Role of Education in the Context of Mon Ethnic Nationality in Burma: Initial Report of the First Phase of the Study on the Thai-Burma Border, November 1999–February 2000," available online at http://www.students.ncl.ac.uk/thein.lwin (accessed May 29, 2000). The Mon case is the most documented of minority-language persecution, in part because of the ongoing research of one graduate student. There are also reports of the military regime eliminating other minority languages from school curricula. See coverage of the issue in Chin schools in *Burmanet News*, issue 405, May 12, 1996; the issue of language repression is highlighted more generally in Amnesty International, *Myanmar Ethnic Minorities: Targets of Repression*, ASA 16/014/2001, June 2001.

in Rangoon after 1988 destabilized the predictable, century-old, territorially bound mode of power politics, leaving the military exposed and vulnerable in the absence of a clearly defined set of rules as to how to consolidate and to maintain its power. I argue that in its effort to impose form and order over the political chaos in the center, the military elevated language affairs to a national agenda, newly mapped all the way out to the borders drawn around the country by British surveyors. Language became one tool in the regime's broader efforts to rebuild the post-1988 state and pacify the population.

The chapter then steps back and considers why language in these remote regions never appeared on a Rangoon regime's agenda before 1988 and considers the way the evolution of language policy was conditioned by territorially defined ideas about and practices of politics. The following section analyzes the military's response to the 1988 political crisis, which was to deploy a series of counterinsurgency-type tactics to try to reorder the practices of politics and to create new boundaries to define and enforce the terms under which the population throughout the country could belong, be left alone, or be heard. At the heart of the regime's reconstruction process was its attempt to create, to deploy, and to animate a new racialized definition of citizenship. This new Myanmar citizen was to be born out of programs of homogenization and differentiation, both of which aimed at rebuilding the state and pacifying the population. In this process, the regime's activities established new markers for how language could (and could not) be used by native Burmese speakers and new demands for linguistic homogeneity among those whose first languages were different. Drawing new boundaries around who belongs, what one can belong to, and how one can express belonging, however, inevitably produces unintended consequences, which are covered in the conclusion of the chapter.

Before proceeding, it is important to note the limitations of the argument here. The chapter does not attempt to impute subjective feelings of belonging to any populations – elite or otherwise – in Burmese territory. Given that very little systematic anthropological research has been conducted among any populations inside or outside the center in more than fifty years, the essay cannot even assume any integrity to the categories of ethnicity and linguistic identity long assumed to be "real" or "natural" by scholars and practitioners of Burmese ethnic politics. Instead, this chapter analyzes the quite serious and equally unprecedented attempt by a Rangoon regime to fabricate a monolingual body politic mapped across spaces long considered beyond the realm of politics in pre-1988 Burma.

Why Non-Burmese Languages Became Dangerous

The political struggle between the military regime established in 1988 and the opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi brought ethnic minority cultural and language politics into dangerous new

terrain for the first time in modern history. Prior to 1988, postcolonial politics, belonging, and citizenship mapped to the central plains, Irrawaddy Delta, and southeastern archipelagic areas – all constituent parts of the region originally targeted for direct rule by British colonial officials, who called this territory "Burma Proper" or "Ministerial Burma." In the colonial and early postcolonial eras, struggles over who would rule and who would be disenfranchised pitted various groups of ethnic Burmans against Chinese, Indian, and other lowland indigenous groups all living in these central regions. There was never much more than lip service paid to populations living in the territory beyond, which the British called by a number of evocative names, including the "frontier fringe" or the "Excluded Areas."[2] By the 1960s, ethnic minorities living in the central region had been eliminated from political contention, but various ethnic Burman elites continued to compete among themselves for the power, resources, and prestige associated with the independent state. These intra-elite struggles remained remarkably fixed in their central territorial domain. Centrally based contenders rarely recruited ethnic minorities who lived beyond the colonial-designated center in any notable fashion. On the rare occasions that Burman politicians sought support from non-Burman leaders outside the center, they built neither durable nor successful coalitional forces.[3] From the viewpoint of elites in the center, there were neither potential political allies nor equal citizens in the regions beyond. This perception was reinforced in the 1950s and 1960s, when separatist insurgencies broke out in the remote, former frontier regions, capturing the attention and sacrificing the young of the *tatmadaw* (Burmese for "armed forces" of the national state) without ever really threatening the spatial logic of national-level politics. Since none of these "rebel" groups considered Rangoon a target or a prize to be won, remote territory and its inhabitants rarely stirred the imaginations of political rivals and contenders in Rangoon and environs.

All this changed in 1989, when opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi began touring the country and crossing the seemingly impermeable boundary between center and margin that only the *tatmadaw* had crossed before. In trips and speeches to ethnic minority communities far from Rangoon, beyond the center, she canvassed this "new" terrain for political allies, along the way inspiring the creation of local incarnations of her political party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). Appearing at times in ethnic

[2] This territorial hierarchy of administration persisted in postcolonial constitutions. For example, under the 1974 constitution, the former frontier areas (mapped almost identically to the colonial "frontier") was divided into "states" comprised mostly of ethnic minority populations. Under that constitution, central Burma – which was populated mostly by ethnic Burmans – was divided into administrative units called "divisions."

[3] The only significant attempts at legal multiethnic political coalitions came in 1958 and 1960, when Prime Minister U Nu promised concessions to Arakanese and Mon politicians in return for support for his flailing government and subsequent electoral campaign, respectively.

minority costumes – a Karen *htamein* (sarong) or a Shan *khamauk* (conical peasant hat) – she captured the attention and affections of long-ignored populations. Perhaps most evocative was her party's decision to use a drawing of that Shan *khamauk* as the ballot pictogram indicating a candidate's membership in the NLD; the symbolism of the *khamauk* connecting Aung San Suu Kyi to populations beyond the center was lost on no one.[4] Of course, on these tours, Aung San Suu Kyi spoke in Burmese, and just like the army in its past counterinsurgency campaigns in these regions, she also employed translators to convey at least parts of her message to non-Burmese-speaking populations. It worked, and in the 1990 election, the NLD won 392 out of the 425 seats it contested for the new parliament. Nineteen ethnic minority parties also won parliamentary seats, with most of the victors sympathetic to the goals of the NLD.

This parliament was never permitted to meet, as the military regime quickly began disqualifying, arresting, or chasing out of the country many of the victorious opposition candidates. Ultimately, the junta – called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC; in 1997 renamed the State Peace and Development Council, or the SPDC) – squashed the opposition's attempts to build a multiethnic political coalition that crossed the boundary between center and margins. SLORC came to view that experiment in coalition building as the single greatest threat to the military's power and to Burma's continued existence as a unitary state spreading to the British-drawn borders. The military's response does not suggest that Aung San Suu Kyi and the opposition had in fact built an integrated multiethnic coalition of forces that successfully rendered irrelevant the old interior divide between center and frontier. But it does highlight the panic that the mere possibility of such an alliance inspired in the military. In the aftermath of the bloody, divisive 1988 uprising, military leaders calculated correctly that the army did not have the capability to fight battles in border regions and in Rangoon should an alliance develop between the NLD in central Burma and armed, ethnic minority rebels beyond the center. In the new order of post-Socialist politics, the SLORC/SPDC[5] no longer could afford to concede border regions as irrelevant to struggles for power in Rangoon but could less afford to move troops away from the rebellious central region to deal with tensions beyond.

As a result, the junta tried to drive a wedge between potential allies in the center and frontiers by launching a somewhat coordinated political campaign to march peripheral populations into national formation according to

[4] Pictograms of every party appeared on the ballot, in recognition of the population's multilingual nature as well as of the quite serious problem of illiteracy nationwide.

[5] The conflation of the two names of the regimes from 1988–97 and post-1997 into "SLORC/SPDC" is deliberate. While the SPDC reorganization of November 1997 did represent some realignment of power among particular generals in Burma, on the surface, the post-1997 SPDC has not shown any serious deviation from previous policies of SLORC.

the military's security-focused terms. For the SLORC/SPDC, the populations of the border areas had to be embraced and remade into "Myanmars," and it accordingly launched a singular cultural heritage industry along with development and educational initiatives in both the center and the former frontier areas. While this attempt to fabricate "Myanmar" and "Myanmar" speakers is analyzed more carefully below, here it is important to note that this component of the regime's response to the transethnic oppositional threat sent a warning to minorities living beyond the center: They will belong to the nation-state on the terms set in Rangoon, at regional military headquarters, and by local military garrisons. The warning instructed minorities that they are, always have been, and always will be "Myanmars," the new putatively biological, racial category constructed by the regime. As a regime spokesperson noted on the educational components of these identity-producing campaigns in the border regions, "National races [i.e., ethnic minorities] residing in the border areas will then be able to think correctly and work together resolutely for reconsideration of national races through common awareness and objective and correct belief and conviction."[6]

This emphasis on teaching citizens to "think correctly" is not new in the history of Burmese politics, but what is new is the fervor with which this campaign has been carried out over more than a decade. Over the last fifty years, Rangoon regimes always have framed their formal policies toward ethnic minorities living beyond the central region as programs aimed at teaching "backward" peoples how to think correctly – that is, to think with a Union mentality (1950s), as Socialists (1962–88), and now (since 1988) as authentic and pure "Myanmars." During the first two time periods, however, one could think, speak, read, and write correctly in any indigenous language, as long as the content of one's utterances were pro-Union and later pro-Socialist. Since 1988, however, the regime's cultural homogenization programs suggest that thinking correctly must be done in "Myanmar" language; any diversity threatens all "Myanmars." Thinking incorrectly is dangerous, as is teaching and preaching in non-Burmese indigenous languages.

Language, Boundaries, and Belonging before 1988

Burma is quite unusual by Southeast Asian standards in that until 1995, its postcolonial governments had never directly promulgated any *coordinated* or *systematic* set of regulations regarding language policy.[7] By "language policy" or "language administration," I mean actions by state officials at all

[6] Lt. Col. Thein Han, "Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar: Unity in Diversity," in *Human Resource Development* (Yangon: Ministry of Defence, 1998), p. 218.

[7] For comparisons with Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, see the case studies in Michael Brown and Sumit Ganguly, *Fighting Words: Language Policies and Ethnic Conflict in Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

levels of the state administrative hierarchy that explicitly compel social and political actors to communicate in the public sphere in a specific language. Nonetheless, language has always been an integral component of the formal government regulations, popular and elite prejudices, and force-backed commands that have constituted and enforced citizenship and belonging in this country. Hence, it is necessary to trace the often uncoordinated and not terribly calculated actions of government and social forces toward administration of language and "correct" thinking.

Before the 1990s, the politics of language were limited to the central arena in which struggles for national power transpired. Throughout the entire territory of Burma's nation-state, more than a hundred languages are spoken, although precise numbers of speakers, dialects, and language families are unknown. In fact, the last attempt to collect statistics on numbers of home speakers or mother-tongue speakers of each language was in 1931, when the British Census of India attempted to group populations into categories according to language. One census official noted with great consternation that "some of the races or tribes in Burma change their language almost as often as they change their clothes."[8] Census takers confronting this bewildering and fluid ethnolinguistic pastiche in 1931 created dozens of new racial categories, finally settling on a figure of 135 races. Until recently, postindependence governments downplayed difference and from 1948 to 1988 recognized only seven major "nationalities" (minorities) in the country. The fact that no subsequent government has seen fit to collect information on languages and their speakers presumably arises from this postindependence political project aimed at discounting the diversity of the population while promoting instead its unity-building programs.[9] Somewhat surprisingly, this data avoidance was continued by the post-1988 military junta, even while it reinvigorated the 135-race framework of the 1931 census in its attempt to divide ethnic minority groups from each other and block political alliances among them and other regime opponents.

This variance in the numbers of ethnolinguistic categories created and embraced by colonial and postcolonial governments before 1988 did not affect the mapping or substance of language politics in Burma throughout the first ninety years of the twentieth century. Throughout this period, the politics of language centered on the territory mapped to "Burma Proper" and focused on a singular and contentious programmatic ambition: to establish one language as the language of administration in the colonial period and of the nation-state after independence in 1948. During British rule,

[8] Census Commissioner, Government of India, *Census of India, 1931*, vol. 11, part 1, p. 245.

[9] Anna Allott, "Language Policy and Language Planning in Burma," in David Bradley, ed., *Language Policy: Language Planning and Sociolinguistics in South-East Asia* (Canberra: Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1985), p. 131.

anticolonial, nationalist organizations pressed for the recognition and elevation of Burmese to official status, along with the associated demotion of the languages of colonial collaborators, the Indians and Chinese. Conflict over language in the central region was less between speakers of English and Burmese than it was between Burmese speakers and other non-English-speaking populations. At stake was who would hold postcolonial political power. After independence in 1948, Burmese-speaking elites launched in the central regions a new industry of language "modernization" – that is, unification, standardization, and translation – aimed at elevating Burmese to the status of "national language." Under parliamentary rule in the 1950s, the newly independent, ethnic Burman–dominated government supported the founding of the Burma Translation Society (BTS) in 1948. Later the University of Rangoon opened a Translation and Publications Department. The BTS formed committees on history, science, and the creation of a dictionary and an encyclopedia and by 1965 had produced more than 5 million copies of books in fields such as science, arts, history, Burmese culture, and education. The Vocabulary Committee's forty terminology subcommittees boasted of translating 65,000 technical terms from sixteen specialized subjects and assigning them standardizable Burmese equivalents for a "vocabulary bank."[10] Commissioned in 1949, the Burmese Encyclopedia began appearing volume by volume in the early 1960s. The Socialist government (1962–88) continued and expanded on these language-enhancement programs. During the Socialist period, the aim of policies that affected language usage was to turn everyone – especially Burmans but also non-Burmans – into Socialists first and foremost, or at least to provide everyone with linguistic tools that would allow them to express Socialist ideology in public. Notably, other identity or community linkages were politically irrelevant as long as Socialism came first.

Inside central Burma, language policies did not provoke much resistance.[11] In fact, a Burmese dictionary, vocabulary bank, and translated texts constituted the logical elements of an official language, which for all elite-level political contenders was one uncontested requirement for a modern nation-state. Given that no significant elites in the central region were excluded from access to this language, this "modernization" of Burmese was

[10] Howard Hayden, *Higher Education and Development in South-East Asia: Country Profiles*, vol. 2 (Paris: UNESCO, 1967), p. 56.

[11] There was remarkably little debate about which regional dialect should be designated the "official" language, which is probably a reflection of how few major differences exist among the dozen or so dialects of Burmese. Moreover, no one seriously questioned the idea that one dialect should be crowned "official." On regional dialects, see John Okell, *A Reference Grammar of Colloquial Burmese*, part I (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), and his "Three Regional Dialects," in David Bradley, ed., *Studies in Burmese Languages*, Papers in Southeast Asian Languages No. 13 (Canberra: Department of Linguistics, Australian National University, 1995), pp. 1–138; and Minn Latt Yekhaun, *Modernization of Burmese* (Prague: Oriental Institute in Academia, 1966), pp. 62–3.

seen as a "natural" and unproblematic step in the decolonization process.[12] Prior to 1988, this modernization project spurred conflict only once, when in the 1960s, the Upper Burma Writers' Association in Mandalay which argued in favor of simplifying the quite formal writing style.[13] These writers called for abandoning this inaccessible literary style entirely and replacing it with the colloquial style of Burmese. The writers argued that this reform would accelerate the social revolution under way in Burma, by making literacy more achievable for uneducated peasants and workers. The Burma Socialist Program Party government, backed by the Rangoon-based literati, rejected this proposal, claiming that serious matters of state simply cannot be expressed in a lowly colloquial language. The latter was said to have lacked the prestige, dignity, and authority required of an official language of a modern nation-state.[14]

It is important to note that throughout the postcolonial era leading up to 1988, national leaders' concerns about the politics, cultures, and languages of the frontier regions remained of secondary significance, while the major struggles that dominated national-level politics were still over control of the state based in Rangoon. Because the map of political contention was limited to the center, language policy and administration rarely spilled very far over the internal boundary between center and margin. By drawing borders that became internationally recognized, the colonial state had assigned ethnic minorities in remote locations to the territory that became the Burmese nation-state after 1948. That these populations were equally mapped out of the political struggles and imaginations of the center by the colonial state's internal territorial/administrative grid made it unlikely that Rangoon-based elites would ever care about delivering on the goods of citizenship to these territorially and linguistically distinct populations.

From the frontier areas, however, the view of central proclamations about officializing Burmese and forging national unity was one of threat, intrusion,

[12] During the first decade after independence, non-Burman political and economic elites in the central regions did not consider the elevation of Burmese to be terribly onerous. Most Chinese and Indians spoke Burmese as a second language, and they were still able to send their children to private schools where their mother tongues were used in instruction. Moreover, Martin Smith notes that minority presses "thrived" during this era, and at least eleven newspapers were published in minority languages in central Burma. See his "Unending War," *Index on Censorship* 23, no. 3 (July/August 1994): 113–18.

[13] Burmese language is communicated in two very different styles – one is formal, literary, written Burmese and the other is spoken, colloquial Burmese. In general, literary style is used in formal writing, nonfiction books, newspapers, school readers, comic books, and the narrative portions of serious novels, while colloquial style is used in everyday conversation, classroom lectures, informal letters, and in the dialogue sections of novels. There is "a considerable degree of variation between usages, grammatical forms, and constructions" appropriate to each style. See Okell, *A Reference Grammar of Colloquial Burmese*, p. xii.

[14] Allott, "Language Policy"; Julian Wheatley, "Burmese," in Bernard Comrie, ed., *The World's Major Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 834–55.

and belonging-by-command. This outlook contributed to the emergence in the late 1950s of armed separatist movements seeking political concessions that ranged from increased cultural, economic, and political autonomy from Rangoon to outright political independence. There also emerged a legal united front of representatives of several frontier populations, which many called the "Federal Movement." This group formulated demands to replace the Burman-dominated "Union" constitutional framework with a more explicitly and substantively federal one and forced the issue on to the agenda of the government in Rangoon. When the Federal Movement held a series of high-profile meetings in the capital in 1962, the military accused the civilian-led government of preparing to give away territory to Federal Movement leaders. This became the justification for the military's coup d'etat in 1962. In fact, movement leaders, who negotiated and argued in English and Burmese, demanded not that they separate their territory and administration from Burma but that minority populations simply obtain greater access to the decisions that affected the definitions and methods of belonging to the postcolonial national society. They wanted to be heard in Rangoon. When this movement was crushed by the army in its 1962 coup, many of its backers went into armed rebellion against the government. The military's Revolutionary Council (which initiated the transition to the Socialist government) immediately embarked on a propaganda campaign to broadcast the Socialists' unity theme in the border regions where separatist violence was escalating. As F. K. Lehman argued, many in these regions interpreted the propaganda as a warning that "adherence to a minority cultural tradition is treated as tantamount to subversion of the nation and is branded as a mark of group inferiority within the nation."[15]

Even more directly confrontational was the Socialist government's revision of citizenship laws in 1982, which created three categories of citizens: full, associate, and naturalized. The new requirements made it very difficult for many indigenous minorities throughout the former frontier areas to qualify for anything better than "associate" citizenship.[16] Full citizenship required presentation of government identification cards, which in many cases had never been issued in large parts of rebel-held or even government-held territory where minority populations could not communicate in the language required for the application. Josef Silverstein notes that in a large number of cases, these minorities "lost their equal standing with other indigenous peoples of Burma and were treated as stateless."[17] Such people were

[15] F. K. Lehman, "Ethnic Categories in Burma and the Theory of Social Systems," in Peter Kunstadter, ed., *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 104.

[16] Josef Silverstein, "Fifty Years of Failure in Burma," in Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly, eds., *Government Policies and Ethnic Relations in Asia and the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 167–96.

[17] Ibid., p. 182.

required to hold a Foreigners' Registration Card, which effectively barred them from many occupations and disqualified their children from entrance to the university. Hence, while the Socialist regime preached the necessity for unity throughout the nation-state's territory, its practices and policies neither questioned nor allowed any public reflection over the boundary between the center and its margins. The center was where politics happened, full citizens lived, and Burmese was the currency of public life; in the margins, social affairs were considered "local," lesser citizens lived out "primitive" existences, and language was by definition not a public activity, since the public had been territorially limited to the center.

To summarize, until the 1990s, all postcolonial regimes in Burma expressed formal concerns and issued proclamations about the populations inhabiting the former frontier areas, but these matters were always of secondary importance to intra-elite struggles over who controlled state power in the central region. Even the literacy campaign of the 1960s, which could have been the perfect tool for assimilating a wide swath of citizens across the British-drawn territorial divide between center and periphery, took more than fifteen years to stumble into minority terrain and ultimately had little impact. Despite the center's apparent neglect of these frontier regions, the activities of ethnic Burman elites regarding language and identity were viewed by populations beyond the center as anything but benign or neutral. Many in these regions saw themselves under political, cultural, and linguistic siege from Rangoon. The monolingual bent to all colonial and postcolonial language policy universalized standards and requirements for public language without universalizing access to channels through which large numbers of citizen speakers and writers could have some say over the new requirements. As Bourdieu writes, this involved "the imposition of the dominant language and culture as legitimate and . . . the rejection of all other languages into indignity (thus demoted as patois or local dialects). By rising to universality, a particular culture or language causes all others to fall into particularity."[18] Until the 1990s, no postcolonial regime deliberately forced Burmese on the frontier peoples, but the official functionality of Burmese certainly endowed it with a kind of prestige and potentially a financial payoff that non-Burmese mother tongues would not be able to match in the era of monolingual nation-states.

Language and Belonging in the "Myanmar" Era

As noted above, of all the criticism and resistance that the junta has faced since 1988, it clearly found most threatening Aung San Suu Kyi's 1989–90 popularity with minority populations, in both rebel-held and

[18] Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 46.

government-held territory. The threat of an alliance between opposition groups in the center and in the border regions pushed the military into quite dramatic responses. First, not surprisingly, it carried out a massive expansion of the army and an unprecedented arms modernization plan, so that the *tatmadaw* would never be vulnerable to an onslaught from armed rebels allied across the old center-margins divide. More surprising was SLORC's creative engineering of nonmilitary ways to come between the urban-based NLD and its potential allies in the frontier regions. Toward this end, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt initiated cease-fire negotiations with ethnic rebel groups in 1989. Over the next several years, seventeen of the twenty-one major antigovernment forces with as many as 50,000 troops concluded cease-fire agreements with SLORC. These arrangements should not be taken to indicate a shift toward center-frontier reconciliation. Instead, these are nothing more than temporary, ad hoc solutions to the political conflict between Rangoon and the minority populations scattered throughout the border regions. The cease-fires merely bought the junta the opportunity to redirect troops to the center, where the 1988 crisis was felt more deeply. Notably, the cease-fires already have broken down in a number of regions.

As these cease-fire agreements began to fall into place, the shape of the government's strategy for imposing order over what appeared to be the breakdown of the long-manageable, territorialized order of national politics began to emerge. For the first time since the British established the two administrative zones in this colony, a Rangoon regime launched a somewhat coordinated campaign to deal with the centrifugal impulses created by the century-old spatial logic of politics. This campaign entailed the most concerted government effort at minority assimilation and disempowerment in the twentieth century. It started with a number of makeshift, not terribly well-thought-out solutions to what the military defined as the national crisis of 1988. Over the last decade and a half, these practices and proclamations have evolved into an unparalleled obsession with producing cultural homogeneity and purity, while at the same time exoticizing and infantilizing the ethnic minority populations. It might seem contradictory to be pressing for homogeneity and unity among the citizenry of Burma, while also differentiating groups within the population as primitive, tourist-attracting, exotic creatures. But for this military, homogenization and differentiation were integral parts of the same offensive against the disintegration of political order. The 1988 crisis, in the view of the *tatmadaw*, was caused by national disunity. The junta's offensive against disunity had two spatially demarcated objectives: to purify the polluted oppositional politics in the center that brought on the 1988 crisis and to render legible (and hence controllable) the formerly excluded populations in the remote regions.[19] Homogenization

[19] On the concept of legibility, see James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).

and differentiation strategies carried slightly different messages to populations in the center and the margins, but these activities all aimed at producing manageable citizens across both these spaces.

Differentiation

The emphasis on exoticizing minorities and differentiating identity-producing association is not entirely new in Burma, nor at all unusual among Burma's neighbors. During the Socialist era, the Burma Socialist Program Party routinely dragged representatives of the major nationality (i.e., minority) groups into Rangoon on Union Day every February to perform folk dances at the National Theatre, while also supporting the translation of some minority folklore into English or Burmese for publication. And next door in Thailand, the government's emphasis on promoting tourism beyond simply its sex resorts resulted in windfall profits for those who tapped into the most "authentic" hill tribes to whom western tourists pay to be introduced. What was unusual about the differentiation programs carried out by SLORC/SPDC in the 1990s was that their scale and complexity was so much grander than the annual theatrical productions of previous postcolonial regimes. Moreover, their target appeared to be domestic audiences (in both the center and beyond), not dollar-laden foreign tourists as in Thailand.

The first expansion on this scale of differentiation came during the negotiations over cease-fires with former ethnic minority insurgents, when the then-SLORC Chairman Sr. Gen. Saw Maung reinvigorated the colonial categorization of indigenous peoples into 135 races. The latter probably appealed to Saw Maung as a classic counterinsurgency (and colonial) divide-and-conquer strategy to limit the size of the groups that might make common claims on the government, so as to weaken their bargaining positions. Over the next decade, the regime brought thousands of actors, musicians, artists, dancers, and writers not just for Union Day but for celebrations of any national holiday, as well as a whole range of new state productions, competitions, and spectacles. Government-authorized textbooks for schools and universities inserted images of ethnic minority figures alongside *tatmadaw* soldiers into drawings representing significant events in Burmese history. In the 1990s, the high-circulation, pop-culture magazine, *Myet-khin-thet* (published by the military intelligence directorate), routinely carried what must have been costly full-color photos of the most exotic of Burma's minority populations, such as the Pao or Palaung. The first nightclubs authorized to open in Rangoon in 1992 all included stage shows in which dancers and musicians (often ethnic Burmans wearing minority costumes) performed "traditional" minority dances, songs, or acts; many foreigners and Burmese in the audiences were not sure which minority was being depicted, and there were often discussions about what the "real" name of the group was that was on display onstage.

Traffic in this differentiation has been two-way across the century-old internal boundary between center and periphery, but the traffickers in each

direction are quite different groups of people and are carrying out quite different parts of the regime's program to rebuild the state and pacify the post-1988 society. The regime has tightly controlled the route from the border areas to the center, allowing a trickle of ethnic minority representatives (artists, musicians, former-insurgents-turned-drug-warlords) hand-picked by the regime. The endpoint for them has been some kind of regime spectacle, wherein they played roles ranging from the primitive, childish tribesperson displayed in a festival or competition to the expensively attired, well-armed druglords who proclaim their allegiance to SLORC/SPDC at opening ceremonies for their new banks, toll roads, and office buildings. The audience for these spectacles has been strictly limited to the territory of the center and, more specifically, the performances target those who marched in the streets in 1988 (or were sympathetic to the marchers) but have gone back to quiet lives since the crackdown. The message has been a warning: "These people from beyond the center are not like you; we (the military) will keep the uncivilized primitives and dangerous druglords under control on your behalf." In a sense, then, this warning tries to shore up the old colonial internal boundary, in an effort to keep potential allies territorially separate and, more importantly, incapable of thinking of each other as equal political partners.

By contrast, the traffic from the center out to the margins has been more crowded, mainly with military officers and foot soldiers, as well as a handful of Chinese, Burman, and other entrepreneurs looking for economic opportunities. As in the case of a hearts-and-minds counterinsurgency operation, the military typically has arrived in the remote areas championing the cause of a particular kind of differentiation. What it has wanted the local populations to hear and process was this: "We respect you, and encourage you to escape whatever oppression you may have encountered at the hands of your distant ethnic cousins; you deserve separate recognition." The fact that the message has been conveyed in Burmese, the language of the ethnic majority population long suspected of expansionism by many in the border regions, undoubtedly has reinforced suspicions and inspired intransigence to the *tatmadaw*'s new mapping and identity production in national politics. But there have been signs that some groups embraced the parts of this message that suited their purposes and along the way thwarted the regime's overall aim of consolidating the power of the military over the polity. For example, the new emphasis on the existence of 135 nationalities in Burma reportedly derailed the regime's progress toward finalizing a new constitution back in 1996, according to one member of a National Convention committee assigned to deal with political arrangements for ethnic minorities. This army colonel reported, "We have to accept the 135 races theory, but now all 135 want their own states."[20]

[20] Interview, September 22, 1997.

Homogenization

Along the same lines, the regime's homogenization strategy also has aimed at both purifying the center and increasing the regime's control over populations in border regions. For the former to be accomplished, the power of Aung San Suu Kyi and her political party had to be diminished. The regime's cultural homogenization programs have subsequently emphasized the way impure, heterogeneous, foreign influences (ranging from Aung San Suu Kyi's imperialist British husband to western neo-imperialist governments that colonized Burma and that recognized the NLD's victory in the 1990 election) have destroyed stability and prosperity in Burma over the last two centuries. In this attempt to construct a homogeneous "we," the regime has deployed quite extraordinary language in its attempt to recast Aung San Suu Kyi as both contaminated "other" and a contaminant who is dangerous to those around her. For example, in newspapers and public pronouncements, regime spokespersons have called Aung San Suu Kyi an "axehandle" (she was the handle that foreign oppressors wield to chop up and destroy Burma), "puppet girl," "puppet princess," and "Mrs. Race Destructionist" (by mixing her blood with that of her British husband, her mixed race sons destroyed the purity of the Burmese bloodline). Notably, there is little evidence that these clumsy psychological warfare–inspired initiatives have made any dents in Aung San Suu Kyi's popularity in central Burma.

Beyond the center, the regime's concern was with making potential allies of the NLD more legible and hence more controllable. To accomplish this, the populations in the old "excluded" areas had to be regrouped, and assigned new names and categories of belonging. Most importantly, these names – all 135 of them – were generated, defined, and enforced by the *tatmadaw*, which simultaneously laid out a unifying, genealogical theory of how all 135 were connected via a common and glorious ancestry, called "Myanmar." Under this theory, every Shan, Pao, Chin, Karen, and Lushai is fundamentally a "Myanmar."

Hence, the junta's solution to the political chaos that surrounded 1988 combined the entire population – in the center and in the margins – into a single target of this strategy of cultural homogenization, albeit for different reasons and toward different ends in each territorial space. At the core of this homogenization strategy was an optimistic, no-holds-barred assault on the everyday language and conceptual referents to be used throughout the country and beyond. The government renamed the country "Myanmar" and renamed some of the major cities, allegedly to eliminate vestiges of imperialism. English-language books were republished with all references to "Burma" whited out and replaced with "Myanmar." After twenty-six years of rewriting history to explain the teleology of Burmese socialism, SLORC in 1989 launched a new growth industry in writing the sacred and ancient history of the singular national race called the "Myanmar." The junta assigned various government bodies responsibility for conjuring a highly improbable

unilineal, unified, and peaceful history of a single, millennia-old nationality divided only by the trickery and brute force of the British imperialists. Perhaps most representative of this campaign was the 1997–8 Pondaung Primate Fossil Exploration archaeological project. With little archaeological expertise, the army-led dig has produced specious claims that fossils found in the Pondaung region prove that "human civilization began in our motherland."[21] The government claims the fossils "prove" that harmony among all ethnic groups existed in Burma all the way back to the Neolithic period:

> This irrefutable conclusion is drawn from the very fact that all over the land which now constitutes the Union of Myanmar, there is a surprising consistency and uniformity or rather similarities observed on the Neolithic pottery, . . . common ideas and similar techniques that were responsible for all inventions and evolution in material cultures during the Neolithic period. . . .
>
> [A]mong the Neolithic peoples then, is a total lack of any evidence as to indicate mass mortality or mass burial that could have arisen out of inter-ethnic conflicts; for this reason, divisive inter-racial disharmony and enmity seemed an anathema to the national groups in those days of yore.[22]

Similarly, SLORC/SPDC sponsored numerous large-scale "Myanmafication"[23] performances that revealed the unity campaign's dual purposes: keeping out foreign influences (thus "purifying" Myanmar culture and purging the "impure" (i.e., Aung San Suu Kyi)) and papering over differences among indigenous populations and cultures. The purification and homogenization purposes are reflected in the regime's founding of new versions of historicized "Myanmar" festivals – including annual regatta, equestrian, and music competitions – aimed at "strengthening the national pride of being a Myanmar citizen as a unifying bond."[24] At annual Exhibitions to Revitalize and Foster the Spirit of Patriotism, junta Secretary 1, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, enjoins attendees to study "the origins of the Myanmar race, the flowering of Myanmar patriotic spirit during the Bagan, Pinn-Ya, Inn-wa, Taungu, Nyaung-Yan and Konbaung dynasties, the 3 Anglo-Myanmar wars."[25] Additionally, over the last decade, science, cultural, and national and local history museums have popped up all over Rangoon and the rest of the country. Built by particular

[21] May May Aung, "National Museum, the Symbol of Myanmar Pride and Honour," *Myanmar Information Sheet*, December 29, 1997, available online at http://homepages.go.com/~myanmarinfosheet/1997/1997.htm (accessed June 11, 1999).

[22] *Myanmar Perspectives* (March 1999).

[23] This is Gustaaf Houtman's evocative terminology. See his *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999).

[24] Uta Gartner, "Old Festivals Newly Adorned," Conference on Tradition and Modernity in Myanmar, Berlin, Fakultatsinstitut fur Asien- and Afrikawissenschaften, 1993, p. 360; Gavin Douglas, "State Patronage of Burmese Traditional Music," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2001.

[25] *New Light of Myanmar*, October 30, 1998.

ministries, regional commands, or armed forces directorates, all of them revere the "Myanmar" race as the sacred core of their narratives of progress and history.

Making Myanmar Speakers

In this cultural heritage industry, language has taken center stage, and it has done so by crashing through the old substantive and territorial boundaries that had limited the reach of the monolingual state since the early twentieth century. SLORC's earliest moves were typical of previous centrally focused initiatives: The junta quickly ordered the Myanmasa Ahpwe (Burmese Language Commission) to rewrite the official monolingual Burmese dictionary in order to strip out Socialist terminology and English loan words. Here, as in the previous ninety years, the audience for this language initiative was the population living in the central regions. However, very quickly, language manipulation activities began to spill across the old boundary between center and margins. As the regime has attempted to reassemble the remnants of the Socialist state into one under more direct military control, it has appointed waves of new committees – all under the direction of military officers – that have been charged with addressing the weaknesses of national unity that caused (in the army's view) the 1988 crisis. One of these committees came straight out of the army's forty years of counterinsurgency combat: the Committee for Writing Slogans for Nationals, established on April 16, 1989. From this committee emerged "Our Three Main National Causes": (1) nondisintegration of the Union, (2) nondisintegration of solidarity, and (3) perpetuation of national sovereignty. These slogans and others – such as "Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy" – have appeared in Burmese and English in every publication produced in Burma after 1989, and on red-and-white signs in all public places. The slogans all emphasize the urgency of maintaining national unity, at any cost.

This unity crusade has moved language politics into new arenas for a Rangoon regime, starting with the June 18, 1989, Adaptation of Expressions Law. The law and the subsequent renaming campaign that came out of it have attempted to regulate two things: First, the regime has tried to standardize the terms Burmese language speakers would use to discuss their public identities, and, second, SLORC has tried to dictate what non-Burmese speakers – inside and outside the country – would call the country and its public institutions (including the official language). The regime also has decreed a new romanized orthography for these names. For example, the 1989 law renamed the country, "Myanmar," while "Rangoon" was henceforth "Yangon." According to one regime spokesman, "The term 'Myanmar' has been used as the name of the nation and the people for years countable by the thousands."[26] The junta appears to be harkening back at least to twelfth-century

[26] Tekkatho Myat Thu, "Call Us Myanmar," *New Light of Myanmar*, April 23, 2000.

Old Burmese inscriptions, wherein "Myanmar" was the written term for the domain of the kings at Pagan and, later, at Pegu and Mandalay. There is some conceptual slippage here, given that for most of these eras, a king's domain was defined by claims not over territory but over scarce labor and populations. Under SLORC/SPDC, the political unit called "Myanmar" has come to refer only to territory. There is also linguistic inventiveness at play here. In modern Burmese language usage, "Mranma/Myanma/Myanmar"[27] has been the formal, written, literary term for the modern nation-state's territory since independence in 1948, while "Bama/Bamar" (from which "Burma" is derived) has been the spoken or colloquial language equivalent for the sovereign domain of the government, that is, the name of the country. Under SLORC's language reforms, Burmese speakers and non-Burmese speakers have been directed to use "Myanmar" as the name of the country, its citizens and the official language, and to use "Bamar" to refer to the ethnic majority group. Speakers of this diglossic language have been directed to scrap the old formal-versus-colloquial distinction and deploy these new terms regardless of setting.

In a sense, the junta's renaming project represents a continuation of the four-decade-old postcolonial – and centrally focused – project of codifying and officializing the Burmese language to enhance its prestige as a language of a nation-state. However, whether or not it was intended, the renaming project represents one of the more naked assertions of the supremacy of the ethnic-majority Burmans over the minorities in the country. Gustaaf Houtman points out, "Neither *Myanma* nor *Bama*, from which Myanmar and Burma are derived, are neutral terms, as both are strongly associated with the Burmese language, the language of the ethnic majority."[28] For speakers of Burmese as a second or third language, the formal, written style – from which "Myanmar" and almost all the other new names are derived – is even more inaccessible than the colloquial style and perhaps most identified with the ethnicity and associated chauvinism of its mother-tongue speakers. One critic writes of the renaming project:

> [It is] clear proof that the Myanmar [i.e., ethnic majority group] want to dominate over all other ethnic groups, and is practising the policy of a great nation of Myanmar, i.e., in the course of time there would be no Shan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Mon and Arakanese, all would eventually merge into Myanmar. It will be a monolithic whole with one country, Myanmar, instead of the Union of Burma, one religion, Buddhist, and one race, the Myanmarnese [*sic*].[29]

[27] These are common transcriptions, transliterations, and romanizations of the Burmese language term. No single romanization scheme has gained widespread acceptance, which accounts for this variation.

[28] Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*, p. 49.

[29] Kanbawza Win, *An Appeal to the UN and US* (Bangkok: CPDSK Publications, 1994), p. 44.

Beyond the renaming campaign, there is further evidence that Rangoon cares about everyday politics, social relations, and language in the former frontier regions a great deal more than did any previous regimes. From a century-old policy of malignant neglect, the postcolonial central government has shifted demonstrably into a more invasive, assimilationist set of policies toward these populations. As noted above in this chapter, schoolteachers and monks in widely dispersed border regions have been arrested for conducting instruction in languages other than Burmese. In the regions where cease-fires have been reached with former insurgent groups, Rangoon has deployed the Ministry for the Development of the Border Areas and the National Races (later renamed the "Ministry for the Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs") to build roads, Burmese-language schools, hospitals, power plants, telecommunications relay stations, and other institutions aimed at both modernizing and subjugating former rebel-held territory. These border-areas projects, which are on a scale never seen in Burmese history, are carried out by soldiers, officers and local residents conscripted into labor gangs by the *tatmadaw*. This army likewise exists on a scale unprecedented in modern history. Growing from 170,000 in 1988 to over 400,000 (mostly Burman) soldiers in 2000 and expanding its materiel and technology at a similarly breakneck pace, this *tatmadaw* has a capacity to deploy soldiers, guns, trucks, teachers, doctors, nurses, and other resources in ways the unity-conscious Socialist government never could. The Socialists' clumsy attempts to integrate these ethnic minority groups into a Socialist Union of Burma never succeeded because of the utter incapacity of the central government to offer any compelling incentives to locals to work, cooperate, and negotiate with Rangoon. There is little doubt that some local populations still consider the *tatmadaw* an occupying force representing Rangoon's continued attempts at internal colonialism. Nonetheless, these border areas development activities bring new resources and incentives to bear on negotiations over political and economic power that now routinely transcend the old divide between center and the margins.

Conclusion: The Making (or Unmaking?) of Myanmars and Myanmar Speakers

Language policy in modern Burma has come a long way from its original territorially bounded focus on the creation of a monolingual public sphere in the central regions. Rangoon-based regimes throughout the twentieth century dedicated resources and personnel to the task of creating all the trappings of a modern, standardized language in these regions. At stake was how power was to be articulated in styles that favored one elite group over another and that elevated the status of that elite group within the international community as well. Out of intra-elite power struggles, various postcolonial

coalitions of ethnic Burmans grasped the reins of rule and generated an extensive array of programs aimed at codifying, empowering, and modernizing their own mother tongue. These programs have been quite successful in their transformation of the Burmese language. Indeed, the latter now seems inevitably and naturally the language of this nation-state. No one in central Burma with any serious claims on ruling power would ever question the status of Burmese as the official language of the public sphere – a significant change since the colonial era, when English was paramount. For those in the center, belonging is now unquestionably a process that can be practiced and imagined only in Burmese.

During the entire twentieth century, it was only in these spatially limited central regions that any explicit language policy materialized in formal policy pronouncements. However, this does not mean that the impact of the policy to "modernize" Burmese – as well as other outcomes of intra-elite struggles in Rangoon – did not have far-reaching implications for populations living, speaking, struggling, and thinking beyond the central regions. From the colonial era onward, cultural, symbolic, and political capital became centralized in Rangoon's environs. This centralization led to a hierarchical ordering of territory and populations that located sophistication, civilization, and power in the center. Distance from Rangoon was associated with political insignificance and social backwardness. Reinforced by deeply rooted Social Darwinist views about the evolution of civilizations, this systematic and tidy ordering of state and society placed at a distinct disadvantage the territorially distant, linguistically distinct populations that lived in the juridically "excluded" areas. After independence in 1948 and especially after the takeover by the military-Socialist regime in 1962, central politics became increasingly contestable only in Burmese, which turned thinkers, writers, and speakers of other languages into lesser citizens in the roster of the modern nation-state.

From the point of view of populations living in the former "excluded" areas, postcolonial military, political, and cultural power has been displayed in Burmese language and narrated according to putative ethnic Burman traditions. Minority populations have viewed postcolonial, national-level politics as a series of theatrical acts pitting arrogant, intolerant, expansionist, and often incomprehensible Burmans against increasingly self-identifying, oppressed, indigenous minorities. Little has changed since independence in 1948 to inspire revisions of this interpretation. In areas where the SLORC/SPDC concluded cease-fire agreements in the 1990s, local populations have gained little from integration with Rangoon, although some of their leaders – especially those involved in the production of heroin and methamphetamines for the global market – may find easier access to money-laundering services in Rangoon. Few villages and towns view the "border areas development" programs as anything but a new, more invasive round

of Rangoon expansionism;[30] the fact that the army carries them out and does so exclusively in Burmese language reinforces this view. As a result of decades of exclusionary state practices, anything Rangoon does is automatically suspect among populations living in many of the more remote regions. Importantly, this may not change when the state is no longer in the hands of the military.

Despite the hostile reception to development and Burmanization programs in remote areas, the use of Burmese language therein nonetheless is probably spreading. In terms of language policy in the border areas, the SLORC/SPDC regime did not promulgate an explicit Burmese- or "Myanmar"– only policy, but local and regional commanders handling day-to-day law and order affairs have consistently made it difficult for educators, monks, and other public figures to operate in anything but Burmese. As a matter of survival interest, many people living in these remote regions – confronting the presence of tens of thousands of recently arrived Burman soldiers – have a range of incentives to speak and to understand Burmese so as to navigate the new power corridors of their localities. Fluency or comfort with Burmese language allows the possibility of negotiating with the soldiers who claim the locals' husbands, sons, rice, land, or bullocks for use in development or counterinsurgency projects. A generation from now, this bilingualism may lead to what SLORC feared most after 1988: the ability of ethnic minorities to communicate fluently enough in Burmese language that they can team up with the monolingual Burman opposition. In other words, the post-1988 regime's state-building and pacification practices pushed language manipulation beyond the old boundaries of Central, Ministerial Burma, where these practices may end up empowering social forces that could destabilize the Rangoon military junta.

Considerations of the regime's differentiation, homogenization, and language practices highlight both the new permeability of the century-old territorialized logic of politics and the remarkable durability of that boundary-generating logic. The regime itself exhibits mixed feelings about this. In the central region, the regime wants ethnic Burmans – who have not thought of the former border regions as political spaces inhabited by equal fellow citizens – to sustain the colonial demarcation between center and periphery. It wants to rehabilitate practices and images of differentiation that ensure a disjuncture between politics and nonpolitics, center and margins, civilized and primitive populations, the NLD and potential allies in border regions.

[30] The use of forced labor to carry out the "development" projects has created not only local hardships and hostility among ethnic minority villagers, but also waves of displaced people as rural populations flee the depredations of the military labor recruiters. See, for example, the report of the International Labour Organisation, *Forced Labour in Myanmar (Burma)* (Geneva, July 1998).

The regime also wants to make populations on the periphery legible enough that they cannot slip through the permeable border and politically ally with centrally based opposition. Creating this legibility has entailed an explosion of state building in territory beyond the center, which asserts a bureaucratic impulse toward administrative uniformity across the two spaces. Quite unintentionally, these state-building projects require and in some ways force the internal boundary to become increasingly permeable and irrelevant.