

**Revolution as Development:
The Karen Self-Determination
Struggle against Ethnocracy
(1949-2004)**

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Jack Fong

Universal Publishers
Boca Raton, Florida

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Author's Note

There are many political and non-political organizations in Burma. In the text, as is the customary practice, the full name of the organization will be listed upon first mention, followed by the acronym in parentheses; subsequent references to the organization will only be in acronym format. Should readers forget the meaning of the acronyms, refer to this page, derived from Martin Smith's 1999 work *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*.

ABSDF:	All Burma Students Democratic Front
ABFSU:	All Burma Federation of Students Union
AFPFL:	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
ALP:	Arakan Liberation Party
APC:	Armored personnel carrier
ASEAN:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIA:	Burma Independence Army
BSPP:	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CBE:	Citizens for a Better Environment
CCP:	China Communist Party
CNF:	Chin National Front
CPB:	Communist Party of Burma
CPT:	Communist Party of Thailand
DAB:	Democratic Alliance of Burma
DKBA:	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DKBO:	Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization
DNUF:	Democratic Nationalities United Front
EGAT:	Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand
EIA:	Environmental Impact Assessment
ERI:	Earth Rights International
FAO:	Food and Agriculture Organization
FBR:	Free Burma Rangers
FPMA:	Five Party Military Alliance
FWI:	Fritz Werner Industries
HRW/A:	Human Rights Watch/Asia
ICG:	International Crisis Group
IDP:	Internally Displaced People
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
INGO:	International non-governmental organization
KAF:	Karen Armed Forces
KEF:	Kawthoolei Education Fund
KGB:	Karen Governing Body
KHRG:	Karen Human Rights Group

KIA:	Kachin Independence Army
KIO:	Kachin Independence Organization
KMT:	Kuomintang
KNA:	Karen National Association
KNDO:	Karen National Defence Organization
KNLC:	Karen National Liberation Council
KNLP:	Karen/Kayan New Land Party
KNPP:	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNUP:	Karen National United Party
KPLA:	Kawthoolei's Peoples Liberation Army
KRC:	Karen/Kawthoolei Revolutionary Council
KTWG:	Karen Teachers Working Group
KWO:	Karen Women's Organization
MIS:	Military Intelligence Services
MNLA:	Mon National Liberation Army
MOGE:	Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise
MPF:	Mon People's Front
MTE:	Myanma Timber Enterprise
MTTT:	Mobile Teacher Training Team
NCGUB:	National Coalition Government Union of Burma
NCUB:	National Council of the Union of Burma
NDUF:	National Democratic United Front
NGO:	non-governmental organization
NLA:	Nationalities Liberation Alliance
NLC:	National Liberation Council
NLD:	National League for Democracy
NLD-LA:	National League for Democracy-Liberated Area
NMSP:	New Mon State Party
NULF:	National United Liberation Front
NUFA:	National Unity Front of Arakan
PA:	People's Army
PNO:	Pa-O National Organization
PDP:	Parliamentary Democracy Party
PLA:	Patriotic/People's Liberation Army
PSLP:	Palaung State Liberation Party
PTT:	Petroleum Authority of Thailand
PVO:	People's Volunteer Organization
RAN:	Rainforest Action Network
RC:	Revolutionary Council
RECOFTC:	Regional Community Forestry Training Center
SAIN:	Southeast Asian Information Network
SEATO:	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SHRF:	Shan Human Rights Foundation
SLORC:	State Law and Order Restoration Council

SPDC:	State Peace Development Council
SSA-S:	Shan State Army-South
SSIA:	Shan State Independence Army
SSNLO:	Shan State Nationalities Liberation Organization
SSPP:	Shan State Progress Party
STR:	Special Township Region
SWAN:	Shan Women's Action Network
UN:	United Nations
UNHCR:	UN High Commissions for Refugees
UNRISD:	UN Research Institute for Social Development
UPNO:	Union Pa-O National Organization

Names of Karen individuals I personally interacted with will be given pseudonyms to protect their identities. However, those individuals that have had public exposure, for example, in the press and/or in the televised media, will be referred to by their actual names.

Preface

Before exploring the epic Karen struggle for self-determination, I find it important to point out the date of September 27, 2007, during the Buddhist uprisings in Burma where tens of thousands of serried people, with hands adjoined, marched alongside the unarmed Buddhist clergy—the *Sangha*—shielding them from potential harm. On this date, in the eastern hills of what is in essence the descending flanks of the eastern Himalayas, hundreds of kilometers away from Burma's former capital at Rangoon, the Karen National Union (KNU), the political body of the Karen Revolution, urged all ethnic nationalities of Burma to support the predominantly Buddhist and Burman monks in their uprisings against military rule. In solidarity with the people of Rangoon and all of Burma the KNU communiqué stated:

We...earnestly urge you, the armed forces, to stop shooting and killing the people and the Sanghas, and stand on the side of the people and the Sanghas by turning...against the...generals, who are making you commit heinous crimes so that they may remain in power (Irrawaddy.org, September 28, 2007).

Upon reading this communiqué, I was swept by very deep, powerful, and visceral emotions, for it was the KNU and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) that granted me entrance to their free state of Kawthoolei between January 2004 and May 2004. At the KNU headquarters of Mu Aye Pu, base for the KNLA 202 battalion, I was introduced to themes of the Karen Revolution and Karen nation construction. Sadness overcame me, however, since I knew that the Karen armed struggle, along with struggles by other democratically aspiring ethnic nationality groups, is ignored precisely for the same reason that Aung San Suu Kyi's approach based on *satyagraha* is not.

My work thus focuses on the Karen self-determination struggle begun in 1949. The Karen struggle against military rule in Burma has often been overlooked by the international community when compared to the exploits of democratic activist Aung San Suu Kyi. The Karen have been fighting a fifty-nine year campaign of ethnic discrimination and cleansing directed against them by various pro-Burman governments. The ethnopolitical problems that have affected the Karen have thus predated for decades the democracy struggle that the world now sees in Burma. The Karen Revolution is rich with cues that point to how nationalist and democratic politics are ideologically harnessed to attain autonomy and development. It is within this complex world that those interested in Burma must begin since there are *many* regional players in its epic sociopolitical landscape.

Chapter I

The Karen Epic and the Journey

The Epic

At the time of this writing an uprising by Burmese monks in major cities of Burma¹, otherwise known as Myanmar by polities that recognize the current military regime, appears to have come to a temporary close. However, reports on the uprisings, presented on television for the world to see, and linked historically to the military crackdown upon the student uprisings of 1988 and the denial to Aung San Suu Kyi the prime ministership, have ignored the source of the country's problems: its labyrinthine and unresolved ethnopolitics. Indeed, for decades the region's ethnic minorities, or ethnic nationalities in the political parlance of the region, have challenged the hyper-nationalist militarists from the dominant Burman ethnic group.

By ignoring the region's ethnopolitics, world attention on Burma is highly myopic and exhibits numerous political blind spots. Specifically, world attention on Burma overlooks how the interior of the region, populated by fiercely independent non-Burman peoples in their respective nations, can be analyzed transnationally. It is within this context that I introduce the Karen ethnic nationality and their struggle for liberation against three atavisms and forty-six years of genocidal military rule. Indeed, the Karen struggle against Burman chauvinism, or *Burmanization*, has the dubious distinction of being the twentieth century's longest and most underreported civil war, begun in 1949 and continuing to this very moment.

The Karen struggle began in January 1949, when Burma's independence from colonial rule was beset by social breakdown. Burma, a country ruled by an *ethnocracy*² since 1948 and by three military regimes since 1962, has engaged in frequent military campaigns of ethnic cleansing against its ethnic nationalities. As Rangoon descended into various incarnations of military rule, Karen self-determination was employed in hopes of countering a totalitarian and racist regime. In the early years of the war the Karen aspired to fight for a separate state but have since shifted their platform toward fighting for a greater autonomy within a federalized Burma.

¹ As Heppner, founder of the Karen Human Rights Group, notes, "those who do not recognize the military junta as a legitimate government continue to use the name Burma" (Heppner 2000, 1). I will do so as well.

² A term utilized by Stavenhagen (1986, 1996) and David Brown (1994) to refer to the ethnic group with the most political power within a multiethnic or pluralistic setting. I shall expand on this in greater detail in Chapter 2.

The fighting between the Karen and Rangoon has the dubious distinction of being one of the longest civil wars of the twentieth century, lasting well into the twenty-first century. Yet the tensions between the Karen and Burman predate the post-colonial period. As a Karen village elder had told Major Abbey at the Karen village of Kya-in before the end of World War II, and at a time when inter-communal strife was increasing daily:

As a minority, our political union with the Burman in the past...has not been a safe, satisfactory and happy one. History repeats itself. Centuries ago, before the advent of British rule, our ancestors had continuously suffered the persecution at the hands of the Burmans and no sooner had the British left this shore...the tell-tale temperament of the Burman made itself felt on the Karen masses... We strongly appeal...to the authorities concerned, that the Karen be allotted a certain part of Burma where we could...administer ourselves free from the Burman (Rogers 2004, 76).

For decades Rangoon's attempts at consolidating the country were based on forcefully persecuting ethnic nationalities like the Karen. The Karen have responded with a self-determination struggle against one of the world's most brutal military regimes. In this regard, the examination of how the Karen people aspire to develop themselves is simultaneously an examination of how the military polities of Burma and its construction of the nation-state have failed.

In 1962, after General Ne Win's coup that established the first military regime of Burma, the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), Rangoon has been attempting to subdue not only the Karen but other ethnic nationalities through an ethnic cleansing policy known as the *Four Cuts* (*Pya Ley Pya* in Burmese). Karen activists are not the only group employing this designation, as international observers, pressure groups, and non-governmental organizations have also designated the events inside Burma as genocide/ethnic cleansing (Rogers 2004; International Crisis Group 2003; Karen Human Rights Group 2000; Smith 1999; Human Rights Watch 1995, 1997, 1998; Lintner 1994; Fredholm 1993; Falla 1991).

By the early 1990s, when the second military regime, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) rejected democratic elections and reforms voted by the Burmese, as well as putting election winner Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest, the *Tatmadaw*—generally used to refer to Burma's armed forces—has repeatedly been condemned by the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation, the European Union Parliament, the US State Department, and various human rights

organizations for its rampant human rights abuses.³ Yet still the Tatmadaw has remained intransigent in its treatment of the Karen, other ethnic nationalities, as well as pro-democracy Burmans.

Burman chauvinism can clearly be seen in the explicit behaviors of members of the Tatmadaw: in 1992, Tatmadaw General Ket Sein had publicly announced, “In ten years all the Karen will be dead. If you want to see a Karen, you will have to go to a museum in Rangoon” (Rogers 2004, 40). Yet Ket Sein was hardly the only Burman chauvinist at the time. In February 1996 on Myanmar TV, deputy chairman General Maung Aye, the current regime’s number two man after General Than Shwe, was shown “stamping on a Karen flag” and forcing a recently surrendered Karen leader “to kneel before him and apologise for their rebellion” (Rogers 2004, 40). Indeed, the Tatmadaw’s confidence in Burma’s development was quite pronounced by the late 1990s: it had destroyed the very important Karen capital of Manerplaw in 1995—home to a variety of democratically aspiring ethnic coalitions as well as a base for the NLD. By 1997, it had immobilized Aung San Suu Kyi and her political party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). Thus, in 1997 SLORC renamed its polity to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

The Karen have had little choice but to maintain their course toward self-determination. One of the principles of their revolution mandates unending resistance and no surrender. However, in 2004, an informal gentleman’s ceasefire was declared by Rangoon and the KNU. Tatmadaw General Khin Nyunt wanted to negotiate with the KNU in hopes of attaining a lasting peace. The KNU responded, and General Bo Mya of the KNU, KNU congress members, and top KNLA commanders were invited to Rangoon for talks. It was during this window period that I first entered Kawthoolei, the name the Karen give their homeland.

However, despite a gentleman’s ceasefire, the Tatmadaw had repeatedly betrayed this agreement by continuing their harassments and violations of Karen human rights in areas which should be free from the fighting. Moreover, hawks in Rangoon concerned that Khin Nyunt’s political gestures were too concessionary, ousted him in a military coup in late 2004. Since then hardliners led by the SPDC’s General Than Shwe have consolidated their hold on power.

Rangoon’s continuing acquisition of weaponry from their main ally, China, means that the Karen continue to face frequent offensives and attacks by a modernizing military. The disparity in weapons between the two sides is even more shocking when we consider that despite Burma’s military rule, the

³ The Tatmadaw evolved from the Burma Independence Army (BIA) established by Japan during World War II to fight the British. Fredholm notes that the BIA “distinguished itself by slaughtering and massacring ethnic minorities to such an extent that even the Japanese had to step in” (Fredholm 1993, 75).

regime has not been invaded by another country since its 1948 independence from Britain; that is, Burma has no international enemies, its entire half-million troops and military apparatus exists solely by waging war against its ethnic nationalities and the pro-democracy Burman activists who struggle alongside them.

The fifty-nine year saga of the Karen resistance continues to this very day, with new issues, both local and global, that beset the KNU. The current older and younger generation of the KNU leadership are attending to a generational change in its rank and file as well as continuing to attend to multiple generations of war-fatigued Karen, many of whom have been relegated to being refugees and/or internally displaced peoples (IDPs). Regardless of which Karen one speaks to the vast majority are ready for a political and peaceful resolution to the conflict for since 1949 over 300,000 Karen lives have been lost, thousands of villages have been razed to the ground, over a million Karen have been internally displaced, over one hundred thousand Karen have been forced to flee as refugees into Thailand, and the fragile ecosystems on which their livelihood depends are being destroyed.

Although many Karen do not want a peace that would compromise the ideals of the Karen Revolution, some Karen are ready for peace at all costs. The KNU, on the other hand, have not been defeated by the Tatmadaw. In this complex ethnopolitical terrain, amid the dozen self-determination groups that are still challenging Rangoon's authority, the Karen—one of Burma largest ethnic nationalities after the Burmans—emerge as the ethnic nationality “that has fought the longest, suffered the most, and came closest to achieving their aims of self determination for a greater autonomy” (Peck 2004, Rogers 2004). At the time of this writing, ceasefire talks have all but evaporated and a formal peace agreement with conditions acceptable to both the KNU and the SPDC does not exist.

The staying power of the Karen struggle typifies how disadvantaged ethnic minority groups seeking to improve their human condition remain one of the most significant factors for social change (Gurr 1993). It is my hope to introduce the Karen struggle as an example of what Benedict Rogers describes as a “wider struggle that all the people of Burma are fighting for” (2004). Yet to effectively read how the Burman militarists violently deny the Karen development and how the Karen concomitantly respond by engaging in their own autonomous development requires us to employ a perspective contributed by Rodolfo Stavenhagen known as *ethnodevelopment* (1986, 1996).

As a development strategy ethnodevelopment positions the state to foster “development of ethnic groups within the framework of the larger society” (Stavenhagen 1986, 92). By virtue of this statement, Stavenhagen provides an honest picture of multiculturalism, namely that resources are skewed toward and by the dominant and/or largest ethnic/racial group, in our case, the Burmans. The CIA breaks down Burma's population as such: Burman - 68

percent, Shan - 9 percent, Karen - 7 percent, the Rakhines and Rohingyas of Arakan - 4 percent, Chinese - 3 percent, Indian - 2 percent, Mon - 2 percent, and other at 5 percent (CIA World Factbook 2005). The Karen population, depending on which source one refers to, ranges between 2.5 million to 7 million. The underestimated figure is what the SPDC claims, while the KNU claims the latter figure (Rogers 2004, 30). Accurate population figures are impossible to come by since the last formal census ever taken in Burma took place during the 1930s while it was under British rule.

Hardly a “Union” as claimed by Burman nationalists, the country contains over 130 ethnic nationalities and over 100 languages spoken. But more importantly, the Karen are not the only ethnic nationality engaged in a struggle for democracy. Following the Karen in 1949, the Shan, Mon, Karenni, Arakan, Chin, Kachin, and many other ethnic nationalities have all launched their own self-determination struggles against the Tatmadaw. Most have since signed ceasefires during the different amnesties offered by Rangoon, while a handful continue on alongside the KNU.

That ethnodevelopment emphasizes development policies need to be “sensitive to the needs of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples and where possible controlled by them” is perhaps nowhere more exigently appropriate than in Burma, given the aforementioned diversity and autonomy demanded by many of its ethnic nationalities (Clarke 2001, 413). The most significant benefit of employing an ethnodevelopment perspective is the *a priori* acceptance that ethnicity has material consequences, and that somehow a multicultural configuration contains some form of resource asymmetry. In the case of Burma’s political landscape, one that is fraught with acute ethnic inequalities and systemic crises, the asymmetry in material consequences and quality of life experienced by different ethnic nationalities invites scrutiny into the role that ethnicity plays in development.

Although the ethnodevelopment envisioned by Stavenhagen (1996, 1993, 1986), Hettne (1996), and Clark (2001) assumes the centralized polity can function as a conduit from which resources are then distributed toward ethnic minority development, this approach cannot fully illustrate what is actually occurring in Burma. Since Burma’s independence in 1948, pro-Burman governments, flushed with power from acquiring larger territories, have preferred to use force and maldevelopment to consolidate peripheral areas where the majority of Burma’s ethnic nationalities conceptualize as territories of their own nations. Moreover, since General Ne Win launched his coup to establish Burma as a militarized state in 1962, Rangoon has *institutionalized* a violent process of internal colonization upon Burma’s ethnic nationalities. The Karen and their homeland of Kawthoolei have not been spared and have been subjected to the heaviest brunt of Burmanization throughout its fifty-nine year struggle.

Whatever articulation of ethnodevelopment that occurs for the Karen is based on being structurally opposed to what the Tatmadaw conceives of as

development. For the Karen, their self-determination for a greater autonomy, designed to preserve heritage, culture, way of life, and a regional political economy is thus a *bottom-to-top* ethnodevelopment process. This is an important distinction to remember for it means that Karen development occurs not from the charity of the Burmese state, but from its own Karen-administered institutions. Indeed, I point out that the Karen ethnodevelopment trajectory *is* the revolution the KNU launched in 1949, and is a response to how frequently development strategies “based on a top-down design have failed to reach their explicitly stated objectives” (Sachs 1992, 7).

Karen ethnodevelopment harnesses its own social institutions and regional political economy that are structurally opposed to Rangoon to sustain their self-determination struggle. These they use to develop as much as possible the lives of the Karen people in Kawthoolei. At the peak of Karen nationalism and administrative efficacy, the KNU administered their own hospitals, various social departments, and schools that teach in the main Karen dialects. Although these institutions have suffered tremendously due to the fifty-nine years of protracted warfare, it is nevertheless important to identify the structures and assess their benefits upon civilian Karen. This is an important task because it is through these institutions that the KNU has constructed their nation as well as their own sense of legitimacy as an autonomous political entity.⁴ Indeed, the Karen that manage their country’s institutions and political economy exemplify a hitherto unexplored trajectory of ethnodevelopment as a liberation movement and revolutionary force. Thus Karen *liberation ethnodevelopment* is explicitly unlike Stavenhagen’s ethnodevelopment.

Given the complexities of Karen and Burmese ethnopolitics, two questions drive my work. The first question asks: what are the distinguishing features that allow the Karen to sustain their struggle in spite of the adversities that have confronted their revolution? More specifically what KNU institutions reinforce Karen self-determination as a form of development? The second question is: what factors will affect the future of the Karen struggle and the Karen way of life as they continue to seek a greater autonomy through self-determination? To answer these two questions requires us to (1) fuse ethnopolitics with the material analyses of the Karen human condition as well as (2) make visible that ethnicity, apart from its intimate links to the cultural system, is also very much a development system comprised of political institutions and political relationships.

⁴ My use of the term *state* implies a multicultural or relatively homogeneous country. I do not employ the term nation-state because it overlooks the contradictions of multiethnic or multicultural realities, which is characterized by many intra-state nations, not just one nation constructed by a dominant ethnic group.

In the process of exploring the Karen struggle and its ethnodevelopment, I attempt to counter two myths regarding the Karen struggle. The first myth is that British colonization and Christian indoctrination generated the clash of Karen and Burman identities. Although the United Kingdom was certainly a colonial power that ruled Burma as a province of India until a few years after World War II ended, and supremely versed in decolonizing machinations that would configure most of its former colonies to be in political disarray and sectarian strife, to argue that British colonials and Christian missionaries constructed the Karen identity—as suggested by Rajah (2002), Bryant (1997), and Keyes (1979)—overlooks how the cultural fault lines predate any systematic European colonial maneuverings to pit one group against another (Wee 2002). Indeed, Gurr reminds us that autonomy demands by indigenous groups should not be taken for granted as a recent phenomenon, as they only emanate from groups with “a tradition of political independence and sharp cultural differences from dominant groups” (1993, 316).

Moreover, attributing the beginning of the Karen Revolution as being instigated by the British is exactly the line continued to be held by the various military regimes. It is a trite position that has been regurgitated to justify its continuing enforcement of violently punitive measures against the Karen as colonial collaborators. Furthermore, adopting this stance overlooks the fact that after World War II Burman militarists also colluded with the British under the Attlee administration, which, after relinquishing Burma, began supplying Rangoon with arms to quell the first decade of the Karen Revolution. It also overlooks the fact that Burma has itself become an internally colonizing force implementing its own unique divide-and-rule formula for repressing its ethnic nationalities.

The second myth to be dispelled is that self-determination politics are the “internal affairs” of Burma, a claim repeatedly made by the Tatmadaw so as to ward off international scrutiny and condemnation. This line is still held by the SPDC, the current military regime now based out of Burma’s new capital at Naypidaw.⁵ The position of not interfering with the internal affairs of Burma is also subscribed, albeit nominally, by states such as China, India, Thailand, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations economic bloc (ASEAN). In reality, there is nothing politically or materially “internal” regarding Rangoon’s maneuverings against the Karen. Rangoon and its military juntas readily court and receive from many countries tacit support and funding for their internally colonizing policies.

Discrediting the second belief is important because it makes visible the different networks that have formed internationally to sustain the regimes. Yet, the panglossian international community continues to expect the regimes

⁵ The scope of this book encompasses a time dimension when Rangoon was still the administrative capital. As such, the remainder of this text will employ Rangoon when discussions center on domestic policies supported or enforced by the Tatmadaw.

to be the catalysts for change. Burma's regimes have had many decades and numerous political opportunities to shift toward a genuine democracy and the development of its ethnic nationalities and regions, yet it has chosen to evolve under various atavisms of military rule. Even under Burma's first prime minister after independence, U Nu, the "democratic" period saw Burman chauvinism and Burmanization generate ethnic bloodshed.

This is why it is important for us to be conscious of the players that maintain dialog with Rangoon, as well as making visible the links Rangoon has with other governments that are complicit in the international participation of genocide. One cannot fully understand the dynamics of self-determination without exploring the geopolitical context that surrounds all players.

To accomplish these goals, the Karen struggle will first be situated historically so that changing ideological, political, geopolitical, and military anatomies of the Karen Revolution can be made visible. Here I am in line with scholars like Edmund Leach (1964) who emphasized that understanding a culture is a historical process based on ever-changing social structures, and Stefano Varese (2002) who criticized the "poverty" of an ahistorical ethnography. Yet I would like to add a corollary to Varese's advocacy on the importance of historical analyses: that historical dynamics should be viewed dialectically. Because the human condition of the Karen since Burma's independence has been within a context of protracted conflict, the evolving "spiral" of Karen revolutionary dynamics can only be understood against the policies and maneuverings of the Tatmadaw, where diametric tensions between the two break, evolve, and reform.

One of the most challenging aspects of writing about the Karen struggle is determining what social features to include in my analyses. To detail every factor that has shaped the Karen struggle would be a task too monumental for the scope of this book. Readers interested in an exclusive Karen civilian perspective, the Karen ethnogenesis and their exodus from Mongolia in two distinct waves before the Christian era, the Karen during the colonial period, the history of religion in Karen culture, and the ideas presented by the proto-Karen nationalist, Sir San C. Po, will have to engage in independent readings elsewhere. My examination begins during the charged nationalisms that emerged in Burma after World War II.

The Journey

The approach employed to create this work was significantly influenced by Michael Burawoy's important text, *Global Ethnography* (2000). I attempted to break out of the researcher's solitary confinement of being "bounded to a single place and time" and acquire information from more than one place and source (2000, 4). As such I followed my Karen contacts as they navigated

their struggle transnationally, be it in Kawthoolei, Mae Sot, Doi Saket, Bangkok, and even California. I did not desire to be a lone and secluded researcher, an image made popular by Bronislaw Malinowski when he resided with the Trobriand islanders during the early part of the twentieth century.

My examination of Karen liberation ethnodevelopment is based on a synthesis of historical, critical, exploratory, and descriptive research. It is primarily *historical* in that I observe the evolving aspects of Karen self-determination as well as how Karen institutions and development have had to respond to them. It is *critical* in that I ultimately make the case that the military regimes' construction of a "Union" of Burma, due to its draconian policy of internal colonization and ethnic cleansing, qualifies the state of Burma as a failed nation-state project. It is *exploratory* in that I am trying to make visible how Karen self-determination and development of the Karen nation occurs within the context systemic crisis—a condition where social institutions of a society are unable to effectively provide welfare for its citizens due to war (and as we shall see in the next chapter, few development analyses or strategies factor in systemic crisis and its capacity to influence the parameters of an ethnic group striving to develop). And finally, it is *descriptive* in that I try to describe how key Karen social institutions attempt to sustain Karen liberation ethnodevelopment.

Information was derived from interviews, documents, and historical examinations of Karen 20th century development through KNU institutions. I was also mindful of Burawoy's caveat to not let analyses "disappear into the interiors of organizations and institutions" (Burawoy et al. 2000, 6). However, conducting research in the field forced me to factor in the circumstances of interacting with actors in a war zone. Thus, scheduled interviews, data collection, and interpersonal interactions frequently faced two main barriers.

First, gathering information in the context of war meant that the duration of my time spent interacting with pro-KNU Karen at various sites was subject to time constraints. My sample of participants was small. Sadly, much interview data were thrown out because some of these Karen later abandoned the struggle, a status I worried would jeopardize their safety were I to include their sentiments. Commanders and colonels I had the most interaction with since many of them spoke rudimentary Thai and/or English. My stay at the 202 was intermittent and dictated by ceasefire talks that either freed up or restricted contacts from holding dialog with me. Given these uncertain circumstances, KNU factions that had their own spin on the struggle, and the sensitivity of information during war, I did not have time to form the long-term bonds needed to be privy to more in-depth information.

Due to the volatility of ceasefire talks, arrangements for my stay were thus designed for me to get as much information as possible within the shortest possible time. I did not have the needed resources for a long-term trek into Kawthoolei like Karen experts such as Falla (1991), Smith (1999), Rogers (2004), or Lintner (1994). Thus, the information and insights drawn from the