New media and Burmese diaspora identities in New Zealand

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Translations of Burmese and Karen by the author

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Abstract

This study examines ways in which Burmese diasporic identities are formed and maintained, and the importance of new media in this process. Political oppression in Burma, the experience of exile and the importance of opposition movements in the borderlands make the Burmese diaspora a unique and complex group. This study used tapoetethakot, an indigenous Karen research methodology, to interact with fourteen participants in Auckland, exploring aspects of new media use and identity maintenance.

Common among all participants was a twin desire to share stories of suffering and to have that pain recognised. This suffering is an important part of refugee identity and is also linked with resistance against assimilation in New Zealand. Instead, participants try and maintain their language and cultural practices, with the intent of returning to a democratic Burma in the future. New media supports these processes, by providing participants with access to opposition media reports of human rights abuses and suffering, through making cultural and linguistic artifacts accessible and through providing an easy means of communication with friends and family in Burma and the borderlands.
I declare that this work is my own original work and that this dissertation has not been previously submitted as part of the requirements of any other degree. I give permission for a copy of this dissertation to be retained and kept by the AUT Library for the use of future researchers.

Signed ………………………………… Date ……………………………
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Introduction

This research is about the use of cyberspace in making and maintaining diaspora Burmese cultural, social, political, national and ethnic identities in Auckland. The use of new media among the Burmese diaspora is a means of sustaining bonds with the home country and creating a transnational diasporic community. In the following chapters, the use of new media among Burmese will be explored, with particular attention to the function of new media in the process of identity formation. New media can be defined as media online, including internet forms of traditional print, radio and TV, as well as newer participatory types of media such as social networking, chat, video and audio sharing. Through an exploration of how these media are being used in the Burmese refugee community in Auckland, I will examine ways the internet is helping to maintain, reconstruct and change political, ethnic and social identities. The first chapter is a survey of Burmese history and politics. This is important in contextualising why people are fleeing their homeland to places like New Zealand. I will also provide a brief outline of the Burmese diaspora in New Zealand. I will then go into deeper exploration of the role of ethnicity and identity in Burma and the problematic position they have played in conflict in the country. This will necessarily involve some analysis of the important and conflicting role of religion since colonial times. A discussion of the dynamics of these identities and the role of new media will follow, divided into three sections: The first section will generally discuss internet and media consumption among the Burmese diaspora in Auckland and differences of media use between older and younger research participants. The second section will examine ethnic and religious identities in the diaspora and how new media maintains and changes those identities. The final section will look at political identities and activism within the diaspora, where the internet plays a key supporting role.

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1 In this research, the term 'Burma' and 'Burmese' is being used to refer to the country and nationality. In 1997, the Burmese military government changed the name of the country to Myanmar. The word Myanmar and Burma derive from the same root, however 'Burma' has been linked to British colonial rule. Because the country name was changed in an undemocratic way by military authorities, the Burmese opposition has rejected it, and continue to use the term 'Burma', as is done in this dissertation. The term 'Burman' is used to refer to the dominant ethnic group in the country, while 'Burmese' refers to the nationality, regardless of ethnicity.
Positioning myself as the researcher

Since I position myself as an indigenous Karen-Burmese, I am part of the community I am studying so I am simultaneously an object and subject of this study. This study came into existence as a result of my experiences as an exiled Burmese refugee granted the opportunity to pursue an Honours degree in Communication Studies at Auckland University of Technology as the inaugural Asian Journalism Fellow with the Pacific Media Centre. As a foreign student and a temporary member of the Burmese diaspora in Auckland, I became interested in how living in New Zealand impacted on Burmese communities and how they are negotiating contradictory forces of integration and the maintenance of Burmese cultures. I grew up within the diasporic Burmese community in Thailand, so my familiarity of being treated as an “outsider” in Thai society has always fuelled my sense of belonging to Burma and pushed me to maintain my Burmese and Karen identities. Again the sense of belonging and the struggle to be part of the homeland society is also important for Burmese diaspora members in Auckland, but their challenges are very different from those in Thailand because they are in a multicultural society where they can integrate. They are not officially segregated and marginalised as is the case in Thailand.

One of my research interests, since arriving in Auckland, is the question of why the community seems to be divided on ethnic lines, mentally and geographically, and the implications of this for Burmese national identity. Why is ethnic minority identity so important for the diasporic community? Though I was raised in a refugee camp, in which the majority population are ethnic Karen, I never thought of myself as only Karen but Karen-Burmese. I valued being Karen but politically I have also defined myself as being Burmese. I believe that the strong sense of ethnic division is one of the major causes of political conflicts in Burma so by having a twin Burmese and Karen identity, I can resist ethnic division on a personal a level. Identifying as Burmese as well as Karen is a way of articulating the possibility for a peaceful, multi-ethnic society in the future. Promoting a de-ethnicised national identity that every ethnic group in Burma could agree with would be a key part of a solution to the many problems in Burma, but of course this is only one of the multitude of challenges facing Burma.

In this research, I have attempted to test the hypothesis that new media is of central importance for the maintenance of cultures, activism and a sense of belonging within the Burmese diaspora. This hypothesis came into my mind after visiting Burmese friends in Auckland and learning about how they live in their adopted country and managing to keep in touch with those left
behind. The majority of people I met use new media in a wide range of ways to communicate and get information from and through Burmese cyberspace. As people here do not have access to Burmese television, newspapers or live radio, new media has become essential, in place of traditional media forms, for news and information. Most people I talked to have a very strong attachment to Burma and their daily spaces, the way they talk, the way they eat, their cultural codes show they are Burmese and they appear to have a strong sense of ‘Burmeseness’. It made me wonder why they don’t adapt more fully into New Zealand. I have therefore sought to test the use of new media in identity maintenance, through interviews with members of the Burmese community. In doing so, I have tried to explore the various uses of new media for distinct and diverse identities within the Burmese diaspora.
Chapter one

Burma and the diaspora

Burma is located at the crossroads of South and Southeast Asia, bordering Bangladesh, China, India, Lao and Thailand. The area is geographically varied, with tropical rainforests in the south and peripheral areas, dry plains in the centre and the southeastern end of the Tibetan plateau in the north. It is an ethnically complex country, with more than 130 recognised groups, although an exact number is problematic because of the contested nature of ethnic identity (Tin Maung Maung Than, 2005, p. 67). Since constitutional reform in 1974, modern Burma was divided into seven divisions and seven states. States were designated as areas where the majority were from an ethnic minority group whereas divisions were areas where the majority were Burman or ethnically mixed. Population figures for Burma are problematic, since there have only been two censuses since independence, the last being in 1983. It is therefore only possible to consider rough demographic estimates. Total population figures for 2006 range from 55.4 million, published by the Burmese Government, to 48.3 million as published by the United Nations, (Embassy of the Union of Myanmar -Islamabad, 2008; World Bank Group, 2006). The difference between these two totals equals the size of a small country. According to the 1983 census, ethnic Burmans make up the biggest population in the country at 65%, followed by the Shan at 10%, the Karen at 7% and the Kachin at 2%, (Thawnghmung, 2005). The military government sometimes releases updated demographic figures but these statistics can be unreliable because they are not systematically collected.

The area that is contemporary Burma was gradually settled by people from Tibeto-Burman (Karen, Chin, Arakan, Kachin and Burman), Mon-Khmer (Mon) and Austro-T’ai (Shan) linguistic groups. The first important migration into central Burma was by Pyu, a Tibeto-Burman people, who established a kingdom and first introduced Buddhism to Burma. They mysteriously disappeared around the ninth century, succeeded by the first Burman kingdom in Pagan. Pyu and Pagan eras involved the unification of much of what is now Burma. Since Pagan, Burman

\[2\] The seven divisions are Irrawaddy, Magwe, Mandalay, Pegu, Rangoon, Sagaing and Tenasserim. The seven states are Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan.
kingdoms have held power over the central plains, but there have also been rival kingdoms, established by Mon and Arakan people in the south and west respectively. While these groups adopted Buddhism, developed alphabets and written traditions, Chin, Kachin and Karen peoples were mostly animist with an oral tradition, living in more equal societies compared to the feudal practices of the kingdoms surrounding them. The era of monarchies came to an end when Britain colonised the country. Through three wars, British authorities succeeded in taking control of the whole territory in 1886, forcing the Burman king into exile in India. After taking Mandalay, British soldiers burnt royal records, thereby demolishing aristocratic entitlement (Thant Myint, 2001, pp. 3-4). With colonialists came missionaries, who succeeded in converting many Karen, Kachin and Chin animists to Christianity. The colonial authorities used a system of divide and rule, creating a diarchy where ethnic minority areas were under a separate authority from the central plains. The colonial administration privileged Karen, Kachin and Chin people in the army and lower levels of the bureaucracy, creating tension between ethnic minority and Burman nationalists that continues to have repercussions in contemporary times.

The tension and conflict between Burma’s diverse ethnic groups has increased since Burma gained independence from Great Britain in 1948. Colonial authorities attempted to resolve minority discontent regarding autonomy arrangements but were largely unsuccessful. Particularly troubling was the question of how Karen people would be integrated into the state, which was left unresolved at independence (Constituent Assembly of Burma, 1948). After the British left Burma, Burmans began to dominate both the government and national army, in contrast to the colonial period when some ethnic minority groups such as Karen, Kachin and Chin were favoured by the British colonial government, (Smith, 1991; Thant Myint, 2001; Thawngmung, 2005). A civil war broke out immediately after independence when Burmese communists and Karen separatists began armed struggle. Karen separatists demanded an autonomous state, and were later followed by other minorities groups such as Arakan, Kachin and Mon. The civil war escalated during the post-independence period, when Burma was a parliamentary democracy. However, as the government kept losing control of territory, it eventually handed over power to a military caretaker government in 1958. The military formally instigated a coup in 1962, headed by General Ne Win, who isolated the country. In the early 1970s Ne Win introduced the “Four Cuts” policy, which aimed to cut all food, supplies, recruits and intelligence to insurgent groups. This was effectively a scorched-earth policy against villagers in conflict zones (Thawngmung, 2005, p. 3). The military offensives against
opposition armed groups included forced relocation of villages, forced labour and other forms of abuses which pushed many civilians to take refuge in neighbouring countries (Burma Issues, 2009; Karen Human Rights Group, 2006).

In 1988, a national pro-democracy uprising forced Ne Win to step down. In response, the military cracked down on the demonstrators, killing an estimated 3000 people throughout the country (Fogarty, 2008). Many Burmese student activists fled to ethnic insurgent-held areas in the jungle, where they formed their own pro-democracy organisations, allied with ethnic armies. In Rangoon, a military council was formed, calling themselves the State Law and Order Restoration Council. They took power vowing to restore order and hold a democratic election in 1990. Severe repression against opposition groups continued. However, unlike under Ne Win’s regime, the ruling military Council opened up the borders for trade in order to stimulate economic development in the country. In the 1990 election, the National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won with a landslide victory. The military panicked, not expecting such an embarrassing result, and refused to hand over power. They instead announced that they would form a national convention to draft a new constitution, using elected representatives mixed with military appointees. The constitution is now complete and will become law in the upcoming 2010 election.

The majority of people in Burma are Theravada Buddhist and Buddhism is one of the most fundamental aspects of Burmese identity. Burmese state development has been highly influenced by Buddhism, and it remains an integral force for both the military government and opposition. The Saffron Revolution in September 2007 was a notable recent example which highlights the role of the religion in country. While Buddhism is the majority religion overall, Christianity is the majority religion for Chin and Kachin people. A significant minority of Karen people are also Christian, and Christians dominate Karen politics.

Ethnic conflict that began after independence is still a core problem in need of solutions. The cycle of conflict, militarisation in ethnic areas and the economic downturn has triggered increased poverty and mass migration. In Thailand, currently there are an estimated three to four million Burmese migrant workers and about over 110,000 refugees in nine camps along the Thai-Burma border, (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2009; Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2009). There are also significant numbers of Burmese migrants and
refugees in Malaysia and India. Those who get formal recognition as refugees can be resettled to countries such as New Zealand, the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and Scandinavian countries.

The Burmese diaspora in the City of Sails

Since 2000, Burmese refugees have come to New Zealand under the refugee quota programme. According to government statistics, total Burmese quota arrivals ending in September 2009 are 2471 (Immigration New Zealand, 2009). Before this, migrants from Burma had arrived since the 1970s, from middle class professional and urban bourgeoisie backgrounds, and settled in New Zealand in small numbers. The community is very diverse and divided along ethnic, religious, socio-economic and political lines. I have found that ethnic division amongst refugees from Burmese minority groups is emphasised over a Burmese national identity. The notion of belonging to a specific ethnic group and location is thus significant and valued. For instance ethnic Mon people spoken to for this study identified themselves as coming from Monland, while Karen identified themselves as coming from Kawthoolei (the name for the Karen homeland), rather than Burma. This kind of division is common in Burma but the cause of division cannot be easily understood without looking back to the perplexing history of the country.

This study only focuses on a small number of Burmese refugees who have resettled to Auckland since 2000. Research participants live in different but overlapping ethnic communities around Auckland, held together by churches, monasteries and cultural and political rituals. Geographically, communities are partly separated on ethnic lines. The majority of Karen people live in the North Shore, the majority of Burmans and Mon are in Glen Innes while the majority of Chin are in Henderson (see map 2). Refugees I spoke with appear to have a strong attachment to Burma and Burmese culture. The community in Auckland is young and all participants have close family in Burma. Furthermore, the majority of participants wish to return to Burma in the future, so they see New Zealand as a temporary home. Despite obvious ethnic and political divisions, whenever there is an event or emergency, such as Cyclone Nargis, the community as a whole comes together, which shows the fluidity of these divisions.
Ethnicity and identity in Burma

“I always want to identify as Chin when I introduce myself to people here in New Zealand. But people here do not know who or what Chin people are so I just tell them that I am Burmese and from Burma. But this is not what I want.” (Interviewee four, 11 October 2009)

The two dominant theoretical approaches to ethnicity are primordialism and constructionist. A primordialist view sees ethnicity as something fixed and essential, unchanging over time. In contrast, a constructivist view holds that ethnicity is fluid and relative, changing over time. Generally, the Burmese government and opposition groups have primordialist views of ethnicity and such views of ethnicity are necessary in order to maintain ethnic nationalism (Esman, 2004). However, the significance of ethnicity and identity in Burma has changed over time due to the political, social and economic circumstances, giving credence to constructionist views. For example, during the pre-colonial monarchical period, the most important identity was one’s location and position within the feudal system (where one lived geographically and the nature of their occupation) (South, 2008, p. 4). Ethnicity still existed as a category but the meaning was different – it did not define who one was in the same way as it does now. As Lieberman has found, changing ethnicity in pre-colonial times was as easy as changing clothes (1978). The politics of ethnicity and ethnic identity has been put ahead of national identity in a lot of the debates within the exiled opposition movement, which reflects viewpoints deeply grounded in historical experience.

In August 2009, I was invited by a friend to a multicultural concert at a local Auckland high school. The school is in an area with a large Burmese community and thus has a number of Burmese students. Students performed traditional dances from places including China, the Cook Islands, India, Korea, Māori, Philippines and Samoa. One of my friends was dancing in the Burmese group, and she did a traditional dance with two of her friends. In addition to this, there was a performance by dancers from “Monland”. As the announcer introduced them, there were whispers in the audience: “Where is Monland?” No explanation was given. Decorated around the stage were flags for each country the students at the school came from. These included a flag for Burma and a flag for “Monland”. For me this was in interesting demonstration of the complexity of Burmese identity and the contested meaning of “Burma”.

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Identity is a key area of contestation in contemporary Burma. The term “Burmese” is ambiguous because it has two meanings. One usage refers to Burman people, who are the dominant ethnic group. The other usage denotes Burmese citizenship, which includes all ethnic groups in the country. In Burmese language, ‘Burman’ and ‘Burmese’ is the same word. National identity is therefore ethicised because of the underlying ethnic meaning of the term. This in turn strengthens ethno-nationalism and separatism. Karen nationalism serves as a pertinent example.

A Karen nationalist, Saw Poe Chit, who went to London in 1946 with a Karen delegation to negotiate for a separate Karen state wrote that “the nature of Karen and Burman are in fact different and distinct genuses and it is a dream that Karen and Burman can ever evolve a common nationality,” (Cited in Gravers, 2007, pp. 229-230). This strong opposition to the compatibility of Burman and Karen as one nationality was one cause of the confrontations that took place before independence. These confrontations, which continue to taint Karen-Burman relations, manifested as being based on a combination of ethnic and religious factors. Many Karen were converted to Christianity during British colonial times. After British annexation, Buddhist monks started to engage with the growing anti-colonialist movement, thereby connecting Buddhism with nationalism, and subsequently, Christianity with colonialism. The anti-colonial resistance movement by monks was suppressed by missionaries, backed by Christian Karen soldiers who got weapons from the British army (Gravers, 1999, p. 23). The racial tension between Karen and Burmans started then and was followed by persecution of Karen people in the Irrawaddy Delta during Japanese rule in Burma. A number of massacres of Karen villagers took place, carried out by the Japanese and allied Burma Independence Army. The massacres were partly explained as being triggered by some Karen killing Japanese military officials, but this does not explain Burmese involvement. This event continues to scar Karen-Burmese relations. I learnt about this incident after I started attending school in a refugee camp. The curriculum was designed by Karen nationalists and this was taught in order to bring students into the Karen cause. Related to this incident, Ba Maw, the Prime Minister of modern Burma wrote in his memoirs that “Burmans were aggressive, and the minorities never forgot such actions because of fears of extermination” (paraphrased by Gravers, 1999, p. 46). Gravers summarised the importance of these events as follows:

Even today such memories of ethnic vendetta poison any attempts at a dialogue. Ethnic differences were marked by rumour, mistrust and the dominance of a political strategy central to which was the anticipation and forestalling of the others conspiracies and insurrections. There was however, some substance to several of the rumours, for instance
the dropping of paratroopers and the murder of Karen people. The Christian Karen leaders have since referred to these events as evidence that they cannot live together with the Burmas, who have such barbaric tendencies. (1999, p. 46)

One problem with ethno-linguistic categories in Burma is the existence of ‘alliance ethnicities’. These are ethnic terms that refer to a number of different groups that share some similar cultural or historical traits. Examples of this are Kachin (made up of approximately six ethnic groups), Karen (made up of 20 sub-groups) and Chin (with around 50 sub-groups). These ethnic alliance identities are unstable, with ongoing tension between dominant and marginalised groups and tension between definitions of which ethnic groups should be included within the terms. For example, many Rawang people, one of the six Kachin groups, do not identify as Kachin, preferring a separate identity. However Jinghpaw nationalists, who are the majority, insist that they are Kachin.
Chapter two

Literature

New media, has been a significant mechanism for organising and constructing identities and community in the modern era (Appadurai, 2001; Georgiou, 2006). Communication at local and global levels through electronic media such as radio, television and the internet has played an important role in reminding diasporic people of their sense of belonging and has helped to form their varied identities (Georgiou, 2006). There have been numerous studies on electronic media arguing that its nature and capability is important for the diaspora situation, being more suitable than traditional media forms (Hiller & Franz, 2004; Kang, 2009). In his research focused on the London-based Chinese population, Kang suggested that internet use destabilised the boundary between home and abroad and the power dynamics of majority and minority (Kang, 2009). New media thus provides people with broad opportunities to access information through surfing the internet, watching web TV and listening to web radio, regardless of location or time zone.

Consuming media from the home country is common among most diasporas groups who feel the need to maintain their identities while they are away from their birthplace (Kang, 2009; Ogan, 2001). The reasons diasporic communities turn to the media from their country of origin rather than media in their host country are diverse and varied. The diasporic community generally view the dominant media in the country in which they are living as institutions that carry unfair perspectives in the coverage of their issues, and charge that minority groups are portrayed in a stereotypical way (Ogan, 2001, p. 75). In her research on Turkish migrants in Amsterdam, Ogan observed that there is disaffection with the dominant media in Holland, as it fails to represent Turkish migrants in a positive aspect (Ogan, 2001, p. 75). Migrants in Ogan’s study felt that they were portrayed as the ‘Other’ in media coverage, and that their perspectives were silenced in mainstream coverage. Mainstream media also often fails to recruit producers from minority groups who can represent the group and thus provide content that helps address the interest and needs of diasporas. A feeling of suspicion and marginalisation in the host society (Sheffer, 2003), plus the misrepresentation by mainstream media in the host country pushes diasporic communities to rely on media from their country of origin. In addition, with the lack of language skills and difficulties of integration in the culture of the host country, many diasporic groups including Burmese in New Zealand have expressed less interest in media in the host country. So
instead of considering mainstream media in the host country as a main sources of information, they prefer to use familiar media in their original language.

It is therefore also important to understand the use of new media within the diaspora as a form of resistance against assimilation and domination by the culture of the home country. Dissatisfaction with the misrepresentation and stereotypical portrayal by mainstream media in the host country also encourage different diaspora groups to set up their own media. “Diasporic media can be a powerful agent of the community they represent and they can create powerful images of self-representation for the group.” (Husband, Cottle, King and Wood cited in Georgiou, 2006, p. 13). Moreover, these media can also be understood as symbols of empowerment and reconcile diaspora community to participate in the public sphere in the host country, their country of origin and across international boundaries. Well-established diaspora communities might successfully set up their own media, as Indian, Samoan and Chinese diasporas in Auckland have done. The Burmese diaspora in New Zealand has not yet reached that stage, and instead rely on web-based media produced in Burmese diaspora communities in Thailand and India. However those in New Zealand do make good use of Web 2.0 technologies, participating in social networking sites and forums.

A number of studies have been conducted, finding that new media is important in allowing diasporic groups to access home culture artefacts (Hiller & Franz, 2004; Kang, 2009). According to Kang “internet use becomes critical in diasporic everyday lives in that it is an important method to bring homeland and home culture into migrant’s daily lives abroad”, (Kang, 2009, p. 328). Kang found that many Chinese migrants maintain their identity as Chinese by using the internet to obtain information, cultural products and other resources (Kang, 2009, pp. 327-343). Looking at news websites and reading online news is one of the popular ways to assist them to obtain up to date information about social and political events taking place in the country of origin.

According to Kang, the internet is not only helping diaspora groups maintain their cultural identities by transmitting information and cultural practices from their homeland, but it is also effectively pulling together people in the diasporic community and helping them to maintain cohesion through the use of online social networking sites such as Facebook (Kang, 2009, p. 332). Social networking is thus an important tool that helps reinforce people’s sense of where they come from and to which community they belong. Moreover, it is a vital method for
disseminating information. Kimball and Rheingold also argued that online social networking helps create “a venue for storytelling, showcasing, projects and best practices that could be leveraged to create new knowledge resources” (Kimball & Rheingold, 2000). Possibilities for online storytelling are particularly significant for communities with oral traditions, such as my own.

New media can have a particularly important role for youth identities, as the internet usage is higher amongst younger people. Some nation-specific studies have found that youth can maintain their ties to each other and share interests in popular music, e-books, e-journals, animation, computer games and other form of youth culture through the internet (Sefton-Green, 1998). Kang argued the public spaces such as web pages are important because it is a place where many homeland’s popular cultural products are “consumed and articulated”, which is of significance to diaspora youth (Kang, 2009, p. 336). Pop music is another feature that can link youth in the diaspora to their country of origin. Among diaspora youth, music from the country of origin is important in maintaining identity, according to Ogan’s findings. She found out that many young Turkish migrants in Holland prefer Turkish to Dutch music, and they enjoy watching music programme on Turkish television (Ogan, 2001, p. 135).

Moreover, people in the diaspora also maintain their social identity through offline activities that they could organise as a result of opportunities created through new media. By using chat rooms, blog, instant messenger programs and newsgroups, diaspora members can get ideas and network in order to arrange social, political and cultural activities in the community (Kang, 2009; Thawnghmung, 2005). Kang, for instance explained that the Chinese diaspora in London had organised several fundraising events with Chinese people in support of earthquake victims in the Sichuan province in China in May 2008. They organised all of these activities through online video sharing.

According to Thawnghmung’s findings, many in the Burmese diaspora start political activities as soon as they arrived in the West (Thawnghmung, 2005, p. 6). In the case of New Zealand, where political activities are open and free, many Burmese refugees interviewed fully took up this opportunity by introducing political activities into the host communities. According to a Radio Free Asia (RFA) Burmese section news report;

Regardless of the nature and objectives of their organizations and activities, however, all these communities have, one way or the other, exerted political pressure on the Burmese military regime. Aside from high profile political events, what appeared to be genuinely
cultural activities, such as water festival, may oftentimes turn into political ones.” (cited in Thawnghmung, 2005, p. 6)

While there is a significant amount of literature related to media and diasporic identity, there have thus far been less work that focuses specifically on new media and connections with political protest movements. This study aims to expand on this literature through a specific case study of new media and the Burmese diaspora, taking into account the interrelatedness of political, ethnic, religious and youth identities.
Chapter three
Tapotaethakot

As an indigenous Karen-Burmese woman doing research about myself and my community within a “Western” academic setting, I have struggled to find a research methodology that is appropriate to who I think I am and who I think my community is. As a Karen, we have no universities and no current practice for translating our culture into a Western academic form. We have no academic journals or books in Karen language. Our language comes from an oral tradition but it has been heavily influenced by British colonisation. As a Burmese, knowledge production inside my country is extremely restricted, universities are under-funded, subject to strict censorship and plagiarism is widespread. People in Burma have little experience with academic research. Burmese and Karen people in foreign universities, working in an alien system, in a language other than their own, can easily become alienated, as I felt when I started studying in New Zealand. It is therefore important for Burmese and/or Karen researchers to work with methods of research and knowledge production where both researchers and participants can recognise themselves. Positivist research methodologies were not appropriate to me because being distant, formal and ignoring the position of myself as researcher is foreign.

To look at other options, I started exploring indigenous research methodologies and indigenous ways of knowing. According to Kovach, indigenous epistemology involves “incorporating an indigenous theoretical perspective and using aligned methods (e.g., qualitative interviews, storytelling)”, (2005, p. 22). Kovach uses this way of knowing to develop an indigenous methodology, following these key principles: “(a) experience as a legitimate way of knowing; (b) indigenous methods, such as storytelling, as a legitimate way of sharing knowledge; (c) receptivity and relationship between research and participants as a natural part of the research “methodology”; and (d) collectivity as a way of knowing that assumes reciprocity to the community”, (2005, p. 28). All of these points, about ways of knowing, and principles for research, are appropriate for myself as a Karen researcher and the community I am researching. I found that this does reflect who I am and does not make me feel lost, although it is still expressed in English, which is a foreign language. There is, though, a key contradiction between my Burmese identity and my Karen identity. Burmese has a literary tradition while Karen does not. Therefore the written form could be seen as more legitimate in Burmese culture. According to Karen historian, Saw Aung Hla, Karen people had a written tradition with their own alphabets but these were later lost during Burman and Mon kingdoms. The current Karen alphabets were
invented by missionaries who started converting Karen in the early 19th Century (Saw Aung Hla, 1999). Karen written tradition today is therefore very new and heavily influenced by colonialist and American Baptist culture. As I feel that my primary community and culture is Karen, I wanted to use a methodology that could be Karen.

The concept of Tapotaethakot

Language isolates me at university in fundamental ways. Meyer has pointed out the “difficulty of using language that is not one’s own in constructing knowledge” (Cited in Kovach, 2005, p. 26). This is a problem with English in general and also with academic English. As writing a paper like this necessitates thinking in English, it can feel like I am cutting myself off from my Karenness. For me, thinking in Karen is natural but it is not something I can do when I have to write a paper in English, a foreign language and foreign system. Absolon and Willet, who are indigenous Canadians, have written that being from a non-English background “has given us unique epistemological lenses. Cultural world views are embedded in language”, (2005, p. 114) . They call for a process of renaming: “In order to express ourselves, we have no choice but to break these rules to make the words work for us, or to create new words”, (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 114).

As I could not find a word to express how I think a research methodology for this study could work for myself and my community, I have decided to use a Karen word, tapotaethakot. Using a Karen word is also important as part of an attempt to use Karen language for knowledge production and to give power to Karen ways of seeing and knowing and the many concepts in Karen language that can help us indigenous researchers understand and get meaning from the world. Tapotaethakot literally means informal conversation with people who are close. This closeness comes from Karen culture, where people treat others as relatives. One should treat an older man as their uncle, a younger girl as their little sister etc. There is no appropriate word for tapotaethakot in English. The closest could be “chatting” but that does not have the same kinship meanings as tapotaethakot.

Applied to research methodology, tapotaethakot can include the following principles, which are culturally appropriate to all people in Burma:

(a) respect participants and treat them according to Karen rules of kinship, as if they are close family members.
(b) meet informally and openly, have conversations rather than formal interviews, sharing food. This also involves reciprocity so the researcher should disclose personal information about herself and her family, and not just expect to take information. This also means I am part of the research and my own experiences do not need to be hidden in “objective” language. I will attempt to incorporate some reflexive and auto-biographical elements into the work.

(c) being open, direct and upfront about the research and purposes of the project.

(d) being a community member, involved in and supporting community initiatives. For example, through this research, I have come to know members of a Karen youth group. I have given assistance to them in planning and translation and I am also involved in preparations for a dance performance they are organising for Karen New Year. I am not “using” the community for the research but rather I am trying to be a useful part of the community.

(e) *Tapotaethakot* also means recognising and valuing people’s experience and experiential knowledge, in local languages where possible, rather than Western formal, institutional knowledge.

(f) recognising and making use of oral tradition and storytelling as legitimate forms of knowledge and research practice. As part of this, I am using radio. I will produce five short radio features as part of this project, which is a way of asserting the Karen oral tradition.

(h) Recruiting research participants through personal and family relations, and through community leaders in an informal way. This is similar to snowball sampling. First I recruited some friends, and then they introduced me to friends of friends etc.

I have therefore carried out the research as best I can using *tapotaethakot*. The research project involved sixteen participants, of whom eight were Karen. The heavy Karen representation reflects my own Karen identity and my relationships with the Karen community as a starting point. I have carried out most of the interviews in participants’ homes. I did not conduct interviews until after at least one visit where we share our experiences and eat a communal meal, which are integral for building trust. Actual interviews that I have recorded have taken approximately 30-45 minutes, but I have incorporated my own experience and informal conversations with participants into the findings. It is not possible to take a “representative” sample of Burmese people because of the complexity of political, ethnic, linguistic, class,
subcultural and gender identities that are fluid. The findings here instead reflect the experiences and viewpoints of some of my new friends in New Zealand.
Chapter four
Interpreting interviews

The internet plays an important role in maintaining continuity between the new lives of Burmese refugees in Auckland and their past lives in Burma or the borderlands. For those in the diaspora, the experience of becoming a refugee, leaving Burma and fleeing to Thailand, India or Malaysia is something participants do not want to forget. For those spoken to for this study, the idea of assimilation and integration into New Zealand is complex. Participants seemed to have conflicting feelings of wanting to integrate in the medium-term, while also staying connected to what is going on in Burma, socially and politically. This is like “recycling home politics” (Thawnghmung, 2005, p. 6).

Through reading diasporic media online, Burmese refugees in Auckland have been able to stay up to date with what is happening in their “home” country. This provides continuity with their past, which is especially important as the majority of participants see Burma as their “real” home and New Zealand as only a temporary home. One example of the multiple and practical uses of diasporic media for those in Auckland came from one man in the western suburbs. The participant had not had any contact with his immediate family, who remained in Burma. One of his first cousins, who was an insurgent soldier, was shot in a military offensive and the participant only found out about it through exiled media in Thailand, when they published the story online.

All Burmese people interviewed have at least one computer in their house with an internet connection. The internet has provided users with broad opportunities but this has a different meaning for various people within the Burmese community. The diasporic use of the computer and the internet is varied based on age, English language skills and the familiarity with modern technology. I have found that large proportions of young participants have personal computers with high speed internet while those over 50 show less interest in learning to use computers and instead mainly rely on older technology like telephones for communication. Hence, the use of the internet is much more common among diasporic children and youth than their parents, which has created a knowledge and cultural gap between these two groups. This knowledge gap includes information regarding international and Burmese news, cultural developments in Burma and access to information about services in New Zealand.
The internet is an important communication tool to keep in touch with friends and is used as a primary instrument by most participants. One Karen young woman who has not been so long in the new country explained how she uses the internet to keep in touch with his friends:

I have contact with all of my close friends who I knew before. Some of them are in countries like Australia, USA, Russia and Sweden with their families so we live far away from each other but we have regular contact through internet services like email and chat programs. (Interviewee nine, 17 October 2009)

In contrast, many older participants mainly rely on the telephone to be informed, and to exchange important news and to stay in touch with family back home. This use of offline technology among older Burmese diaspora members is also largely based on their lack of English skills. One participant mentioned that he feels confused when he first looked at a computer screen because everything was in English:

I first learnt how to use a computer when I was fifty years old and I was only taught how to type the English alphabets after I arrived in New Zealand in 2006. Now I can type but I am still not confident to use the computer without my children because I worry that I’ll break it. I hardly ever use it. (Interviewee five, 12 October 2009)

The regular use of the internet also helps Burmese youth to be more socially active in the community in New Zealand, compared to their parents. Online internet usage among young Burmese has highly effected their offline community activities. The internet has, for example helped Karen youth establish a group, which at the time of writing comprises about 30 young people in Auckland who organise themselves with the objective of preserving Karen culture and traditions. This group was successfully set up after one young leader and his colleagues in Auckland had seen and learnt cultural-based activities online, which were carried out by Karen communities overseas. The youth group was established in response to the perceived inaction by senior New Zealand-based Karen organisations and the youth group still does not have a name or formal structure. The group leader explained the motivation behind the new group:

Through the internet, I have read news and seen pictures of Karen rituals such as the wrist tying ceremony and Karen New Year that were organized by communities in Australia, the USA and the UK. We could not do things like that in New Zealand before so this encouraged me to set up a youth group to organise these necessary cultural activities. (Interviewee three, 11 October 2009)

At the time of writing, they were preparing for a Karen New Year event. This has involved weekly practice for the dohn dance, an important Karen performance involving music, singing and dancing with about 30 people. To coordinate the dance takes a lot of practice and
cooperation and community building. The rehearsals are just as important as the final performance.

Despite their informal status, they are also successfully involved in practical activities to assist newly arrived Karen in tasks like interpreting, driving training and transportation around Auckland on a voluntary basis. These activities have led to wider recognition of this youth group within the Karen community. One example of this recognition was the inclusion of youth representatives in plans to set up a Karen language summer school. The group leader and his colleagues are now actively working on that. Within the youth group, members communicate through web-based technologies such as email, internet to mobile phone texting and instant messenger programs, which are free, allowing them to cut operational costs associated with phone calls and mobile phone text messages.

**Language, resistance and identity**

Among ethnic minority participants, ethnic language community media operating on the Thai border are significant in supporting diaspora members to maintain a strong sense of ethnic identity and to keep up to date with ethno-nationalist politics. This sense of belonging is particularly strong because the majority of participants came to live in New Zealand less than five years ago and have therefore not developed a New Zealand identity. This is also partly because of a lack of English skills, which is an essential requirement to be able to build up meaningful relationships with people outside one’s ethnic/national groups. Three participants explained how they did feel secure living in New Zealand compared to previous times when they had to flee fighting. However, they were still not happy because they do not feel like New Zealand is their home (Interviewee five, 12 October 2009; Interviewee six, 14 October 2009; Interviewee two, 14 October 2009). Participants whose families had been left behind have a particularly strong connection to Burma and/or the borderlands. All participants said they still have relatives, however the closeness of the relatives varied, ranging from parents and siblings to more distant cousins. Still, this familial link underlines connections to Burma. One Karen participant who has been here four years described how he has lost contact with siblings since coming to live in New Zealand. He could only send a letter once, but was not sure if the letter ever arrived, because of the poor postal service in Burma. His desire to know what is going on with his siblings, who remain in a remote area, underscores his feeling of belonging to Burma rather than New Zealand.
All Karen and Chin participants said that a key reason that they regularly use minority-language media was for linguistic reasons. They felt that if they often read news in their minority language, it would keep them in practice with that language, and therefore maintain a sense of culture and identity. One Karen participant said: “in a country where everyone speaks English, it is important to read Karen language news. We are worried that our language may be lost so we need to read in it regularly to maintain it” (Interviewee three, 11 October 2009). One Karen participant explained the importance of accessing Karen language media after experiencing repression in Burma:

I grew up in a refugee camp where everyone spoke Karen. I went to a Karen language school and, in that situation, we didn’t need to worry about losing the Karen language, but here when we go to school and talk with friends, it is all in English. The only time we can read Karen language is through reading news and speaking at home with our families. So we are in a position where we could lose our language. It is also important – in Burma we are not allowed to learn Karen in school so the language could be lost one day if we don’t maintain it. (Interviewee three, 11 October 2009)

For this participant, therefore, simply reading news in Karen is a political act of resistance against the perceived threats to the language, both in Burma and in the diaspora. Because of this concern, the Karen, Mon and Chin communities in Auckland are also organising language classes for their children. Because ethnic minority identity is so connected to language in the participants’ minds, passing on the language to children is fundamental to maintain ethnic identity among their children.

For many ethnic minority participants, a feeling of persecution is part of their ethnic identity. As a result of decades of civil war, being Karen, for example, now means fighting, fleeing and suffering. Essentially, minority ethnicities for many people are connected with the sense of being a victim of the SPDC and/or Burman domination. Arguably, the fact that exiled media is saturated with human rights reports contributes to an identity of victimage amongst those in the diaspora. When I talk with New Zealanders, they constantly express sympathy because Burmese people are so often portrayed as victims in mainstream media. One participant expressed the importance of telling New Zealanders about human rights abuses in Burma in order to gain their sympathy (Interviewee seven, 14 October 2009). Since there are few concrete actions New Zealanders can do, recognition of suffering is like a political act in itself and the desire to garner expressions of sympathy is one part of local diaspora activism. Some participants seem to
internalise the human rights news they read in exiled media, which heightens their feeling of victimage.

For one participant, “reading Kwekalu [a Karen language online news service] everyday is important because we get to know the updated information about Karen people, for example how they flee fighting, how many get killed and the food problems” (Interviewee ten, 17 October 2009). Some activists expressed a profound sense of guilt, around their relatively privileged and safe position in New Zealand, compared to those left behind. One Karen community leader commented:

Here in New Zealand, we don’t need to worry about our basic living conditions. We don’t need to worry about our survival. If you want to eat something, you can eat it. Our kids can go to school, without worrying about where the school fees will come from. But our people back home are suffering – they don’t have enough food to eat. We shouldn’t enjoy our life here so I encourage everyone to think about what’s going on and do something for people back home. (Interviewee eleven, 20 October 2009)

This feeling of guilt is one factor that pushes people to take part in political activism. One participant explained that he is only in New Zealand because of his family and the fact that his child has a disability. He said he felt “selfish” leaving his comrades behind to come to a comfortable and safe life in Auckland. “Because I have been working as an activist in the border, when I arrived here, I felt like I needed to show that I can continue that. My comrades keep working so regardless of place, I need to keep working. I need to work even harder than friends back home and do more because I am in this good place now” (Interviewee one, 9 October 2009).

Spreading news was one of the most basic forms of activism. Because not all in the Burmese diaspora have access to the internet and read news, those who do often take it as a duty to inform others about what is going on, particularly in relation to human rights and political developments. For two participants, summarising daily news to others was an important political action, which they tried to do everyday (Interviewee one, 9 October 2009; Interviewee three, 11 October 2009). One participant said that telling people the up-to-date news encourages them to take part in activist events, such as memorial days and protests (Interviewee one, 9 October 2009). The feeling of satisfaction from sharing news and information from websites is also connected to the Nichols’ concept of epistephilia, which he defines as “a desire to know” (Nichols, 2001, p. 40). Nichols, writing about documentary film, explained that “He-Who-
Knows (the agent has traditionally been masculine) will share knowledge with those who wish to know. We, too, can occupy the position of The-One-Who-Knows. They speak about them to use and we gain a sense of pleasure, satisfaction, and knowledge as a result” (2001, pp. 40-41). The appeasement of guilt and the feeling of action from “knowing” and being in a position to spread knowledge is an important motivation behind Burmese activists who make this part of their routine. As Nichols has said, ‘power and responsibility reside in knowing’ (2001, p. 41). The unequal language and technical skills within the diaspora create a division then, between those who “know” and those who wait to be told.

Another reason for keeping up to date with news was connected with plans and desires to return home. One older participant talked about how he regularly spoke with friends in the borderlands and got news because he was planning to retire there. He said he did not want live in New Zealand because “the community is not warm and communal, it doesn’t treat me in a good way. Here if I want to meet friends, I have to make an appointment, I can’t just drop in. This is completely different to the borderline where you live with friends and feel warm” (Interviewee six, 14 October 2009). Some Karen in Auckland, in reaction to this “culture of individualism” have drawn up plans to create a “Karen village” to bring Karen families together physically. According to the plan, Karen who join the community would all live together on the same street, recreating a communal environment in suburban Auckland (Interviewee eleven, 20 October 2009). However given the high costs involved, and government policy of integration, it is very unlikely that this plan will ever be achieved. However, the desire of community leaders to draft a plan like that highlights the deep dissatisfaction with New Zealand culture and perhaps a fear of identity loss, as members of the diaspora gradually integrate into New Zealand.

As Buddhism is so important in Burma, it is unsurprising that it is also a key force for the diaspora also. Within this study 50% of participants are Buddhist, including one monk. In Auckland, there are three Burmese monasteries, of which two are rented suburban houses and one is an official monastery. Two of these monasteries are simply Burmese and one is Mon, and each monastery has one monk. The funds to maintain the monasteries come from private donations from within the Burmese community. Access to monks are crucial for Buddhist Burmese. One participant commented,

It is very important for us to have a monk in a country where we are in a minority group. At the same time, as Buddhist people we need monks to lead ceremonies like birthdays,
funerals and Buddhist holidays. We are not Christian, we can’t go to churches so we need these monks. (Interviewee one, 9 October 2009)

Living as a minority in a secular country, many parents have concerns that they will not be able to bring up their children to be “good Buddhists”. One Buddhist participant, who has a six-year-old daughter explained that because he is Buddhist, he wants his daughter to grow up Buddhist, so he makes an effort to bring her to the monastery and to teach her about the religion (Interviewee one, 9 October 2009). For that participant, new media is a key tool to get Buddhist information and audio in order to pass on the religion to his daughter.

I download songs, prayers from websites that focus on Buddhism and let my daughter listen to them. As she is young, she cannot learn many things, like how to read scriptures, so listening to voices is more effective. It also teaches her to pray before she sleeps every night. (Interviewee one, 9 October 2009)

In contrast, parents who either do not have internet access or are computer illiterate struggle to find resources for teaching their kids. One participant explained: “I can’t force my kids. They seem uninterested in my Buddhist/Animist religion. Now they just go to the church with friends rather than the monastery” (Interviewee twelves, 19 October 2009).

Within the diaspora, monks are important political activists in the community. One monk who participated in this study identified as an activist, being part of the Young Monks’ Buddhist Association, and actively supports the monks’ movement inside Burma through fundraising and giving advice and encouragement. For him, the internet is the most important tool for his activism. He uses it to keep in touch with his colleagues in Burma and around the world, through email and instant messenger programs:

I use internet everyday and chat with my colleagues inside Burma and other countries and find out the latest information. Buddhism is linked with ideas of peace and justice so when the country is in trouble, it is considered to be part of the responsibility of monks to address these problems. This is the reason monks took to the streets in 2007. (Interviewee eight, 17 October 2009)

As Steinberg has observed, Buddhism is important for political legitimacy in Burma (Steinberg, 2006). This is also true in Auckland, where U Aw Ba Tha attends and blesses key political events, such as protests, Aung San Suu Kyi’s birthday and the anniversary of the 1988 uprising. His presence there indicate connections between Buddhism and Burmese identity and the importance of religious blessing at protests for this diasporic group.
Identity and resistance

Involvement in Burmese political activism was significant for many participants in this study (see appendices 2, 4, 8 and 12). The meaning of political identity, in the context of the Burmese democracy movement, means being associated and allied with one or more of the many organisations that oppose the military regime, as well as identifying with “the movement” generally. There is a joke amongst democracy activists in exile, that if you have three Burmese in a room, they will represent four organisations. One of my first initial interests before undertaking this study was how people sustain political identities when they are so isolated from the movement for democracy in Burma, and how much truth there is to this joke. In particular, Burmese activists who have been involved with organisations that oppose dictatorship have the strongest need to belong to opposition groups after they resettle. I also feel that. The first organisation that I joined when I was about 14 years old was the Karen Student Network Group, which is a youth organisation founded by young refugees to raise awareness about Burma’s political situation among youth in the camp and to maintain and preserve Karen culture while we are away from our country. I joined this organisation in order to find an answer to the question of why I was a refugee living in a camp. I became aware of the social and political situation in Burma after I joined this organisation and it encouraged me to be active and work for the cause of democracy in Burma. I am always proud to identity with this organisation and this is a story that I also share with my other fellow Burmese who are already involved in this political movement. Telling the story about how we got involved in the political movement is a common topic. This kind of storytelling about our own experiences and history took place when I met many of the research participants. This is an important way of building friendship and trust. There are four participants in my research project who proudly indentified themselves as still being members of their mother organisations, although they could not physically be active members in the organisations since arriving in New Zealand (see appendices 3, 6 and 7).

I have come to know all of these four participants since I arrived in Auckland. I met two of them in a protest, one at a cultural event and another participant was introduced to me by friends in Thailand. They all are actively involved in the Burmese community here and also have close connections with Burmese opposition groups along the border as well as in Burma. And they all share a dream to do what ever they can to organise Burmese people in New Zealand to support the democracy movement.
Three participants claimed that communication with their colleagues and friends from both inside and outside Burma, through the internet, encouraged them to be politically motivated (see appendicies 2 and 8). An ethnic Burman participant who has friends inside and outside Burma could identify activities that he could do from New Zealand, through discussions with activists in the borderlands on Google Talk: “I always talk to friends who live on the Burma-India border and by talking to them I get updated news that gives me hope and motivation to keep working for the cause” (Interviewee one, 9 October 2009). I was able to listen to an online conversation between this participant and one of his friends, a senior Burmese politician based in New Delhi. His friend, who regularly travels to Burma secretly, gave an update on the underground movement, encouraging more fundraising to supporting activist networks inside Burma. Online chatting with friends who have access to ADSL is a regular phenomenon for many participants. However it is harder to use chat technology with those inside Burma, because of limited internet access, the expense of internet cafes and internet surveillance by the government. This limited some participants from communicating with activist friends in the country.

Buddhism is also an important identity for political activists in Auckland. A Burman participant who is a political activist equates being a Buddhist with national identity and thereby saw the loss of Buddhism as the loss of Burmese national identity. Generally, the religion is placed in the highest position in society and the monks are treated as the sons of Buddha. It is reasonable to see monks take part in political events and their appearance in social and political anniversaries and rituals is significant for Burmese inside Burma and in Auckland. A participant explained how he worked with one of the refugee monks in Auckland:

We invite the monk to all of our political anniversaries because he is a spiritual leader and he has the highest position in our community. We do not have a Burmese state minister or state representatives that we can invite to our important political events, so we invite him instead. His appearance in the event is also important because he is an influential figure for Burmese people here and people give respect to him as someone who is even more than a monk. Rather, he is a revolutionary monk. (Interviewee one, 9 October 2009)

These political events organised in Auckland with the participation of monks has another agenda. It is clearly organised to set an example for young Burmese who arrived here when they are young or those born in this new country. According to Burmese political activists involved in
In this study, an important task for those with Buddhist political identities is to pass them down to their children, as one activist explained:

It is important for us to organise political events that include monks because we need our young generation to learn these things. It is more crucial for us to do this because we understand that there is a very limited chance for our young people to see this kind of political activity that includes monks, if we do not initiate it. (Interviewee one, 9 October 2009)

In this study, political identity was only important for Burmese adults in their thirties and forties. Identifying oneself with political organisations, even that of one’s parents, appeared to be outside of the concerns of young Burmese in their teens and twenties, especially young people who were born in New Zealand or those who arrived here at a very young age. As a consequence, some Burmese parents and members of the community seem to be very keen to share the political struggle with their children and the younger generation by encouraging them to join and participate in protests and political anniversaries whenever they are organised in Auckland. This practice arguably has a mixed outcome as some young people show their interest in the political situation in Burma, while others do not even pay attention to it.
Conclusion

New media has fundamentally influenced the everyday living spaces of the Burmese diaspora community in Auckland. According to this study, internet use is widely available among the diaspora, and it is used in different ways, depending on how people view themselves and what is important to their identity. For participants from ethnic minority backgrounds, maintaining language and culture was of key importance. Those participants tended to use the internet to read and listen to music in their own language, which was often articulated as a type of resistance to the perceived threat to their languages from the Burmese government. For Burman participants, maintaining language and passing it down to their children was also significant, however the perceived threat for them came from New Zealand culture rather than internal politics in Burma. It appears that online media, which has a heavy emphasis on human rights stories, also leads to a feeling of victim image among participants, even if they have not directly experienced persecution. However further studies should be done to examine this.

For participants with connections to political groups in Burma or the borderlands, the internet was important in maintaining their ties and keeping them up-to-date, which sustain their identity and actions as activists. For all participants, the internet was useful for keeping in touch with friends and relatives, thereby maintaining their links to their homeland and thus their sense of belonging to Burma. One lesson I have learnt is the fluidity of identity. The identity and meaning of homeland is vastly different between older and younger people. Younger people are exposed to New Zealand culture through school and often develop friendships with non-Burmese people. Older people struggle to fit in, learn the language and thereby have a heightened feeling of separateness.

Among those I have interviewed, the majority come from the borderlands, and their Burmese and ethnic identities are central to their feelings of personhood. However, from informal contact with Burmese youth and children who were born and/or grew up in New Zealand, their identity is completely different. Those I have spoken to identify as Kiwi, speak fluent English and show much less interest in their parent’s homeland and the important markers of their parents identity: language, religion, popular culture and political activism. This suggests the fluidity of identity and the importance of historical memory and experience in identity formation. Perhaps those interviewed for this study might also start to identify more as Kiwis and less as
Burmese/Karen/Chin/Mon if they stay in New Zealand for another decade. However, longer term research would need to be done to test this.

Most of my participants identified as oppressed. The sense that wrongs had been done to them by the Burmese military government was important. Having faced this oppression and then fleeing as refugees was a fundamental part of the identities of virtually all of my respondents. Common among all participants was a wish to keep their Burmese identities that always included their sense of having been victimised. All of this was an integral part of their identity. As such the desire of those I interviewed to identify as Burmans or Karen was as much concerned with the political struggles they had left behind as an attempt to resist assimilation in to New Zealand.

As I am also a Karen/Burmese refugee who speaks their language and has suffered like them, I can communicate with them in a deep way. When I meet participants, we tell each other stories about exile, which is a way of recognising each other’s suffering and thereby keeping each other’s identity as Burmese refugees who have resisted an oppressive regime. In my research, it was very important that I was able to speak with participants in their own language. If I was not able to do so then I probably could not have entered their private sphere. My own identity as a Karen refugee in the interviews and the use of tapotaethakot as a methodology led to the development of relationships that involved recognition of our shared mutual experience.
References

I. Oral Sources (digital recorded interviews)

Interviewee one, 9 October 2009, Glen Innes, Auckland
Interviewee two, 9 October 2009, Glen Innes, Auckland
Interviewee three, 11 October 2009, Henderson, Auckland
Interviewee four, 11 October 2009, Massey, Auckland.
Interviewee five, 12 October 2009, Henderson, Auckland
Interviewee six, 14 October 2009, North Shore, Auckland.
Interviewee seven, 14 October 2009, City, Auckland
Interviewee eight, 17 October 2009, Glen Innes, Auckland
Interviewee nine, 17 October 2009, North Shore, Auckland
Interviewee ten, 17 October 2009, Mangere, Auckland
Interviewee eleven, 20 October 2009, North Shore, Auckland
Interviewee twelve, 20 October 2009, Massey, Auckland
Interviewee thirteen, 21 October 2009, Glen Innes, Auckland
Interviewee fourteen, 5 November 2009, Glen Innes, Auckland

II. Print Sources

In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), Research as resistance: critical, indigenous, & anti-oppressive approaches (pp. 97-126). Toronto, Ontario Canadian Scholars' Press/Women's Press.


Appendix 1: Creative component of 5 radio features translated from Burmese and Karen
(See attached CD and scripts below)

**Topic one: New media and Burmese political identities**

SFX: Ko Sunny talking on GTalk (including dialing and other computer sounds)

Narration: This is Ko Sunny talking to his friend who is a political activist based in India. Chatting online is something very important for Ko Sunny, who is in exile. Ko Sunny is a founding member of the All Burma Student League (ABSL) based in India. He came to New Zealand as a refugee in 2007 and as a political activist working for democracy in Burma, it is very important for him to continue being active in New Zealand somehow. He found that he could keep up his work through the internet.

Grab: Ko Sunny

I use internet everyday, at least two hours per day listening to news from BBC, RFA, VOA and also read news from websites like Mizzima, Irrawaddy and ethnic websites.

Reading news has become my habit and its like people eating two meals a day. I can’t live without reading news about Burma everyday. I read news everyday because as someone who is being active in this democracy movement, I should know the updated situation with the movement and what’s happening. At the same time, I also need to know what people in the country are doing so I can organize things from here to support them. To help make that things people are doing inside the country successful, I need to think about what I can from here.

Narration: As well as paying close attention to Burmese news online, Ko Sunny also shares the latest news with friends in Auckland. This is one small political act of resistance. Since Burma rarely makes New Zealand news, it is important to remind Burmese and non-Burmese people alike about what is going on. It can inspire people, sustain them and make sure they don’t forget.

Grab: Ko Sunny

This is important for people like us to share this information with our fellow Burmese. Many Burmese don’t listen to news so its very important to give them updates. This is the responsibility of people like me.

Narration: Internet is also an important tool for political organizing. They start using internet since the beginning of preparation for an action – trying to send invitation letters, writing what we’re going to do, emailing media releases. After doing an action like protests, they also send details and images to Burmese exiled news groups so the information can spread amongst the Burmese diaspora and those inside the country.

Grab: Naing Ko Ko

My name is Naing Ko Ko and I’m studying Political Studies at Auckland University. I’m a member of NCUB and the director of the Burma office New Zealand, National Council of the Union of Burma. Internet is very important for me – I use internet at least 12 hours a day. I use Gmail to talk to friends in Thailand. Internet is very important for me because I’m away from my organization so I can only have a close relationship with friends and what they’re doing through the internet.
SFX: Typing

Grab: Naing Ko Ko

I spend time sending news that I got from mailing lists and share with other people. I have my own mailing list so I usually send important news from Burma to those on my list. I also have Facebook. It's important for political marketing.

SFX: Burmese song about political movement

Narration: Ko Sunny and Naing Ko Ko are both examples of activists who keep up their work in the diaspora. While they can no longer be full time activists, they can find things to do in New Zealand: spreading news, talking to people about Burma, lobbying, protesting, commemorating.

SFX: Burmese song about political movement

**Topic two: New media and ethno-linguistic identity**

SFX (throughout story): Kids learning language in school.

Narration: Through my conversation with Burmese people here in Auckland, I realized that the loss of ethnic language among young Burmese, especially those who were born and arrived here when they were young is a great concern for parents and the community as a whole. Burman, Chin, Karen and Mon community leaders are all organizing language classes for their children. One Chin community leader and also a teacher Ah Pu Pa told me about their aim of having the classes.

Ah Pu Pa: Our aim in doing this is to maintain our mother language because our children now only speak English and later we worry that our language will disappear so the situation forces us to do this.

Narration: Most of these language classes are organized during the summer school break. Ah Pu Pa explained how the classes are organised and how they teach children.

Ah Pu Pa: We planed to continue to teach Chin to our younger children. We have been teaching Chin language last year and we have class once a week in our houses. We don’t have any organisation doing this and every teacher is a volunteer. We have about 20 children study and because their ages are different, we have to separate it into two classes.

SFX: Karen song

Narration: Like the Chin community, other ethnic communities like Karen and Mon are also active in the process of maintaining ethnic language. Before I have started this research project, I was invited to a meeting of planning for the Karen language class organised by Karen people, which comprise youth and adults. Many detailed issues were discussed such as searching for volunteers teachers, curriculum books, the place where children will be learning and transportation.

SFX: Mon children dancing
Kong: Mon people here in Auckland don’t do politics. We only do social and cultural work for our community. We have Mon language classes that we usually do during the school break in summer. We also have a weekly Mon dancing class for children.

Narration: This Kong, a Mon language teacher explained how her community organising Mon language classes. Internet has play an important role in maintaining literature. Ah Pu Pa uses internet everyday, for at least one hour. He usually logs into Chin Forum, and discusses issues about language and literature with other Chin people around the world. These discussions online influence his offline activities, giving him ideas for action in the community.

SFX: Typing and internet sounds.

Ah Pu Pa: Internet is very useful for me to develop Chin literature, and learn new things about Chin culture.

Narration: While Chin can freely use any internet technology, since they use the Roman alphabet, Mon are extremely limited as their alphabet it not compatible with the internet.

SFX: Karen song

**Topic three: New Media and Burmese Youth Identity**

Ashley: My name is Ashley, there is another name that given me by a monk, that’s a Burmese name and that’s Thi Thi Wa, but I will prefer you calling me Ashley or you can call me Thi Thi Wa but I am adapting to New Zealand Country now, so some English people they do not know how to say Burmese name so I usually told them to call me Ashley instead.

SFX: Nwe Ma music

Ashley: And I am a 17 years old girl living with my mum and dad still. I have three sister and one brother fortunately I am living in Auckland with family.Both of my parents are from Burma a country that I call my first home because I was born there of course my family and I resettle in New Zealand when I was only 9. So we come to New Zealand as Burmese refugee. My family can not live in Burma because my father was a soldier and fought against those nasty Burmese regime. So it was not so secure for us to live in that country anymore. So we flew to Thailand then to New Zealand. I was young when I come to New Zealand. and I grew up and so many friends who are not Burmese of course. People who never met me may not believe that I am like Burmese you know because I speak English like a Kiwi kid. And act like a Kiwi teenager, I have adapted so many culture in New Zealand. However, I always consider and indentify myself as a Burmese. And I am proud to be called a Burmese girl as well.

SFX: Nwe Ma music

Ashly: On the other hand being Burmese is very important for me. I maintain my Burmese culture by speaking Burmese language with my family and spending time with my friends Burmese friends here and participate in Burmese ritual events that are organized in New Zealand of course. I maintain Burmese culture and traditional through Burmese anyinte dancing.

I love Burmese anyinte dancing because it makes me happy when I dance. And I like to show New Zealand people what Burmese is about. And Anyinte is Burmese traditional dancing. I like Burmese dancing since I was so so young and I danced and performed since before I arrived here.
in New Zealand. I brought this interest along with me and now if there is any kind of social political events, for example Burmese New Year of course I will get excited to perform in front of people or we will celebrate the water festival, or different cultural shows in Auckland, I will perform by doing Burmese traditional dancing.

SFX: music

Ashley: I do a lot of Burmese dancing in my school, the multi-cultural. By doing this, in one way I am telling another people about Burmese culture. And also, it is effective way that I introduce another people to who I am and where I come from. And I believe that people learn about Burmese and their culture and traditional through my performance.. I realized that it is important to maintain my Burmese identity especially in a multicultural country like New Zealand. And I must say that I love New Zealand and I love my country as well and one day when the war is over I will go and visit.

SFX: music

Ashley: I used to have a Burmese teacher who taught me a lot of Burmese dancing before but since I arrived here I do not have anyone to teach me which is kind of sad, and show me how to dance. But now, because I do not have any people and anybody to teach me, I teach myself through Internet. It’s a new way of Technology. Anyway, To say basically internet is my teacher. I am learning more Burmese dancing through youtube of course, you must like YouTube. It got everything in it anyway. Whenever I have time, I always download different kind of Burmese anyite and watch it and learn how they dance. I will usually open my computer and dance in front of my computer.

SFX: Nwe Ma traditional music

Ashley: The title of the song that you are hearing is Nwe Ma, it means young girl at the summer and its my favourite music among Burmese traditional songs. I always listen to it like when the new year start, I really want to dance whenever I listen to this song. I also like the western music like Hip Hop, RNG POP and I am also learning how to do Hip Hop dance. After school I will always do bring it on we have competition that so fun, we go and compete the final at the Vector Arena, you might check that out, you might not. There are like so many Burmese teenagers who like Western songs but they do not like Burmese traditional music, I do not know why. But me, I like both.

I like Burmese songs more because the sound of the melody sound special when you feel the vine you can feel tingling over your skin and body and especially when the drum, I like the drum how my country play the drum is so special and unique in a way and I like it a lot.

At the end of my story I want you guys at home to go on YouTube, of course, yes and watch our beautiful Burmese dancing and you can even go to YouTube watch me do Bring It On, new way of expressing, how do you say, it adapting into New Zealand, you might say I suck, I am good, I am not sure. Just go on Selwye College Bring it on 2009 and you will see me and I am embarrassing myself.

SFX: Nwe Ma hip pop music

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**Topic four: New Media and Burmese Buddhist Identity**
Narration: This is a Burmese Buddhist monk chanting during Katayn Festival. For many Burmese in Auckland, this festival is important. Many members of the Burmese diaspora in Auckland join this festival because, the ritual is central to maintaining their identity as Buddhists in a non-Buddhist country.

Ko Sunny: Religion is the most important thing for maintaining our nationality. We can only have our nationality if we have our religion. As soon as our religion disappears, our Burmese nationality will also disappear. I identify myself as Burmese, I speak Burmese and I believe in Buddhism. This is something from my ancestors.

Narration: This is Sunny. He has a strong sense of being Buddhist and he has a plan that he will introduce this religion to his children.

Ko Sunny: I bring my daughter to the monastery every time I go there. She is too young to understand everything but I believe that she will know what the monk is, the monastery and what Buddha is. She can’t chant yet but at least she can be exposed to it.

Narration: Like Ko Sunny, there are many parents who are trying hard to bring up their children as Buddhists in this non-Buddhist society. But it can become harder as some Burmese children lose interest in religion, feeling like it is not a priority.

Sheh Mar: My daughters are not interested in my religion anymore. I can’t force them to believe in my religion as well – that’s their choice. They go now. They don’t have friends here [to go to the monastery with] so they just follow their friends to church.

Narration: This is Sheh Mar, a Buddhist animist Karenni woman. Like Sheh Mar, Ma Wah, a Buddhist Karen, also has a similar problem bringing her kids up Buddhist. She struggle and cannot force her kids to practice religion.

U Aw Ba Tha: It is very important for Burmese who arrive in another country to not forget our culture. We also need to be able to teach our children to be humble, honest and polite. Parents are the most important for the maintenance of culture and religious identity. If you don’t want this to disappear, then parents should try very hard. Monks and teachers are only people who are like helpers – but parents are the most responsible people to help children to be polite.

SFX: Opening a Buddhist website

U Aw Ba Tha: As a Buddhist, there are so many things we can do on the internet, especially when we are away from our country. There are so many websites where we can listen to famous Buddhist monks chanting.

Narration: Sunny also often use the internet to download Buddhist gospel songs, poet for kids and even Burmese language alphabet for his daughter, he also encourage other Burmese especially parents to use computer and internet.

Ko Sunny: I would like to encourage our Burmese people to use computer, we might not familiar with this these technology but we should not ignore it. There are so many thing we can do with internet and it is very important in maintaining our culture. For example, we can get Burmese books, music and even Burmese alphabets, which we can teach our children.
Matthew Dwe: Most people my age don’t use Internet and they don’t have updated news and information. We realise that only young people and those interested in activism use Internet.

Narration: This is Matthew Dwe, a 63 year old Karen former-soldier. Matthew and his family came as refugee in 2001. As many other refugees arriving in New Zealand do, he attended English language classes and learned how to use Internet but he never has had his own computer and got a chance to use it. He mostly uses pre-digital media – newspaper and radio.

Matthew Dwe: I don’t have any ambition to use Internet. I think that it is not part of my life. I only read newspaper for news and I also get news from my friends. My friends print out the news from Internet and they give it to me. There are reasons why I do not use Internet. As I am working, I don’t have time to use Internet and also can’t sit for a long time in front of the computer because I have a problem with my back.

Matthew Dwe can read and write and he’s had some training to understand the technology. But many other older Burmese are illiterate, which shuts them out of text-based media forms. Illiteracy and lack of English among older people are major barriers to them using Internet.

Sheh Mar: Now I’m learning English in New Zealand. Even learning ABCD is too difficult for me so using the Internet is far away.

Narration: Sheh Mar is from an area of Karenni State with ongoing fighting. Because of war and poverty, she never had a chance to study. She just had to focus on survival. She is a widow, and came to New Zealand as a refugee with her children. She is 52 years old.

Sheh Mar: I don’t know what’s happened to my family and friend in Burma. I don’t know how to communicate with them. I lost all the communication with them. I lost contact since I arrived in the refugee camp in Thailand. The only person I am in touch with is my son in Thailand, and all I can do is call him by phone about once a month.

Tee: I heard of Internet but I never saw what it looks like. I first touched the computer when I was 50 years old. When I first saw it, it looked very complicated so I just ignored it. Now I’m learning English and after the class, we get the chance to go to a computer lab for an hour but me and my friend never go. I even don’t know how to open and close the computer so if I want to read news, I ask my kid to open it for me. I find the technology very difficult because there are so many steps to do something. I just end up switching off the monitor instead of following all the steps to turn it off but then I worry that it might break. It is very difficult for me to learn things when I’m older. I can’t really memorize things a lot.

Narration: Tee and his family left Burma when there was a military operation in Southern Burma in 1997. Since then, he has lived in refugee camps and Tee’s village was burnt down so they lost his home. He still doesn’t know what happened to his village. He has family still in Southern Burma but since arriving in New Zealand, he could only send a letter to them once. Because his family live in the mountains, there is still conflict and IDPs there. Tee is XX years old.
Though many older people that I have talked to do not use computer and internet themselves, they all agree that internet is a very effective communication mode these day. And they support people using it.

Mathew Dwe: I don’t use internet, I encourage young people to use it because it is very important. Things are changing all the time and modern technology is developing. Only if people use it they can compete with other people and communicate with colleagues and friends all around the world. However I worry that young people will also take bad things from the internet. But I believe they are conscious to decide what is good and bad for them.

SFX: Sheh Mar showing Karenni food in her kitchen

Narration: It is difficult for Sheh Mar to keep in touch and maintain her Karenni traditional practices in Auckland. For her, cooking traditional food is an important way she maintains her Karenni identity.

SFX: Matthew Dwe talking on the phone with friend in Thailand

Narration: For Matthew Dwe, he maintains his identity through communication and the desire to go home.

Matthew Tway: Because I was involved in the resistance movement, I still have a clear memory of this past. I feel like I’m not happy here because I don’t feel warmth with the community here – you can’t see people all the time, people live separately and spread out. It’s individualistic so I don’t like that. I communicate with people back home through telephone and sometimes visit them when I have money. When I’m older, I feel like I want to go back. Here you don’t need to worry about food and security but I’m not happy. Now I’m saving money to go back one day.

Narration: Not all older Burmese are offline. San Tun is aged 67 and he uses the Internet everyday. He has been using it since he was in Thailand and he uses it to listen to news and share photos. He arrived in New Zealand as a refugee, after joining the Parliament Democracy Party in early 1970.

San Tun: As soon as I arrived here I started working and bought a computer. There are so many good things about the Internet and so many websites we can use to learn about our cultures and traditions. By using the Internet and reading Burmese websites, we can maintain our culture and traditions.
Appendix 2: Interviewee 1, 9 October 2009, Glen Innes, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 40+

Ethnicity: Burman

Gender: Male

English Version [unedited]

I left Burma in 1988 when there was a nationwide uprising and since then I lived in refugee camps on the India-Burma border, where I served as an executive member of the All Burma Students League. I came to New Zealand with my family in 2007. I am Burman and Burmese identity is important for me. I usually introduce myself to other people as Burmese and from Burma. I like to discuss some of the political and social problems in Burma under the military government when I get the chance. We have our country and we have our own nationality. I also remind other Burmese people here about Burma and Burmese culture and tradition, for example, we celebrate water festival here but people here cannot do ‘thangyat’ which traditional music that we play during water festival. People here cannot do it so I show that and teach them how to do it. Religion, politics, culture and tradition are the main topics that I talk about with other Burmese people whenever I met them.

I used to work with a Burmese media group based in India. When I arrived here I said to myself that I have a responsibility to do everything I can to help the democracy movement, although I am away from my mother organisation. Because I have been working as an activist in the border, when I arrived here, I felt like I needed to show that I can continue that. My comrades keep working, so regardless of place, I need to keep working. I need to work even harder than friends back home and do more because I am in this good place and have good opportunities. Now I do everything from social, religious and political activities. I have organised so many protests in Auckland and if I have any news from here then I send it to Burmese media groups in exile. Some people here said that they do not want to get involved in politics and they don’t want to be activists. I explain to them that everything is political, especially for us Burmese who arrived here because of the bad political system in Burma.

I also identify as a nationalist. I have been interested in Burmese politics since I was young and I remain involved with the democracy movement. I will keep working for the betterment of people and country.

I do not have an ethnic identity. I only identify myself as Burmese. I have seen ethnic people when I was in Burma but I felt like we are the same people but when I left Burma and lived with ethnic people in the border, I came to realized that ethnic people suffered a lot because of the government. Many have to flee their village and some become internally displaced. I realized that many ethnic minority groups hate the dominant Burman/Burmese because they think that ethnic Burmans are the oppressors and they are victims. So they do not want to identify as Burmese. I believe that this kind of thinking will disappear one day when we have democracy in Burma.
We only have one goal for Burma: we have to work together for the change. However, if we keep dividing ourselves based on ethnicity there will not be peace our country.

As I have been active in the Burmese political movement, so I also have an intention to pass it down to my kids. My children are still young but I will wait until they grow up before I introduce them to Burma’s social political problems and the democracy movement. But I always bring my kids with me to political events and also to the protests. And I also show some documentaries about Burma.

Maintaining Buddhist identity is also important for me, especially in a non-Buddhist country like New Zealand. And It is very important for us to have a monk in a country where we are in a minority group. At the same time, as Buddhist people we need monks to lead ceremonies like birthdays, funerals and Buddhist holidays. We are not Christian, we can’t go to churches so we need these monks.

So I want my children to be Buddhist as well. I always encourage my children to go to the monastery. My daughter is still young. It is hard for her to understand the notion of Buddhism but by going to the monastery she will know what the monastery is like, what the monks are like, what Buddha is. I pray with her every night before she goes to sleep. Going to the monastery and participating in Buddhist festivals is important for us here. Culture and religion is important for every nationality. Nationality and religion always go together. Our parents are Burmese, we speak Burmese and we believe in Buddhism. I download songs, prayers from websites that focus on Buddhism and let my daughter listen to them. As she is young, she cannot learn many things, like how to read scriptures, so, listening to voices is more effective. It also teaches her to pray before she sleeps every night.

Reading updated news and telling other people about what I have read is my habit. I feel happy when I do that. I usually tell my Burmese people here about up to date news that I got from the internet and I also encourage them to take part in political activities like memorial days and protest. I read news in Burmese language. I do not read in English because I understand Burmese more than English and on the other hand, I should know information and facts in detail so I can tell other people. I try to read important news two or three time and I try to memorise important information to be able to tell other people. There are many people who do not listen or read news even though they have computer. Because of this they do not have updated news and information about what’s happening in Burma. If they heard something from Burma then they start to worry a lot because they do not have information that will make them think critically. So people like us have responsibilities. We organised political events and provide information.

Another thing is Buddhism is an important for political activities that we do in Auckland. We invite the monk [U Aww Ba Tha] to all of our political anniversary because he is a spiritual leader and he has the highest position in our Burmese community in Auckland. We do not have the Burmese state minister or state representatives that we can invite to our very important political event, so we invite him instead. His appearance in the event is also important because he is an influential figure for the Burmese people here and people give respect to him as someone who more than a monk or rather a revolutionary monk.

It is important for us to organize political events that include monks because this is how we do it and we need our young generation to learn these things. It is more crucial for us to do this because we understand that there is a very limited chance for our young people to see this kind of political activity that include monks, if we do not initiate it.
I read news from most Burmese news websites and listen to online radio everyday. So everything that I listen to relates to each other and I know the connection. It is also import because as a person who is involved in Burma’s political movement, I should know the development of the political situation. I should know what people inside are doing so I can understand what I can do from here to support their movement.

I mainly use the internet for communication. I always talk to friends who live in Burma-India border and by talking to them I got updated news that gives me hope and motivation to keep working for the cause. I use Google Talk to communicate with family and friends inside Burma. However, although I can freely talk about sensitive issue like politics with my friends in exile, I could not do that with friends who live inside Burma. It is not safe for them. I also use internet for local political activities like sending out invitation letter, pictures and political statements to local and Burmese media groups.

Internet is very important for cultural maintenance. I speak and read Burmese but there are so many thing that I do not know about Burmese language. There are so many Burmese words that I do not understand and I need a dictionary for. But I might not have the book and we also do not have a library that we can go and borrow Burmese books from. So there are some e-books or e-dictionaries on the internet that I can use. There are songs and even Burmese alphabet exercises that I can download from the internet to use to teach my children.
India documentary identity

The above text is a mix of English and Georgian, but the Georgian text is not clear or legible. It appears to be a fragment of a larger document, possibly related to the country of India and the concept of documentary identity.
Appendix 3: Interviewee 2, 9 October 2009, Glen Innes, Auckland

English and Burma interview Summary

Age: 60+

Ethnicity: Burman and ethnically mixed

Gender: Male

English Version [unedited]

I got involved in the Burmese revolution movement in 1970 when I joined the Parliament Democracy Party. I was a military medic and have a lot of experience fighting in the frontline. Later I was promoted to a military officer and I was responsible for about 100 soldiers.

I always think of myself as an ordinary person although I had to take important responsibilities in the army. There was no division between me and my soldiers as we ate together, shared the same food and I tried my best to help with what ever they needed.

I used to identify as a revolutionary before but not now. There are so many who love to identify as revolutionaries but sometimes I realized that those people do not understand the meaning of revolution. Ne Win’s military regime also called his regime a revolutionary government and the insurgent groups that resist against Ne Win government also said they were doing revolution. So if they are all revolutionaries, then why they can’t they all work together? But the only things that we should know is if we are a real revolutionaries, then we should help improve the life of people, we should develop education, health and the economy for civilians. If we can’t do that, then we should not call ourselves revolutionaries.

I am a nationalist, a patriotic. It is normal to see people love their own people. We cannot love other nationals more than ours. We are the same nationality if we live in the same country so I love Chinese people in Burma. They are my nationality and similarly we have to accept Indians born in Burma as being our nationality.

I joined the Parliament Democracy Party with the aim to fight against the Ne Win government. Ne Win said that his government believes in socialism but what he did was the opposite of socialism. Rather it was fascism, holding state power with guns. I am still a member of my organisation Parliament Democracy Party and I am proud to identify with this organisation though it is not active today. It was the first organisation to fight for democracy in Burma. I sometimes call my colleagues who fought together with me before. We mostly communicate through phone, as many of my friends do not have computers.

I do not have ethnic identity. My parents are Mon but as I cannot speak Mon language I identify as Burmese. Ethnic identity is not important for me. The most important thing for me is to be able to speak Burmese. If I can speak Burmese then I can go everywhere in Burma and communicate with every ethnic groups. I cannot use Mon language everywhere.

I have been here in New Zealand for more than 9 years and I am a New Zealand citizen. However, I do not have a strong feeling or tie to this country. The situation is not getting better
in Burma but I will leave as soon as possible if I believe that things have changed in Burma and it is possible for me to go back.

I listen to news about Burma through online radio. I do not really read news. I’m on some mailing lists from friends so I read those emails sometime. If there were no internet then I feel like I would be a person who is blind and deaf. Since I arrived in New Zealand, I worked and saved money to buy a computer because here I cannot listen to short wave radio so I needed a computer for that. I realized that if I don’t have a computer then I won’t know anything.

The internet is very important in maintaining culture. There are so many things about Burmese culture, tradition and language online so for those who think they lost their language they can use the internet to find information that they want.

For myself, I maintain Burmese culture though going to the monastery regularly and I also explain to young Burmese about our culture and beliefs when I get the chance.

I realize that every ethnic group here are very good at maintaining their culture and religion. We need to maintain our culture and tradition because this is a sign of where we belong. Our sense of belonging becomes loose when we do not have our own culture and tradition anymore. This is very important for Burmese children who were born here. They should know where they belong. Some children here still know who they are. They know that they are not Kiwi. They know that they are from Burma. However, they have difficulties with Burmese language. Many kids cannot speak the language anymore.

Using the internet helps us keep up to date with what’s happening in Burma and I want to say that every Burmese should use it. It is a very effective communication mode so every household should have a computer and internet connection.
Nationalist or patriotic...
ახალი ნაწარმullah ისაზღვრება სერიოზული და არაერთგზული თემები მიმართ. ისევე როგორც ახალი ნაწარმullah მოუწოდებს შემდგომში უამრავი და მნიშვნელოვანი თემები მიმართ.

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ახალი ნაწარმullah იყურებს რჩეული ისტორიული შედეგები და გახსნის აღწერა ისიდორ-დუმი nzის მინიჭების შესახებ. ისევე როგორც ახალი ნაწარმullah მოუწოდებს შემდგომში უამრავი და მნიშვნელოვანი თემები მიმართ.

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Appendix 4: Interviewee 3, 11 October 2009, Henderson, Auckland

English and Burmese Interview Summary

Age: 25+

Ethnicity: Karen

Gender: Male

**English Version** [unedited]

When I was young I lived with my parents in southern Burma. Because of military operations, we could not lived in our village anymore so we came and lived in a refugee camp in Thailand. Through UNHCR’s help, we came to New Zealand in 2006. I studied in the camp and went to a theological school but I did not finish it.

I usually identify as a Karen, but to Kiwi friends I introduce myself as someone from Burma but I explain that I am not Burmese/Burman. Karen identity is very important because I want to maintain our people. If we do not identify as Karen then we will become Kiwi or just Burmese, and Karen will disappear one day. This is something from our ancestors so we have to maintain it. We have our culture, tradition and history, which is different from other ethnic groups in Burma. And we also have our languages. I am proud to be Karen and I speak Karen with my family at home and with some Karen friends at school. I grew up in a refugee camp where everyone spoke Karen. I went to a Karen language school and, in that situation, we didn’t need to worry about losing the Karen language, but here when we go to school and talk with friends, it is all in English. The only time we can read Karen language is through reading news and speaking at home with families. So we are in a position where we could lose our language. It is also important – in Burma we are not allowed to learn Karen in school so the language is in a position that it could be lost one day if we don’t maintain it.

There are divisions among ethnic groups who came to New Zealand. We have our own Karen community. I think each ethnic group has their own group with the purpose of maintaining their culture and traditions. Sometime we work together for social issue like going to church or monasteries together, and sometime when there are political events ethnic groups will come together but there are some groups like Kachin and Chin who do not associate themselves with politics.

I am not aware of or have come across any discrimination against me by Kiwi people. All my friends here treat me as a human being and there is no division among us because we came from a different background. That is a good thing.

I use the internet at least three hour a day. When I log in I check my email, read news Kwekalu (Karen news website) and other Burmese news from various website. In a country where everyone speaks English, it is important to read Karen language news. We are worried that our language can be lost so we need to read in it regularly to maintain it. And sometime I chat with friends in Burma, the Thai-Burma border and those who are overseas. I am only interested in news that happened in the border and I do not like to read news about things that happening
inside Rangoon. Sometime my friends send me some news to my email and if it is important then I forward it to other people.

Since I arrived here some friends and I set up a Karen youth group with about 30 young people. Through the internet, I have read news and saw pictures of Karen important rituals such as Tying Wrist Ceremony and Karen New Year that were organized by Karen communities in Australia, USA and UK. We cannot do things like that in New Zealand before so this encourage me to set up a youth group that will organize these necessary cultural activities.

Our aim is to maintain our Karen-ness and our culture and language. We have organised cultural festivals like wrist tying and Karen New Year. Nobody organised that kind of activity before. Through the internet, I realised that Karen in other countries could do cultural activities so that encouraged me to set up the group and organise our Karen cultural festivals. We have regular meetings and as a leader of the group I use a computer, the internet. I also use the web to phone members about our youth activities and things that we do here.

I also use the internet to download music in Karen language. I do not really listen to Burmese and English songs because I do not understand them. Saw Danny is my favorite Karen singer, who is a refugee as well. Many of my friends here like him and we love his music. We often exchange songs that we have downloaded from the internet.

The internet is very important for our people and our new generation as well. We should digitise our history books and important documents about Karen and put them on the internet. This will be useful for the Karen new generation.
များစွာကြိုးထည်စေရန်အချိန်ကပါသည်။စိတ်ဓာတ်များကိုဖော်ပြရန်အချိန်များစွာစေရန်အချိန်ကပါသည်။

ပြင်သစ်ကြားစေမှုများကိုဖော်ပြရန်အချိန်ကပါသည်။စိတ်ဓာတ်များကိုဖော်ပြရန်အချိန်ကပါသည်။

ယခုကြောင်းကျင်းပြီးစေရန်အချိန်ကပါသည်။စိတ်ဓာတ်များကိုဖော်ပြရန်အချိန်ကပါသည်။
Appendix 5: Interviewee 4, 11 October 2009, Massey, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 30+

Ethnicity: Chin

Gender: Male

English Version [unedited]

I am from Chin State, in western Burma. I arrived here with my family three years ago. I strongly identify as Chin. I always want to identify as Chin when I introduce myself to people here in New Zealand. But people here do not know who or what Chin people are so I just tell them that I am Burmese and from Burma. But this is not what I want. However, some Kiwis who are interested in Burmese ethnic issues, I tell them about the differences between Burmese and Chin. I do not want to identify as Burmese because I am not Burmese. I am Chin. As long as I am alive, I will be Chin. I believe that everyone has an identity. Identity and nationality always go together. If you lose your identity then you lose your nationality so if we want our Chin nationality to exist then we have a responsibility to maintain it.

We have a plan to teach young people Chin language. We taught children last year with a weekly class. We are going to start this language class again in winter. Our language classes are informal as we do not have any organisation to run it. We have several volunteer teachers and we teach in people’s houses. There are about 20 children learning and we have to divide them into two classes as the ages of our children are different. We have this language class because we realized that our children do not speak our mother language anymore, they only speak English. We have a concern that they may not know Chin language anymore so, with the purpose of maintaining our mother language, we set up this class.

We also have a plan to preserve and maintain our culture and traditional practices. It is important to do this as we are away from our country. We want to hold our festivals but we still can not do it as there are only a few Chin here. We hope we can do that one day as we realised that there are more Chin coming to live here. We also want to teach our younger generation Chin dance and song.

I use a computer at least one hour a day. I mostly log into Chin forum, a place where we can discuss and talk about so many things. In the forum, they have different topics about Chin that you can read and discuss. We can talk about religion, culture, social issues and even politics. And we can also discuss Chin literature.

I like using the internet because I can know what is happening with Chin people around the world and my Chin language ability has also developed. I can also learn more about Chin culture and traditions than what I knew before. I listen to songs written by famous Chin poets or writers who write about identity. I also read news from the internet and I only read news in Chin language. Because of news from the internet we could help our people back home who have faced famine. As soon as we got that news, we tried to collect donations and send them to Burma.
through India. I also share important news that I get from the internet with my friends when we meet every week in church.

Burmese Version
သုံးစွဲထားသည့်အသံများ၊ အကြောင်းပြည့်များနှင့်အစိုးရပြည့်များသည် အားလုံးပေးချက်များဖြင့် စိတ်ချရေးနိုင်ပါသည်။
Appendix 6: Interviewee 5, 11 October 2009, Henderson, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 50+
Ethnicity: Karen
Gender: Male

**English Version [unedited]**

I am from southern Burma. I left my country in 1997 with my family because our village was burnt down by Burma soldiers. I brought my family to live in the refugee camp and we lived there for almost ten years before coming to Auckland in 2006.

My parents have already passed away and I still have some siblings who I do not have contact with. Since I arrived here I only could send one letter to them. I am not sure what happened to them as they live in a very remote jungle area so they do not have phones there. The only way to communicate is to send letters to them when people from Thailand go there. There are not a lot of people from Thailand going there so it is very hard for me. But I have cousins and an aunty in Thailand and I talk to them sometime through the phone.

I did farming when I was in Burma but since I arrived here I can’t farm anymore. I don’t have any job because I can’t speak English. Since I arrived here I only study. But I find it very difficult to study because I can’t memorise many things. If the teacher teaches me one day, I find I’ve forgotten everything the following day. I also have to learn how to use a computer and the internet as well. I learnt how to use computers for a month when I arrived and I was given one hour a day to use computers but me and my other friends are old. After the class other people go to the computer labs but me and my other friend come back to our house.

I first used a computer when I was over 50 and I was taught how to type English alphabets. Now I can type but I have concern to use computer without my children because I would break the computer so I hardly use it. I don’t really have any interest in it. I think that it is not part of my life. The first time I saw a computer and touched the keyboard I felt it was too difficult for me and I don’t spend time and try hard to learn it. Sometimes if I want to read news I ask my kid to open it for me and when I’m finished, I ask them to turn the computer off for me. The main reason that I cannot use the computer is because I can’t read English. Another reason is because I do not have my own computer.

I like reading news from the internet and it is very useful. I read Kwekalu a lot. I get to know what’s happening in Burma and I can keep up to date. Through Kwekalu, I knew one important accident with my cousin who was a Karen soldier. He was shot dead by Burmese soldiers. We were so upset about this and we realised that without the Kwekalu website, we’d hardly get any news from our community.

We don’t worry about anything for our living here. We do not need to fear soldiers but I am still not happy here. I always remember our old place. We have so many friends in our community in Burma and it is nice to be in our community. I am planning to go back to Burma when there is peace and it is safe to live. If it is not safe then I will not go back. I think it might be hard to go
back and live there if the situation is not stable and we also do not have farms or property that we can invest in for our survival.

Karen Version

we do not have farms or property that we can invest in for our survival.
Appendix 7: Interviewee 6, 14 October 2009, North Shore, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 55+

Ethnicity: Karen

Gender: Male

English Version [unedited]

I do not have an interest in computers or the internet. When I lived in Burma I listened to news from BBC, VOA and RFA. When I arrived here I went to work everyday so I didn’t have time to use a computer or listen to the radio. In my house, my kids always play computer games and use the internet almost all the time so I don’t use it. I have attended training about how to use computers and the internet but I have never used it myself. I always identify as Burmese although I am now a New Zealand citizen.

Karen identity is important for me because I have come from the Karen revolutionary areas and I used to work there so I could not separate myself from the Karen resistance movement. I always think and have memories about this important movement although I am living here right now. I always remember my colleagues and friends who worked together with me and I remember our time in the past and our struggle. I really want to go back and live in Burma or on the Thai-Burma border. Now I am working hard and if I got a pension then I will go back to the border and live there. I feel warm living among our people and community. I feel strange and foreign here. It is very easy to get around and visit people but I do not feel connected to people here. It is normal here for people to be individualistic. People do not just drop by and visit you and you cannot visit them if you are not invited. You stay in your house, do what you have to do and eat by yourself.

The community in Burma and the Thai-Burma border are different from here. You can see each other all the time over there. I feel close to people around me and I feel nice when I’m with them. It made me realise that I need a warm community now that I’m getting older. When I think about it I just want to go back right now. We do not need to worry about living or surviving here in New Zealand and we have more opportunities here but I am not happy. I just remember the old place and the community that I belong.

I do not use computers or the internet for communication but I always keep contact with friends in Thailand through the telephone. I call them sometimes and ask about the updated situation there and sometimes they call me. This is the only tool I use for communication.

I usually read newspapers and journals from Thailand, Australia and The Times from the UK, and I update myself with what’s happening in Burma and around the world though these news sources. I mainly use media like newspapers and I feel like the internet is not part of my life. I have not listened to radio awhile already and I know that I can listen with the internet but I only asked my daughter to open it for me sometimes when I am free and have nothing to do. There is another reason that I do not want to use computers. I cannot sit for long, as I get a backache. I also don’t think I’ll need that technology in the future because I’ll go home, meet with my
colleague and friends, spend time with them and get news and information through word of
mouth and newspapers.

I have seen so many Burmese people who are my age who don’t really use the internet. I am
aware that those who use the internet are especially young people and those who are interested in
social issues and politics in Burma. They use the internet to have regular contact with people
from Thailand, Burma and Burmese around the world.

I encourage young people to use computers and the internet because it is very important for
them. I believe that technology always develops and we are living in a communication
technology era. We cannot tell what technology people will have in the future and we can not
stop this. So young people need to learn modern technology and then they can compete with
people around the world. We want our children to be successful and up to date. By using the
internet they can communicate with their brothers and sisters in the USA, other countries and
even their friends on the Thai-Burma border.

Internet is very good if we know how to use it but I have one concern. We heard that you can
find so many bad things on the internet so if our children see them, it is not good for them.

Burmese Version

အချက်သို့မဟုတ်ကွယ်ရိုက်များအဖြစ်ပါဝင်သူများနှင့် ဆုံကို ချိုးနှစ်ပါရှိကြသည်။ ကမ်းစွာတစ်ခုလို့ လေ့လာချက်နှင့် အခြေခံကြည့်ရှုရေးမှုလိုအပ်သည်။ ဒီတွင် မိုးမိုင်းပြောင်မှုစွာ ကျောင်းသားများအဖြစ်ပါဝင်သည်။ ရှေးယူနစ်စီးပွားရေးနှင့် အဆင်ပြေကြောင့် တစ်ဆင့်တစ်ယောက်စွာ ပိုင်ဆိုင်သည်။ ဒီတွင် နေ့စဉ်အချက်အလက်ပြောင်းလဲရေးမှုကြောင့် လာဘေးဖြင့် ကျောင်းသားများအဖြစ်ဖြစ်ပါဝင်သည်။ ရှေးယူနစ်စီးပွားရေးနှင့် အဆင်ပြေကြောင့် တစ်ဆင့်တစ်ယောက်စွာ ပိုင်ဆိုင်သည်။ ဒီတွင် နေ့စဉ်အချက်အလက်ပြောင်းလဲရေးမှုကြောင့် လာဘေးဖြင့် ကျောင်းသားများအဖြစ်ဖြစ်ပါဝင်သည်။
စာပေတွေမှာ အထောက်အပြန်စာရင်းကို ဖန်တီးစေရန် လိုအပ်ပါတယ်။

အထောက်အပြန်စာရင်းကို ဖန်တီးစေရန် လိုအပ်ပါတယ်။

အထောက်အပြန်စာရင်းကို ဖန်တီးစေရန် လိုအပ်ပါတယ်။
Appendix 8: Interviewee 7, 14 October 2009, Auckland city, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 30+

Ethnicity: Burman and ethnically mix

Gender: Male

**English Version [unedited]**

I am a tertiary student and also a Burmese activist in Auckland. I have been working as a volunteer for Burmese student organisation and I’m now working with Burmese trade unions as well as well as the National Council of the Union of Burma. In 1988 I was a student and worked as a student activist. We were working for our right as the regime frequently closed down schools and universities so students suffered a lot. I got involved in underground movement but was arrested and imprisoned for almost 10 years.

Identity is an interesting topic to talk about and it is also difficult. I identify as a free thinker, I want to think, act and work without any influence from anyone. I love freedom. I also have my own political identity. Many Burmese people identify as revolutionaries or nationalists but I never considered myself like that. I am a volunteer who is working hard for democracy in Burma. I do not like the concept of nationalism. Because of this there are so many wars in the world. Because of nationalism, Japanese soldiers sacrificed themselves and attacked the US army in WWII and Arakan people in western Burma kill Muslim people from Bangladesh. So instead of being a nationalist, I am an internationalist. And I strongly believe that human beings should learn how to care for all people around the world instead of our own people from our small community and country. We should respect each other’s culture and build up solidarity among each other and help each other.

I use computers everyday and stay online at least 18 hours. I also have the internet in my phone. I use the internet to communicate with my organisation based in Thailand and use Google Talk with comrades inside Burma. Many of them are using Google so it is a convenient way to get in touch with them. I do not have regular communication with my family in Burma because I do not want them to be in trouble. They can be arrested if they contact me. I am not in a position where I can help them so I better not to give them problems.

I also read news from the internet since I arrived here. I do not read newspaper anymore. I have some mailing list that I use to send news about Burma to friends in New Zealand.

The internet is also useful for me as a university student, for research and to borrow books from other universities.

I also use social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and My Space. The main reason is for political marketing. In my Facebook account I have a big network. I have around 500 friends and I usually post important news about Burma. There are usually some comments from people who read it, so it is very effective. So I am helping build the Burmese political movement on
Facebook. It is important to let other people about what happening in Burma and human right violations. We need more sympathy and support from people around the world.

I realize that many Burmese who arrived here only care about their family. I want them to try hard and study hard. They’ve got good opportunities here so they should study and work hard. They should not just enjoy their lives using social benefits here. We should be ashamed if we cannot speak English after being here for ten years or if we haven’t finish any degree or even if we are still do not have a job.

Burmese Version

Facebook.... It is important to let other people about what happening in Burma and human right violations. We need more sympathy and support from people around the world.

I realize that many Burmese who arrived here only care about their family. I want them to try hard and study hard. They’ve got good opportunities here so they should study and work hard. They should not just enjoy their lives using social benefits here. We should be ashamed if we cannot speak English after being here for ten years or if we haven’t finish any degree or even if we are still do not have a job.

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Social Networking sites  Face book, Twitter, My Space

Political marketing
Appendix 9: Interviewee 8, 9 October 2009, Glen Innes, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 50+

Ethnicity: Burman

Gender: Male

English Version [unedited]

I arrived in New Zealand in 2001. As a Buddhist monk it is hard to live in a non-Buddhist country, but I keep living here for the sake of the Burmese community here. Monks and the people are like the water and the lotus. Lotusus cannot grow if there is no water so we have to depend on each other as Buddhist believers need monks and monks need people to be able to keep working. Since I arrived here I could invite famous Burmese monks from Burma to visit. It is very good for Burmese people here as they have been away from Burma and it is hard to see and hear preaching from famous Burmese monks. I also organise a meditation centre. It is very important for people to know the meaning of Buddhism if they are believers. To be able to understand this they also need monks to teach them.

I lived in a refugee camp in Thailand before. I left Burma during the student uprising in 1988. I was still young in 1988 but I involved in protests when Buddhist monks also took part after seeing how people were suffering. Buddhism is linked with ideas of peace and justice so when the country is in trouble, it is considered to be part of the responsibility of monks to address these problems. This is the reason monks took to the streets in 2007.

As New Zealand is a non-Buddhist country, it is quite hard for me to live here as a monk. The way people speak to me and the way they treat me is different. For example, in Burma people won’t use my name because its considered rude. They call me ‘ashin’. Here, when I go to school and the teacher calls out my full name, I feel like my ear is being pricked by a needle. However I know that people respect me as a Buddhist monk.

When I first arrived it was quite difficult for me as I felt lonely and there were not many monks in Auckland. But now, there are more monks from Cambodia, Laos and Sri Lanka so it is much better. We can celebrate important Buddhist festivals together and I have more colleagues. Sometimes I feel like I want to go back to Burma and live there. But if I think about people here then I do not want to go anymore. Burmese people need me here, as they are Buddhist believers who lived away from their family. For example, if their family member like their parents pass away then they want to hold a ceremony. I can be with them and help them through spiritually comforting, supporting and praying for them. I feel happy to be able to do this and this also encourages me to be here.

I mainly use the internet for communication with people inside Burma, especially my colleagues. I am online at least two hours a day and during this time I read news and chat with friends inside Burma and those around the world. I have a close network with monks associations that led the protest in 2007 and I also support them with advice and fundraising for their activities. So we will also communicate and keep in touch through email and chat.
Internet is useful but it depend on the people who use it. A wise person will use it for good but there are people who use it differently. Take fire as a metaphor. Some people use fire for cooking while others use it to burn down other people’s houses. Similarly with the internet, it depends on your how you use it. There are so many MP3s of Burmese Buddhist monks chanting and praying. If people want to listen to them they can download the files. You can even find prayers of famous monks like Nyan Nat Thara and other monks who have passed away.

I always remind Buddhists here about Burmese culture and tradition. They should maintain Burmese culture by passing it down to their children. They should teach their children and raise them in a Buddhist way. Teach them to be polite and have good morals. Parents are most responsible for their kids. Teachers in school and monks are just helpers. They are not as important as parents.

Burmese Vision
...
ပေါင်းစားသောဝါကျများကို ဖော်ပြောနေသည်။

ကျွန်တော်တို့ကို အဖြေရှင်းကျားနေပါသည်။

သို့သော်လည်း အကြမ်းဖျင်မှု ကျွန်တော်တို့ကို ပေါင်းစားသောဝါကျများကို ဖော်ပြောနေသည်။
Appendix 10: Interviewee 9, 17 October 2009, Mangere, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 20+

Ethnicity: Karen

Gender: Female

English Version [unedited]

I came to New Zealand because my mum is already here. I used to live with my grandmother in the Irrawaddy delta and I went to school in Burma with support from my aunts and grandmother as my parents did not have money. I arrived here in 2000 and I am studying at high school now. Here there are so many opportunities if you try hard.

I identify as a Karen from Burma. I do not want to identify as Burman or Burmese but Karen, because I do not like the military regime. I have so many Burman friends who went to go with me. They were nice to me. They do not discriminate against me because I am Karen. We are the same. I do not hate Burman people but I do not like the regime, which is Burman.

I didn’t know anything about Karen suffering when I was in Burma, although I lived in a Karen village. I learned a lot when I arrived in the Thai-Burma border and saw many organisation working for Karen issues. I come to understand how Karen people have suffered a lot from the regime, through media like Kwekalu. I did not know anything about human right when I was in Burma.

I mostly read news in Burmese because I went to school in Burma where we can’t learn Karen and I can’t read and write Karen well. But I try and read stories in some Karen news websites.

I am a member of Myanmar Chat Online and I have so many Burmese friends there. In this site we could do many thing like write comments and respond to each other about so many issue, including politics as well. For example, we were talking about human right violations that the regime does and people who like the regime will say something and those who do not like it will say something different. So I have learnt a lot. We also help each other with Burmese and English language and the use of modern technology. For example, I do not know how to use some computer software so I seek help through this online forum.

I use a computer at least one hour a day and I check my email and keep in touch with friends in Burma and other countries. I have contact with all of my close friends who I knew them before, some of them are in the country like Australia, USA, Russia and Sweden with their families and we may live far away from each other but we have a regular contact with each other though internet services like email and chatting. Among us we share information and pictures of ourselves, family and places that we live. We also share music that we download from the internet. Sometimes we share music with each other through Bluetooth. I mostly listen to Burmese rather than English songs as I understand Burmese more.

I do not read news online because I do not know what news websites I can read. I only read local news here. I like chatting with friends because I get news from them. And sometime I read news that my friends send me through email. They send me the links and I read them.
Life will be boring without internet because I mostly feel lonely at home. I have friends in Auckland but I cannot visit them all the time. So we have nothing to do and when I’m at home then I will log in to the internet and chat with friends outside New Zealand. I feel happy when I can talk to them. I could not talk to friends inside Burma a lot as most of them do not have money to use the internet. They have to work and save money.

I think the internet is very important for maintaining our Karen tradition and culture. I could say this because last year we young people organised the wrist tying festival but none of us know how to do it, so we search for information about how people do it in the internet. We could find some information to organised the festival. The internet helps us a lot.

Burmese Version

ငှကာရောဂါသီးတွေ ကြီးကျောင်းရောက်တဲ့လက်ဖက်များက ကြီးကျောင်းအိန်းအစိုးရစ်ကြီးများကို စိတ်ကူးစိတ်ကူးနိုင်တယ်။ ကြီးကျောင်းရောက်ထားတဲ့ ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာစလိုက်မှတ်တမ်းကြီးစိုးများကို ညွှန်ပေးနိုင်တယ်။ ကြီးကျောင်းရောက်ထားတဲ့ ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာစလိုက်မှတ်တမ်းကြီးစိုးများကို ညွှန်ပေးနိုင်တယ်။
Myanmar Chat Online

Hi5  Facebook  Instagram  Twitter  Radom

Facebook  Instagram  Twitter  Radom
Appendix 11: Interviewee 10, 17 October 2009, North Shore, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 20+

Ethnicity: Karen

Gender: Male

**English Version [unedited]**

Before I lived in refugee camp in Thai-Burma border with my mum and siblings. We came to New Zealand in 2008.

I identify myself as Karen because I was born in Kawthoolei (Karen State). Actually I am a Karen from Burma but because I was born and grew up in the Karen army controlled areas, I feel strange telling people that I come from Burma. I have never been to Burma in my life. I do not know what it is like.

I do not want to identify as Burmese or Burman because Karen culture and history is different from Burman or Burmese. We have suffered a lot because of Burman people. Karen people have to flee their village and become Internally Displaced People and refugees because of the Burmese regime. I have never had any experience myself running away from a military attack but my parents did. And they told me their experience and I also read news so I do not like Burman people.

I use the internet about three hours a day and when I log in, the first thing that I do is check my email and do my homework. Then I open Karen websites and read news. Sometimes, I chat with friends here about their study and work. I like Karen website like Kwekalu because I can hear about the situation in the Thai-Burma border. It is important because we know the updated info with what’s happening with Karen people, for example how they flee fighting, how many get killed and food problems. Without Kwekalu I won’t know anything and life will be boring. I also read news in English sometimes, but mostly just in Karen. I never read news in Burmese because I cannot read Burmese.

Most of my friends who I used to live with in the camp have now resettle to third countries so we keep in touch through phone and the internet. We sometimes meet online and share information about Karen issues and the kinds of activities we’re doing.

My internet connection is very slow so I do not download music but I got Karen English songs from friends. I like rock music and it influences me a lot. I want to act, speak and dress like rock musicians. I want to have my own music band one day. I am not interested in any sports.

I want to go back and help Karen people in the future. But now I have to try my best and learn a lot here. I feel like I am not completely settled yet. I still have problems adapting with the culture. I still have language problems so I have to try hard. Everything is new for me here it is not like Thailand. And I feel like I am like a very young kid learning things from the beginning.

The culture here is different from Karen culture. Young people like me go to bars and drink. And because I am young, I could be easily influenced by this kind of culture. I did that before, going
out late with friends and drinking alcohol. My mum was quite concerned about it and the community also blamed my mum for that. I came to realise that it is not useful for me and it is also not my culture so I reduced my time going out with friends. Sometime my friends call me to go out but I told them that I have to help my mum and I could not go.
Appendix 12: Interviewee 11, 20 October 2009, North Shore, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 40+

Ethnicity: Karen
Gender: Male

English Version [unedited]

I mostly get news and information about Burma from the internet. I read news websites like Mizzima, Irrawaddy and Khit Pyaing and I listen to online radio from BBC, VOA and RFA. I use computers at least 90 minutes a day. I have to share computer with my kids so I cannot use it for a long time. I mainly read news in Burmese language and I cannot read Karen. Most young people here are reading Kwekalu, Karen website as they are from the border where Karen are taught in the camps.

Because I read news about Burma everyday I feel like I am also in Burma. I feel bad when I got bad news about Burma, this encourage me to try harder here and do something for the people back home. Here in New Zealand, we don’t need to worry for living. We don’t need to worry for our survival. If you want to eat something, you can eat. Our kids can go to school, without worrying about where the school fees will come from. But our people back home are suffering – they don’t have enough food to eat. We shouldn’t enjoy our life here so I encourage everyone to think about what’s going on and do something for people back home. When I read news about displaced people and the problems they face then feel the same thing as them and I feel like I am suffering with them. I could feel it because I have had that kind of experience as well.

Now I have an intention to set up a very strong Karen organization that can help people back home. For example, we could not help much for cyclone Nargis survivors. We got news and some people collected donations and we gave it them but it is not systematic. We’re not even sure that our support arrived to the people in trouble. If we have a strong organisation, we can help much better. We set up an organisation after we arrived here in 2000 but we still have problems organising people. Personally we can help our friends and people in the Thai-Burma border and inside Burma but I believe that we can help more in a structured wa.

Another reason is we want to maintain Karen nationality. I do not believe Karen will fade away because we come and live here. New Zealand is a multicultural country but our Karen people should maintain our culture and traditions. We have to introduce Karen culture and language to our children. We can do this when they are young but it will become hard when they are old.

I have realized that young Karen here are very active and as most of them are from the movement, they are socially aware. I am proud of that. I am working with them and supporting them with whatever they need. Adult Karen are not united though, we are so divided so I am trying to bring them back together. I have an idea about setting up a Karen village in Auckland. If we live together than we will be close and united. This is important.

Some people only care about their family after arriving here. For me I think that every Karen is responsible for our revolutionary movement. We have arrived here so we have good opportunities. We need to firmly settle and study and have jobs. Then we can save money that we get from our jobs or business and with that money we can support our people back home. I do not want other to be irresponsible to our people back home.

I do not have contact with my siblings inside Burma. I cut my communication with them after I started working with the Burmese opposition movement because I don’t want to risk their security. I do not worry for my siblings, but I worry for the Karen people. It is so miserable to see our people fleeing the country more and more because of war and poverty.
Appendix 13: Interviewee 12, 19 October 2009, Messy, Auckland

English and Burmese interview summary

Age: 50+

Ethnicity: Karenni

Gender: Female

English Version [unedited]

I never had an intention to resettle before. But when my older daughter was 18, she wanted to leave the camp and resettle. She applied and the UN told me that I had to leave with my family so I decided to come with my three daughters and we arrived here in 2006. I still have a son in the refugee camp in Thailand. He could not come with us as he didn’t have a UNHCR registration card. I was so worried about leaving him alone there as we do not have any relatives in the camp. Sometimes he stayed with his friends. Now he is married and lives with his wife, so I feel a bit relieved.

I am happy here but I feel bored at home, so I really like to go to school and study English. I study four days a week and other times I spend time with my grandchildren. Because my family was poor, my parents couldn’t send me to school and they asked me to work in the farm, so I am illiterate. But when I arrived here I don’t have a farm to work on and there’s nothing to do at home. We just eat, sit and sleep. So I get bored and I ask my kids to send me to school. I feel happy as well at school as I have friends that I could meet and talk with. I could not speak with some friends but we use our hands and body for communication among us.

I have to learn many things in school but as I am old I couldn’t remember many lessons. I am learning the English alphabet now. I find English pronunciation very hard. Sometime, the teacher pronounced a word for me but when I try myself, I can’t do it well. Sometime she just ends up laughing at me. I realise that teachers here are so patient. If I were in the camp, the teacher would beat me if I couldn’t do well. When I’m happy I can study well but sometime when I feel stressed about my family, especially my, son then I couldn’t sleep and eat well and I couldn’t concentrate in the class.

Sometimes I feel sleepy when the teacher keeps talking in English for a long time. It is very hard for me. I feel like I’m becoming a kid again and I could study many things about the world with my new brain.

I am unemployed now because I could not speak English. I am not sure that I would be able to work again in my life as I am learning English very slowly.

I do not know how to use the internet. The English alphabet is even too difficult for me! I only use the telephone for communication. I do not have contact with family or relatives in Burma. I lost contact with them since I went to Thailand. I also do not know how to contact them, now the only person that I have contact with is my son who lives in the camp. I call him at least once a month. It is not convenient to answer the phone in the camp, as we have to pay if people call us. My son doesn’t have money as well, so he doesn’t want to answer our calls. It is not good for him if we call him very often.
We only speak Karenni language at home with my kids. And we only cook Karenni food so I think it is an important way of maintaining our culture as well. Sometime I went to the monastery but we can not arrange our cultural festival here as we do not have many people. I am Tacotaing, which is an Animist Buddhist religion. I could not practice that religion here. My older daughter has interest in that religion but my two younger daughters have no interest. They also do not go to the monastery as they do not have friends. So they just go to church and I think they will become Christian. That’s their choice, I cannot force them to follow my religion.

I really missed my friends in Thailand because I don’t have many friends to spend time with here. In Thailand, we meet each other all the time and eat together. I chewed beetle nut with my friend everyday and my teeth were so dark before. We would drink tea and rice wine when we had it. But here I cannot do that anymore. I stopped chewing beetle nut because Auckland is not like the camp.

**Burmese Version**

ဗုဒ္ဓအားလုံးကို ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာကို ပြုလုပ်နိုင်ခဲ့ပါတယ်။ အကြောင်းရှိသော ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာများကို ကြိုးစားနိုင်ခဲ့ပါတယ်။

မိုးကြီးငါ့ရဲ့ မြင့်မားမီးရံရသော သူ့ကို ကြိုးစားနိုင်ခဲ့ပါတယ်။ သူငယ်၏ ကိုယ်လ်ကို အောင်ဒီးကြောင်းရှိသော ကိုယ်လ်ကို ကြိုးစားနိုင်ခဲ့ပါတယ်။

ဝါမောင်နေသော တံတားများတွင် ကြိုးစားနိုင်ခဲ့ပါတယ်။

သူငယ်၏ ကိုယ်လ်ကို အောင်ဒီးကြောင်းရှိသော ကိုယ်လ်ကို ကြိုးစားနိုင်ခဲ့ပါတယ်။

ငါ့တို့က တံတားများကို ကြိုးစားနိုင်ခဲ့ပါတယ်။
မျှဝေ သို့မဟုတ် သင်၏အရေအတွက်ကို ယူဆောင်ရွက်ရန် အခြေခံလိုသည်မှာ လိမ်းချင်သော သို့မဟုတ် နိုင်ငံတွေကို မြင့်မားသော စီးပွားရေးမှု့မှ စီးပွားရေးမှု့မှ ဖြစ်ရာ ပြည့်စုံမှုများကို ပြုလုပ်နေသည်။ ဤစနစ်ကို မြင်ရာတွင် စီးပွားရေးမှုများကို ပြုလုပ်ကြည်ပြောင်းလဲနိုင်မည်။

အခြေခံသောအချက်များကို ထောက်ခံရန် သင်၏အရေအတွက်ကို ပြုလုပ်နေသည်။ သင်၏အရေအတွက်ကို မြင်ရာတွင် စီးပွားရေးမှုများကို ပြုလုပ်ကြည်ပြောင်းလဲနိုင်မည်။

စီးပွားရေးမှုများကို မြင်ရာတွင် စီးပွားရေးမှုများကို ပြုလုပ်ကြည်ပြောင်းလဲနိုင်မည်။
Appendix 14: Interviewee 13, 21 October 2009, Glen Innes, Auckland

English transcription

Age: 17

Ethnicity: Burman and Karen

Gender: Female

As you may know me as Ashley, there is another name that given by a monk and that’s Thi Thi Wa, but I will prefer you calling me Ashley or you can call me Thi Thi Wa but I am adapting to New Zealand Country now some English people they do not know how to say Burmese name so I usually to them to call me Ashley instead. And I am a 17 years old girl living with my mum and dad still I have three sister and one brother fortunately I am living with my family in Auckland. I am at high school Selwyn College.

And both of my parents are from Burma of course. And a country that I call my first home because I was born there of course my family and I resettle to New Zealand when I was only 9. We came to New Zealand as a refugee. My family can not live in Burma because my father was a soldier and fought against those nasty Burmese regime. So it was not so secure to live there anymore. So we flew to Thailand then to New Zealand. And that pretty much it and I grew up in New Zealand and I have so many friend who are not Burmese of course. People who never met me may not believe that I am Burmese because I speak English like a Kiwi kid. And act like a Kiwi teenager, I have adapt so many culture in New Zealand. But I always identify myself as a Burmese. And I am proud to be call a Burmese girl as well.

I indentify myself as Burmese, on the other hand being Burmese is very important for me. So I maintain my Burmese culture by speaking Burmese language with my family and spending time with Burmese friends here and participate in Burmese ritual events that are organized in New Zealand of course. I maintain Burmese culture and tradition through Burmese anyinte dancing. I like dancing.

I love Burmese anyinte dancing because it make me happy when I dance. I love to show New Zealand what Burmese is about. Anyinte is our Burmese traditional dancing. I like Burmese dancing since I was so so young and I danced and performed since before I arrived here in New Zealand. I brought this interest along with me and now if there is any kind of social political events, for example Burmese New Year of course I will got excited to perform in front of people or we will celebrate the water festival, or different cultural shows in Auckland, I will do perform by doing Burmese traditional dancing.

I do a lot of Burmese dancing in my school the multi-cultural when Ma Ma came and see me I was so surprised nearly got a heart attack that was really fun when I see her. By doing this, in one way I am telling another people about Burmese culture. And also, it is an effective way that I introduce another people who I am and where I come from. And I believe that people learn about Burmese and their culture and tradition through my performance. So I am proud to be showing Burmese dancing to New Zealand people getting a sense of where I am from and what Burma is. I realized that it is important to maintain my Burmese identity especially in a multicultural country like New Zealand. And I must say I love New Zealand and I love my country as well and one day when the war is over I will go and visit my country yes.
I used to have a Burmese teacher who taught me a lot of Burmese dancing before but since I arrived here I do not have anyone to teach me which is kind of sad. and show me how to dance. But now, because I do not have people and any body to teach me, I teach myself through Internet. It’s a new way of Technology. To say basically internet is my teacher. I am learning more Burmese dancing through youtube of course, you must like Youtube. It got everything in it anyway. Whenever I have time, I always download different kind of Burmese anyite and watch it and learn how they dance. I will usually open my computer and dance in front of my computer. You might call me van you might call me not you might love me you might love me not but just listen to my … I also teach both Burmese and non-Burmese who want to learn Burmese dancing to get a sense and a feel of what Burma is like.

The title of the song that you are hearing is Nwe Ma, it means young girl at the summer and its my favourite music among Burmese traditional songs. I always listen to it like when the new year start, I really want to dance whenever I listen to this song. I also like western music like Hip Hop, RNG POP and I am also learning how to do Hip Hop dance in my school. After school I will always do bring it on we have competition that so fun, we go and compete the final at the Vector Arena, you might check that out you might not. There are many Burmese teenage who like Western songs but they do not like Burmese traditional music, I do not know why. But me I like both Burmese and western song. I like Burmese song more because the sound of the melody sound special when you feel the vine you can feel tinkling over your skin and body and especially when the drum, I like the drum how my country play the drum is so special and unique and I like it a lot. I want to be a professional dancer and at the end of the story I want you guy at home to go to youtube yes and watch our beautiful Burmese dancing and you can even go to Youtube watch me do bring it on a new way of adapting into New Zealand, you might say I am suck, I am good just go on Selwye College Bring it on 2009 and you will see me and I am embarrassing myself.
We arrived here in 2000. We set up the Overseas Mon Association of New Zealand as soon as we arrived. There were only 15 members in 2000 and the numbers have increased to 20 after some Mon families arrived here from Malaysia. Our organisation is not political, but rather our aim is to preserve Mon culture and tradition while we are in New Zealand. We mostly do social and cultural work. People who want to do political activism do not join our group. We do not have many activities. We organise Mon National Day every year. We used to hold this event in people houses because we didn’t have enough money to hire community halls. Every full moon day all Mon people in Auckland go to the monastery and make offerings. We also had Mon language classes last year for adults and kids. We have two teachers, one friend taught 4 adult people and I taught eight children. We also encourage children to speak in Mon when they meet each other. We older people tell the children that Mon people should speak Mon language.

It is very important for children to learn Mon language. Some of them do not know that Mon also have their language. When they have a chance to learn it then they understand a lot about us. Then when they grow up, if they are interested in Mon issues, they can explore things more. We arrived here and also consider ourselves an ethnic group in this country. We have responsibility to pass down our language to our new generation.

Similar to here, there are Mon organisation in Australia, Canada and the USA. We keep close contact with each other through telephone and the internet. We sometimes have online meetings as well. We once did an online meeting last year to organize commemorative events for the fall of Hanthawaddy [the Mon kingdom]. We talked about so many things about how we would do that, and the text of the statement. It is very important for Mon communities around the world keep in touch and support each other’s activities. We are very close to Mon community groups in Australia, because of our organisation is small and we want suggestions for how to develop our organisation and activities. Sometimes we call Mon organisations in Australia to seek suggestions from them. For example, we discuss the idea of teaching children Mon language. First we did not know what to do and we didn’t have money to do that so friend in Australia explained how they sought help from the government. And we sometimes also discuss commemorating Mon revolution day with them as well.