Chapter 7

Violence, invisibility and the international order

Shortly after I arrived in Thailand in 1999, newspaper headlines featured "the Battle in Seattle" next to pictures of thousands of protestors thronging the streets of the city, demonstrating against the actions of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Coverage in the Thai press indicated that the protestors were there for various reasons. A primary concern for many, however, was their criticism of the governments of the most powerful nations and the multilateral trade bodies they largely control. Protestors criticized their lack of consultation over trade issues with the peoples of the world and the non-governmental organizations representing them. Groups from developing countries called for greater attention to the difficulties faced by their most marginalized citizens. Then in January, 2000, as described in the preceeding chapter, ten God's Army gunmen were killed after they stormed the hospital in Ratchaburi. These two events felt like a symbolic opening to my fieldwork, and it occurred to me at the time that they were linked to the issues I was exploring in the Burmese opposition movement, although I couldn't yet identify how.

I see now that both events illustrated and contributed to the process of militarization globally, in particular to a militarization of media in which a focus on overtly violent events leads to representations of complex issues in simplistic black and white terms, and in this way obscures an underlying system of structural violence. I refer to the definition of structural violence offered by Philippe Bourgois (2001) and discussed

in Chapter 1. He defines the term broadly, as the organization of society in such a way that it imposes conditions of physical and emotional distress on people. The term "violence" is a necessary component of this concept because it underscores the extent to which global inequities lead to death through malnutrition and other less sensational means than death through overt violence. Scholars and activists, many from the South, have thoroughly critiqued the system of rules and restrictions controlling the planet's resources and global trade as organized by the major multilateral financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and World Trade Organization (WTO), and I will not detail those arguments here (Bello, 2000; Capdevila, 1999; Danaher & Burbach, 2000; Das, 1998; Khor, 2000, 2001; Raghavan, 1990; Shiva, 1996, 2000; WILPF, 1994).

The issue I would like to address is the extent to which media coverage of the overtly violent aspects of an event shapes how other aspects of the same event are framed, and how this influences what we believe about an issue. As Tehranian (1999) has argued, despite the attention paid to an issue during major flare-ups, contemporary violence is at root structural and largely invisible. He points out that while over 500,000 children die yearly from chronic diseases and malnutrition, the media focus much more attention on the 400,000 adults who die violent deaths each year. At the Seattle protests against the WTO, violence took physical form in the demonstrations in the streets, the aggressive police presence, broken windows, teargas, rubber bullets, and so on. But for many of the protestors, this distracted from their primary concern with the structural issues that have led to global inequities in access to resources, and to the discontent and

violence this engenders around the world. At the same time, many of the delegates from the developing world participating in the WTO meeting were expressing anger at the non-democratic practices of the organization, especially the African delegates, who threatened to boycott the meeting's closing statement, which in the end was never produced ("African countries," 1999; "African states," 1999; "OAU Objects," 1999; "Senegalese," 1999).

Reports vary as to the content and impact of the media coverage of the WTO protests. A study reported in the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Giuffo, 2001) critiqued the reporting by major U.S. news outlets on the four largest anti-globalization protests following Seattle (in Prague, Quebec City, Gothenburg, and Genoa) for its focus on the anger of the protestors without providing adequate coverage of the context for that anger. William Solomon (2000) found big differences in his comparison of the coverage of the Seattle protests by the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* with that of the *Guardian/Observer* of London. In the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, he found that "violence" was "defined solely as social unrest and damage to private property, not as environmental damage and human suffering" (p. 17). In addition to the broader range of issues concerning non-Americans covered by the *Guardian/Observer*, including the views of disgruntled WTO participants from developing countries, Solomon (2000) found that the mainstream U.S. media tended to trivialize the activists' perspectives, "thus devaluing them and rendering them more compatible with corporate values" (p. 20). A report by the group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) maintained that mainstream U.S. media "treated protestors' concerns with indifference and often

contempt" (Ackerman, 2000). Even those nonviolent aspects of the events that did receive coverage were widely sidelined by the media focus on the acts of overt violence by a fringe of protestors.

Studies by DeLuca & Peeples (2002) and Rojecki (2002) both determined that while the U.S. media tended initially to focus on the damage to commercial property caused by a small number of protestors, reports eventually appeared concerning the issues raised by those taking to the streets of Seattle. DeLuca and Peeples (2002) maintain that the violence that became an initial focus of the media's reports was in fact necessary to attract media attention, which in turn encouraged more extensive coverage of the issues. In other words, they argue that the violence caused the media to pay attention to the protests and in turn expanded the totality of coverage (DeLuca& Peeples, 2002, p. 144). Rojecki (2002) concurred that the media's initial coverage was superficial and trivialized the protestors' arguments. But he concludes that the coverage was characterized by an "evolving sympathy" with the Seattle protestors that reenergized a discursive pluralism and a "countervailing power" to unfettered mass markets, "in which the mass media may play a constructive role in building democratically responsive institutions" (p. 167).

Even the most optimistic of these observations make clear that the media tend to show an interest in overtly violent or controversial issues, and that at least initially, if they offer reasons for the violence at all, these reasons are generally superficial. Initial coverage misses entirely or at best glosses over the story of the underlying structural

violence that is commonly a root cause of the overt violence to begin with.[52] To the extent that the media focus exclusively on overt violence and its victims, they deflect public attention from the victims of less sensational yet equally deadly effects of structural violence such as widespread global poverty and the disease, malnutrition, and general lack of access to resources that is its result. This is true of local reporting as well as reporting on events globally by international media conglomerates. Overall, then, the coverage of these events was militarized to the extent that it portrayed the complex issues involved in simplistic black and white terms. For anyone who has not studied these events in detail, such dichotomous images are what remain in our minds about the protests in Seattle, and I believe this is true of many of the complex stories covered in the media.

This chapter will revisit some of the issues discussed in this dissertation and place them within the frame of this larger global media context. First I will describe concerns raised by Burmese activists regarding the introduction of new information technologies (NITs) and funding patterns among opposition groups. I will then address the ways that the discourses of human rights and democracy have been used for both liberating and oppressive ends, and contend that we might usefully conceive of communication as a process that can be militarizing or demilitarizing in any given context. A discussion of group versus individual rights then leads to an examination of what implications all of

[52] In many situations around the world, this structural violence implicates the operations of multinational corporations. The commercial press in the U.S., however, is unlikely to focus on that aspect of a situation. Studies of U.S. newspaper editorials have shown them to be heavily weighted towards the corporate perspective in matters of global trade agreements (Giuffo, 2001).

this has for political mobilization. Finally, I return to the discussion of gender. This research has made me aware of how deep-seated many of our gender stereotypes really are, including within myself, and how these stereotypes influence global patterns of militarization. In this way, what happens at the local level, as this study shows, both reinvents and mirrors events globally.

This dissertation has provided a detailed account of the environment for communication and media inside Burma (Chapter 3) and along the border (Chapter 4), including the development of a civil society in exile that includes an increasingly diverse set of voices. As Chapter 5 described, there is ongoing development and use of alternative forms of media along the border. NITs have been central to this process, used in many creative and innovative ways by those activists with access and training in their use. But this study has also revealed the complexity of the movement, with its tensions and internal divisions. The focus on these divisions will upset those in search of "unity" understood as consensus, who would rather not address such problems publicly, and who often maintain that the use of undemocratic means is a necessary and temporary shortcut to achieve the ultimate goal of democracy.

Ethnographer Philippe Bourgois (2001), in an article reflecting on his twenty years of fieldwork at sites of violent conflict, recognized in hindsight how the political context in which he was operating affected what he was able to document empirically and analyze theoretically. He explained how the Cold War context of his work in Central America led him "to sanitize. . . depictions of political violence and repression among revolutionary peasants" (p. 7). This, he argued, caused him to miss "the multi-sided

character of violence and the commonalities among its various subtypes across historical, cultural and political settings" and to "under-report and misrecognize the power of violence to buttress patterns of social inequality" (p.7).

Bourgois (2001) reflected on how he had seen structural violence at work in producing extreme social and economic marginality in East Harlem, but had been unable to recognize the same factors at play in El Salvador, where he took the violent radicalization of small farmers as a manifestation of "the liberating dynamic of political violence" (p. 11).

> In highlighting the difference between direct political violence and invisible structural violence. . . I thought I was transcending Cold War ideology, but instead I merely mimicked it. . . I maintained a moral opposition between "worthy" political violence that rallies the subordinate in the face of repression by an authoritarian state versus "unworthy" violence that confuses and demobilizes the socially vulnerable in neo-liberal democratic societies. . . . I failed to see how political repression and resistance in wartime reverberate in a dynamic of everyday violence akin to that produced by the fusing of structural and symbolic violence during peacetime (Bourgois, 2001, p. 12)

Thus, what he categorized as "worthy" violence directly shaped what he was able "to see, hear and believe," what he interpreted as "data" and what he took fieldnotes on. Thus, Bourgois concludes, he was back then blind to the ways in which the revolutionary movement in El Salvador "was traumatized and distorted by the very violence it was organizing against. . . The government's brutality was transposed into the guerillas' organizational structures and internal relations, as violence became a banal instrumental necessity" in an environment where "gender power relations under rural patriarchy fuel

the coalescence of political, structural and symbolic violence to render even more natural the personal aggression that constitutes everyday violence" (pp. 19, 22). The concept of symbolic violence used here is intended to illustrate how those who have been marginalized at times collude in their own oppression by perceiving and judging the world through categories that make it appear natural and self-evident (Bourgois, 2001). In the end,

> the centrality of structural violence. . . becomes obscured by a maelstrom of everyday violence. . . that in turn propagates a symbolic violence which convinces the dominated that they are to blame – at least partially – for the destitution and destruction visited upon them. (Bourgois, 2001, p. 29)

Bourgois (2001) concludes that the role of the ethnographer is to curb the urge to sanitize and instead "to clarify the chains of causality that link structural, political, and symbolic violence in the production of an everyday violence that buttresses unequal power relations and distorts efforts at resistance" (p. 30). I offer the findings of this work in an attempt to avoid such a dangerous sanitizing of the Burmese opposition movement. Discussing the structural and symbolic violence within the opposition movement is not likely to be welcomed by opposition activists, but addressing this violence is essential for efforts to demilitarize Burmese society, just as addressing these issues at the global level is essential to demilitarizing relations between all peoples of the world today.

The conflict in Burma is a local manifestation of a global environment of increasing militarization buttressed by gender and ethnic inequities. The statistics on war and conflict provided in the opening chapter tell the story of global militarization in the abstract. The framework outlined in Chapter 4 indicates who has access to which

communications technologies and media within the Burmese opposition movement, and addresses in general terms the issues posed by the first of my research queries: *what communications technologies are being used, and by whom, among the Burmese opposition groups based in Thailand*?

Scholars have also shown that militarization is upheld by ideas about the "proper" uses of technologies, and that such "practices involving technology are constituted (i.e. understood and undertaken. . .) . . . in and through relations of gender" (Rakow, 1988, p. 67). In other words, men and women make use of technologies as they perform work commonly associated with their gender, and in this way the technologies themselves become gendered in the process. Therefore, technologies are one means through which gender differences and hierarchies are both constructed and maintained. As discussed in Chapter 1, gendered hierarchies are used to construct and maintain other types of hierarchies, such as racial hierarchies.[53] This is useful to keep in mind while addressing the second issue raised in this research: *how NITs, specifically computers and the Internet, are helping to reduce, maintain, or intensify ethnic conflict* within the movement. To understand this, it is necessary to examine the overall impact as well as the specific changes brought about by the introduction of NITs.

Impact of NIT use and consequences of funding patterns

The use of the computer, e-mail and Internet has changed the work of the opposition groups in several ways, not least of which is an increase in the pace of their work. E-mail offers a solution to international time differences and the rapidity with

[53] See Chapter 1, pp. 24-31.

which information now travels has enabled the Burmese and other activists to make use of information in a timelier manner to lobby governments and obtain funding. Once communication was simplified, the funding began coming more quickly, and was more useful, since it generally arrived, as one activist put it, "before the situation deteriorated" (personal communication, March 6, 2000). It also became possible for the first time to organize a campaign simultaneously in countries worldwide in rapid response to events unfolding in Burma. All of these changes indicate a professionalization of the opposition, and the desire of many activists to be part of an organization or movement respected for its transparency and effectiveness.

The trend toward professionalization reflected the desire of writers and other media activists to write without pressure from political groups, but was also promoted by external funding groups. For example, foreign scholars, funders and other friends criticized the early control exercised over the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) radio station by the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). As a result, in 1996, a new director was appointed who has emphasized training in journalism and fundraising in order to diversify the sources of DVB's funding (Khin Maung Win, personal communication, August 23, 2000). Many of the organizations providing financial support for opposition media encourage or require the media they are funding to remain independent of political organizations, yet they are also required to have the skills necessary to apply for funding. Most funding agencies themselves operate with restrictions on how they can distribute their money, and the arms used in the struggle by ethnic minority groups has kept funders away. Thus, the emphasis on writing skills and

the move away from armed struggle has served to widen the digital divide between the Burmans and the non-Burmans within the movement, especially those who are still armed.

The Burmans in general have had greater success in finding support to gain access to NITs, and thus to the freedoms these technologies provide, despite the efforts of projects such as the Ethnics Online project (discussed in Chapter 4) to change this. The introduction of NITs has also made movement easier for many activists with access to them who need to remain agile in the uncertain environment in Thailand. In the past, when for security reasons the ABSDF moved to a new office, they had to contact all the people they corresponded with to inform them of their new mailing address. Inevitably some messages would fall through the cracks. With the use of e-mail and cellphones, however, they could move and still receive their messages. These technologies have helped activists with access to them to overcome some of the obstacles to effective communication in the militarized environment of surveillance in Thailand.

Nevertheless, Internet use also reflects inherited behavioral patterns from life under military rule, such as the spread of misinformation about rivals within the opposition. In a hypothetical case provided by DVB founder and ABSDF member Khin Maung Win, "ABSDF wants to promote the ABSDF's role, so the NLD or KNU or DPNS would not be happy, because being popular is one way to become a leader in the near future" (personal communication, August 23, 2000). As a result, he said, misinformation campaigns targeted others within the movement in addition to those in the Burmese regime.

The influx of money into the border area in the last decade also created friction between groups. The struggles between opposition groups and schisms within groups often manifested themselves in accusations of misuse of or dependence on foreign funding. Many of the non-Burmans I spoke with resented what they felt was an inordinate degree of international support for the Burmans while they were forgotten. Although the Burman opposition's calls for democracy and human rights merged nicely with the foreign policy concerns of the U.S. and other western powers, many minorities were not convinced that their concerns for equal representation and respect would be taken seriously by a new Burman-dominated government. In addition, a widening gap was noticeable between the elite of the opposition and its grassroots, in part due to the increasing professionalization of the movement.

Professionalization and foreign funding

The preponderance of group splits and fighting over funding suggests that the particular form Burmese political factionalism takes had been sustained, if not exacerbated, in the Thai context where followers were especially dependent on leaders for their livelihood. An additional unintended consequence of border life and the reliance on external funding for survival appeared to be an emphasis on organizational and funding logistics that critics said had grown in some cases to supercede the struggle itself. Critics argued that the increasing professionalization of Thailand-based activists, while positive in that it helped groups gain the skills necessary to apply for funding, also tended to shift their focus from work to support the movement as a whole to the survival of the

group and its funding base. One activist suggested that funders' attempts to get groups to diversify their funding sources had encouraged a belief among activists that they had a better chance to get funding by starting a new organization than by working with already established ones. By funding almost all projects during their initial proposal period but then gradually reducing this funding in subsequent years, funding agencies had provided activists with an incentive to periodically start entirely new organizations to ensure at least continued funding, if not increased amounts. "Some people think, 'Oh, we'll just create a new organization and we'll just apply for whatever amount we can get,'" one activist explained (personal communication, August 23, 2000). In addition, personal relationships between members of specific funding agencies and the groups they fund had reportedly contributed to factionalism among the funding agencies themselves. Although activists recognized that funding agencies had begun to address some of these issues by increasing their coordination, these concerns are worthy of more extensive exploration and discussion.

Several activists who had arrived at the border in recent years were critical of the activities of their fellow students, in exile since 1988. There was the sense that border activists were often out of touch with what was going on inside the country, and that their activities outside were in many ways irrelevant to those inside. For example, Bo Kyi, a former political prisoner who had recently arrived at the border, did not openly criticize border activists, but emphasized that he was not interested in the internal politics of the exiled opposition groups. "I work together with them if we have the same idea, but especially for the struggle, not for any organization. I'm not interested in any

organizations, but in the struggle." When I asked him if he thought the activists on the border were not interested in the struggle, he said, "Many people are interested in the struggle, but some people may be interested in themselves." He then went on to say that while many border activists had good relations with those inside, others did not (personal communication, August 18, 2000).

It is also important to examine critically patterns that privilege funding for specific activities for different groups, in the process contributing to greater perceived differences between these groups. Broadly, women have primarily gained funding for technologies intended to support income-generation, such as looms and sewing machines, or community development, such as typewriters and other low-tech library and school supplies. Ethnic minorities have been widely supported for the portable technologies necessary to document human rights abuses and for the subsequent development of ethnic media, which features news of human rights abuse. Burman leaders and some ethnic leaders, mostly men, have received support for technologies promoting the crafts of state: political diplomacy, lobbying, and state-building efforts. Without exception, the Burmese I spoke with associated new information technologies (NITs) with progress and "development," and this indicates the perceived inequities from the perspective of those without access to these new technologies. Yet while inequities in access to NITs were frustrating to some ethnic leaders, women, and refugees, others did not feel the need for access given their understanding of themselves as apolitical. This self-concept was due at least in part to conventional and unquestioned understandings of who does what best

within the opposition movement. These attitudes have been reinforced by conventional and narrowly-defined concepts of human rights and their relationship with democracy.

Human rights discourse and democracy

Human rights and democracy are widely-used concepts framing the debates and discussions among refugees, activists, NGO workers, journalists and foreign supporters involved with Burma. This dissertation has explored the ways in which global media and the discourses they promoted have been used by the opposition. As I have illustrated, there have been both positive and negative consequences of the dominance of these discourses.

Human rights discourse has proven an effective tool for both Burmans and non-Burmans to advocate on their own behalf. The opposition has made good use of NITs to employ the language and symbols of human rights in order to win sympathy for their cause and increase international attention to the abuses occurring in Burma. The discourse of human rights has also turned a spotlight on the Burmese regime, forcing them to at least mimic a situation of transparency, in which they must either refrain from oppressive practices such as forced labor, or work hard to make them invisible. The human rights focus has also prompted opposition media to print articles about the struggles of the various ethnic groups in Burma in order to clarify for the Burmese and the rest of the world the systematic patterns of abuse taking place around the country. Some people believe that the focus on human rights, as one activist put it, has noticeably "improved the behavior and thinking" among workers and refugees. Saw Min Lwin of

the Federation of Trade Unions, Burma (FTUB) told me that their trainings in workers' rights and strategies for acting in unity when dealing with management had made an impact. He gave an example of female factory workers who were often the target of sexual harassment or abuse on the job. Saw Min Lwin noticed that some of the women had begun banding together to protest this type of treatment, and saw this as a sign that workers were beginning to recognize and act on their rights (personal communication, May 31, 2000).

But the emphasis on human rights has also reinforced stereotypes of both women and non-Burman groups primarily as victims, and this was depressing for many people I spoke with. There was a feeling among some, for example, that the focus on human rights had become excessive.

> People get scared. People are already scared. There is fear. You have to tell them to do something. Courage! Create the stories to have more courage, not to tell people about the scary, scary army unit that came to [a village], killed all the people, raped all the women. That's also very depressing. I think we've got to change. (Aung Zaw, personal communication, April 18, 2000)

An article in a recent edition of *Burma Issues*, an alternative publication focused on grassroots organization, addressed just this issue by pointing out how rarely the nature of conventional human rights reporting is critically examined (Miller, 2002). The article noted that although frequent training sessions on international human rights standards and methods of documentation have been held for individuals and groups along the border, the documentation of abuses, when stripped of contextual data including the cultural and economic realities of the situation, "becomes universal and quantitative in nature" (p. 2).

As the process of human rights abuse documentation becomes "institutionalized" both within organizations and within villages, and with the documentation of abuses often used as the basis for funding, "it becomes imperative for information collectors to vigorously seek out incidents of human rights abuse" (p. 2), leading to a devaluation of other aspects of villagers' lives, including the ways in which they are active agents of their own lives rather than solely passive victims. The article maintained that the social and psychological side effects of this continuing process are rarely acknowledged, but suggested that to avoid these negative consequences, each incident of abuse should be contextualized so that marginalized people are recognized by others as effective participants in their own lives. The extent to which the refugees interviewed for this study felt unable to affect changes in their own lives indicates how stereotypes of refugees as victims can become internalized. Yet there are many stories of courage and tenacity that could also be told. I remember the first time I sat among a group of refugees that had just fled from attacks on their villages inside Burma. Clustered together on blankets and under plastic sheeting that had been erected hurriedly, these refugees talked and laughed at the antics of the small children. They were not sullen and defeated. While I found myself depressed with the gravity of the situation they faced, I was surprised and heartened by the resilience of those around me. At dissonance with my own reaction to the situation was the fact that disruptions like this were commonplace for these people, and while they were not pleased with the situation, they had learned to move on. I could not imagine a group of Americans reacting with the same sense of calm and equanimity.

As far as alternative media is concerned, Aung Zaw warned that an overemphasis on reporting human rights abuses also brands those who do this reporting as "junk news makers" rather than professional, independent journalists whose work would be remembered as helpful or useful in the years to come. Credibility, argued Aung Zaw, is fragile, and this fragility is a real source of danger for those opposition activists working in the media. Some feel, for example, that the news and reporting from the DVB "is still very, very one-sided, very much in line with the [party line of the] opposition, which gives them a bad reputation" (personal communication, April 18, 2000).

It is perhaps not surprising that those labeled primarily as victims have begun to express concern with the emphasis on human rights abuses and other bad news. Saw Thaw Thi, for example, admitted that a few readers had complained that the news in *Kway K'Lu* was all bad, and that this had made them feel lonely and depressed. "So we have to encourage them," he told me, "that you are not alone. All the people at the grassroots level, they are suffering like you. . . . [We have to] encourage each other, 'Hey Karen, we are not alone. Let's rise up and stand for our rights'" (personal communication, July 24, 2000). The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) also received some negative feedback from the readers of their journal *Our Time* who complained because they felt the journal included a lot of news about people's suffering, but not enough about the positive developments in Mon communities. One letter writer argued that these positive developments included the successful struggle for everyday survival, and for the establishment and survival of Mon schools and the Mon language. "'There are so many positive things, he said, 'so please write about this information also.'

And we agreed, we agreed," said Nai Kyin Shwe (personal communication, July 22, 2000). Thus, there was a growing sense among those I spoke with that the opposition needs to move beyond the common stereotypes of refugees and rural villagers as simple, unsophisticated people and to portray people at the grassroots as the active decision-makers they are rather than merely as passive victims of fate. The need to recognize these positive aspects of the human ability to respond to tragedy, however, is at odds with a media system that requires violence and controversy as a driving force.

Militarism, information and propaganda

Many in the opposition, including Karen refugees in Umphien Mai, used media as a means of reinforcing the values they held as individuals and as a community, and as a means of interpreting and explaining the circumstances in which they found themselves. The stories they told and the ways they read and understood the media reveal a great deal about the militarization of their everyday lives. This was reflected in the way they described their media use. The refugees were most interested in stories detailing the kinds of disruption they had faced all their lives, and related especially gruesome stories of violence against women and young girls to symbolize the essence of the evil forces the Karen face. These images also helped to propagate conventional concepts of masculinity and femininity and to justify men's violence with the understanding that they were the primary protectors of the community. This worked to keep women out of the formal power structure and in this way prioritized things associated with men and their power struggles, such as armies, security, and the use of communications technologies. These

priorities were then further justified by the association of negative characteristics with women, such as "talkative" behavior, described by men as untrustworthy and dangerous.

Some opposition activists acknowledged that this militarized thinking is characteristic of the regime and its attitude toward information and media, yet is often reproduced within elements of the opposition leadership for whom the ends at times is used to justify an undemocratic means. Another opinion, however, was that the use of e-mail had begun to change militarized concepts of technologies and information. For some activists, the practice of keeping information secret had been a means to establish control or express power. But this had made it difficult to coordinate with each other or communicate with the regime, and the use of the Internet made it increasingly difficult to keep information from spreading. "Things are getting into the media, one way or another, so you can't hide," activist Win Min told me. "You can't make yourself powerful through keeping information. You have to share the information." In fact, he argued, sharing information had become not just a responsibility but also a means of establishing legitimacy. "People are trying to share information as much as they can, so it makes them look like they are in the movement and they are doing something" (personal communication, March 6, 2000). He also said that this had increased communication with the regime, albeit indirectly. "Previously, the regime didn't know what we wanted to do, and we didn't know what the regime wanted to do. So we are sharing more and more of this information" (personal communication, March 6, 2000).

Nevertheless, the activists I spoke with did not go so far as to say that this was encouraging a genuine dialogue with the regime. As one activist put it, "They think that

dialogue and compromise are weakness. So they don't want to engage in dialogue because people will think they are weak. . . . The regime will only think about dialogue when they are really, really weak." Old patterns die hard, and several activists acknowledged that this was not limited to the regime. "That's the main problem in Burma, not only in the regime but also in the movement . . . many people rarely compromise with each other," explained Win Min. For this reason, he argued, sharing the information on the Internet would not by itself lead the regime to accept a dialogue with the opposition. Instead, he believed that the use of NITs would strengthen the democratic opposition, which in turn would force the regime to the table (personal communication, March 6, 2000).

For many in the opposition, familiar ideas about the relationship between information and power had begun to change. Only recently, for example, had the value of "propaganda" been questioned within the opposition. As Khin Maung Win explained,

> We did not know about journalism. What we called it was propaganda. Even in the organizations, you will hear sometimes about the Propaganda Department. We thought that this is information, this is true, and since we are involved with information activities, we can say whatever we want. This is what people even in the democracy movement think. (personal communication, August 23, 2000)

The ABSDF had a Propaganda Department at one time, he explained, but this had changed as the students heard more about the importance of a free press and responsible journalism. These ideas had come about as a result of training programs, pressure from outside organizations or critics, and in some cases because of a change in an opposition group's leadership.

Communication is a process, and approaches to that process can become militarized in any media system, from the most authoritarian to the most democratic. Militarized approaches to communication include the tendency to emphasize the divisive and violent aspects of a situation, focusing on the immediate and short-term consequences and in this way masking structural violence and its long-term consequences. Looking at the militarization of the process of communication is more useful than sticking to static models of democratic or authoritarian media systems, as it allows us to see the characteristics these two "opposite" kinds of media systems have in common. In addition to a focus on overt violence, this includes the increasingly frequent conceptualization of information as commodity.

The commodification of information

For the Burmese opposition, the Thai context and the availability of foreign funding contributed to the commodification of information, which had become a key resource in border diplomacy between the opposition groups and between these groups and outsiders. Visits by Thai military intelligence (MI) were a regular occurrence in the local offices of the Burmese opposition groups, and not usually cause for alarm. Offering information about developments inside Burma to their Thai hosts ensured activists a degree of freedom to move around safely in Thailand. This relationship had a history; the Thais years ago established listening posts at several places along the border, including Mae Sot, and many of these posts employed radio intercept operators and translators (Ball, 1998). The Thais had also worked with the Karen to intercept the radio

communications between Burmese military units for some time, including operating a joint signals intelligence (SIGINT) station during the 1995 battle for the last remaining Karen army stronghold of Wangkha, across the border from Huaykaloke refugee camp (Ball, 1998). This is a history populated by men, in which women are for the most part absent or invisible.

Information had also become a tool used to obtain and maintain funding from NGOs and other agencies. Gathered in various forms, information was used to provide material for newsletters and reports, and to post on the Internet, increasing one's legitimacy within the opposition movement. Information has always been commodified for presentation in printed works (including this dissertation), and there have always been attempts by opposition groups to promote their own viewpoints to the writers of such works. Yet as groups have begun to write their own accounts of events and to push for their own agendas, information has become an increasingly important resource for which groups in the opposition movement and their supporters compete.

Activists expressed significant concerns regarding this emphasis on information. First, it was beneficial and sometimes necessary to prove to funders that they had accomplished something with their grant money. The need for proof could be risky for the activists inside Burma, and had increased tensions between activists on both sides of the border. As Win Naing explained, "Every funder who gives money would like to see accountability, proof. So some people draw up a program or project that leaves people inside in a difficult situation that they cannot implement" (personal communication, August 15, 2000). One way to prove that work was being accomplished was for groups

to produce information about what was happening inside Burma. This led Win Naing to argue that

> some people are focusing on information, information, information, and not on the work. . . . If you have more information, you have more credibility and more funding. Like I have a connection with the inside, so I got the message. This is proof . . . we are like journalists. What about the political activities? We need to balance the work. For example, organizing the students' affairs inside – how can we show the report? Should we write their names, addresses, and show their photos? If we buy a house from their budget, should we take a picture to show it? Some of the work we can't prove. (personal communication, August 15, 2000)

The need to prove that one's group was accomplishing something had set up a troubling situation in which the arrest of an underground (UG) member involved in dangerous information-gathering inside Burma could be held up as reassurance that risks were being taken and work was actually getting done inside. In this situation, a focus on the violent consequences that occur when UG activists inside are harassed or arrested at times had the unanticipated consequence of helping groups outside obtain, maintain or even increase their funding, thus increasing the "value" of such violent consequences for those groups.

Dependency and neocolonialism

Despite the space for public discussion opened by opposition media, several media staff members voiced important concerns about a growing dependency on outside interests, to which I will add a few cautionary remarks. Several staff members mentioned to me that the emphasis placed on the independence of opposition media was at least in

part (and in many cases in large part) motivated by the expectations of funding agencies. This was especially true when it came to media that had previously been identified as mouthpieces for political organizations. Khuensai Jaiyen admitted that it was partly the need for funding that drove the Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN) to make the transition to an independent news organization. The first funding they received independent of the Shan political movement was from the Open Society Institute (OSI), which agreed to fund them only after several prominent Shans wrote letters on their behalf with assurances that the SHAN was no longer associated with the opium warlord, Khun Sa. Their previous association with Khun Sa also got in SHAN's way when they applied for funding to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which turned down their first proposal. After investigating, the NED eventually agreed to fund the SHAN, which helped to increase their profile (Khuensai Jaiyen, personal communication, June 28, 2000).

While the short-term impact of external funding had helped to open crucial space for dialogue between opposition groups, it had also created a dependence on this funding and a media culture increasingly shaped by Western journalistic values and a professionalization of the media. As Hamilton (2000) warned, the professionalization of media tends to separate media producers from their audiences, and rather than encouraging those who are not producers to participate in the communicative process, it encourages them to be merely consumers of information. "In this way, the social goals of building an active, resilient, indigenous, and democratic popular movement or coalition

of movements are impaired from the start by the imposition of such individualizing social relationships" (Hamilton, 2000, p. 361).

Burmese activists were sensitive to charges of neocolonialism, and what they seemed to fear most was the threat of being pressured or influenced to change their work. Aung Zaw expressed his worries about the National Endowment for Democracy's funding for the *The Irrawaddy*, and especially about his magazine's future.

> When we go back to Burma, how will we print it? We could be politically sensitive because we received this money . . . But I want to run *The Irrawaddy*, I think it is a good magazine, and we've gotten lots of good feedback. But to continue our operation I have to get the money, as long as there's no interference. So far there is no lecture, no interference. If they do so, we will tell them "get out." (personal communication, April 18, 2000) [54]

Despite the insistence of many opposition media staff that they were independent, many of them were reliant to a certain degree on the political organizations from which they desired independence. This was the case because these media needed to use the networks of the political organizations for distributing their newsletters and journals inside Burma. While the media staff members often felt strongly about and promoted

[54] Developments since this interview demonstrate that *The Irrawaddy* has reason to fear interference. After the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington D.C., *The Irrawaddy* published an editorial critical of U.S. foreign policy. During a panel discussion at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand in May, 2002, the U.S. charge d'affaires in Rangoon, Priscilla Clapp, openly chastised the magazine's editor, Aung Zaw, claiming the editorial said that "America deserved the attack of September 11th" and that the editorial did "not go unnoticed in Washington" ("Envoy Blasts," 2002). The editorial, while critical of U.S. foreign policy, did not endorse the attacks on the U.S. Staff members at the magazine have said that the NED has attempted to interfere with editorial decision-making, and that junior diplomats from the U.S. embassy in Bangkok have visited the magazine's office to express displeasure with articles perceived as critical of the U.S. ("Envoy Blasts," 2002). At the time of this writing, Aung Zaw was uncertain of the status of continued NED funding for *The Irrawaddy* (personal communication, September 24, 2002).

independence from the political leadership, they nevertheless had to negotiate this relationship in terms of their ability to get their newsletter distributed.

Although none of the people I spoke with during my fieldwork in Thailand reported feeling pressured to change their work by funding agencies, several people raised this as a concern without any prompting from me, even if only to insist that should any such pressure occur, they would not accept it. This indicates an underlying fear of dependency that is at times apparent in the content of opposition media, as in this cartoon (below) from the Karen journal *Kway K'Lu*.

Woman: Oh my son, you must have had enough.

Boy: No.

Woman: Saw Pa Kaw, It's really enough now.

Boy: No.

Woman: There, here comes your stepfather.[55]

Boy: Release me quickly, I tell you!

Figure 18. Cartoon from *Kway K'Lu*, February 29, 2000.

[55] "Stepfather" here is used to refer to someone cruel or cunning.

Saw Thaw Thi, the editor of *Kway K'Lu*, interpreted this cartoon to mean that although this boy is no longer a child, he still wants to be breastfed. "I think the idea is that people inside Thailand, they still want to be fed by the NGOs, they do not want to work." But the dress of the man in the final panel indicates that he is Thai, and Saw Thaw Thi explained that the cartoon is warning readers that there will come a time when they may want to run away from Thailand. "This is Thailand, not the Karen land. Being satisfied in Thailand has no, what can we call it? It is not reliable" (personal communication, July 24, 2000).

Win Naing pointed out the relentless nature of the SPDC's propaganda about dependence on neocolonialist outsiders, and maintained that the Burmese must decide what is to be done and then act for themselves. Outsiders' attempts to enter Burma and change the country should be discouraged, and as an example explained how the Burmese government reported the story of the "Rangoon 18" incident (discussed in Chapter 4) to the Burmese people. "The SPDC showed them the people in the newspaper, saying 'we didn't arrest them. We settled the case.' They showed it as though they were really flexible." He maintained that this kind of message, repeatedly endlessly as it is inside Burma, has a significant impact on people's thinking (personal communication, August 15, 2000). Aung Zaw argued that the best role for foreign funding agencies would be to provide financial or technical assistance, such as training in journalism, without interference in the editorial policies of the media outlets they finance (personal communication, April 18, 2000). It would be unfortunate, however, for this kind of training to preclude the development of indigenous forms of communication that

don't conform to the standards of Western journalistic notions of professionalism. Such a professionalization can be intimidating for those without advanced skills who would otherwise be motivated to participate, and who might also be inclined to counteract the media's tendency to emphasize violence and controversy with stories about their community's resilience in the face of adversity.

Group vs. individual rights and the digital divide

While activists did not explicitly discuss this, many alluded to the tensions between different concepts of rights in their discussions of technology use. One of the perceived threats of new technologies was their use to promote the goals of individuals or small groups rather than those of the movement as a whole. "If you know how to use it constructively, it's very effective, very good," said Aung Zaw. "But also could be very harmful. You become addicted to it. You sit there," he said, laughing, "divorce rates in America . . . husband and wife sit there, glued to an Internet computer, and they forget everything. That could be very harmful, I think" (personal communication, April 18, 2000). Others alluded to the individualistic nature of some groups' approaches to NIT use, accusing them of using their access to promote only their own group rather than the opposition struggle as a whole (Hkun Okker, July 5, 2000).

Win Min expressed a concern with an unregulated freedom of expression that was echoed by many people I spoke with, and reflected a desire for balance between rights and responsibilities.

> In the Burmese movement, sometimes you see too much criticism on e-mail. Some is not necessary, just ridiculous accusation . . . . This is a side effect of the quick freedom of information. . . . People get freedom, they can write anything they want, there is no censorship. Some of the people use the advantage a lot, and say whatever they want. They don't care about ethics or friendship, you know. They go beyond. So it's no good. But on the other hand, it makes people more transparent. (personal communication, March 6, 2000)

Reflecting the influence of their international supporters, the Burmese opposition movement narrowly defined what was considered "political," and its rhetoric most often emphasized the need for political and civil rights. This relegated economic, social and cultural rights to a different set of categories, such as "development" or "capacity building." This made invisible the political nature of marginalization and how it was accomplished and maintained through a hierarchy of rights that was gendered and racist in its construction. These limited conceptions of what was "political" also exacerbated the digital divide and the corresponding knowledge gap among elements of the opposition. Many women and refugees expressed their belief that they had no use for communications technologies, since they had no political or security-related business. There was also a palpable feeling of despondency among many people I interviewed, especially the refugees, who often expressed the belief that they were not capable of contributing toward change. This has serious consequences, undermining efforts to motivate people to take part in the movement. This also brings us to the final issue posed in my initial research query: *what implications do these findings have for efforts towards political mobilization?*

Human rights and political mobilization

The discourse of rights, unlike the rhetoric of unity, seemed to provide refugees and other members of the opposition with a means of understanding their own situation in relation to the larger struggle for rights in Burma. The concept of unity was used by the refugees, for example, to refer to the unity of the Karen as a group, and primarily with the Karen *failure* to unify. The refugees did not use the concept of unity to refer to their relations with other Burmese peoples. Several refugees, however, used the concept of rights in connection with the larger national struggle for rights in Burma. The discourse of rights also offered activists and refugees a means to express their needs and concerns in rhetoric understandable to outsiders, including aid agencies. Funding for Burmese opposition media promoted democracy and nonviolence, and the discourse of rights fit these goals in ways that had proven useful for refugees in their attempts to publicize the violence perpetrated against their people. In this way, rights rhetoric provided a discourse for establishing what Chandra Mohanty (1991) would call "common contexts of struggle" between the Karen and others. It became a far more unifying concept than that of unity itself, and far more successful as a tool of political mobilization.

Perhaps because the concept of human rights is so useful as a tool for advocacy, there is not much critical attention to the concept itself among those NGOs and other supporters of marginalized peoples around the world who most actively evoke the concept in their work. The criticism that does exist is hardly a feature of mainstream or even alternative media coverage of human rights issues around the world. The most publicized critique of Western notions of human rights is summed up by the "Asian

values" argument espoused by the leaders of several Asian governments, such as Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Singapore's elder statesman, Lee Kuan Yew. They claim that Asians have a unique set of cultural traits that need protection, including hard work and discipline; an emphasis on the family and on social harmony; a paternalistic approach to politics valuing respect for elders and other authority figures; consensus-building; centralized decision-making; and patron-client relationship patterns (McDaniel, 2002; Pravit, 2000). This idea has been roundly critiqued by critical Asian scholars such as Chandra Muzaffar (1993), who is also critical of the concept of human rights as it is used by Western human rights organizations working in developing countries. Muzaffar (1993) argues, as do Mahathir Mohamad and Lee Kuan Yew, that the "centres of power in the North have narrowed the meaning of human rights itself in order to perpetuate their dominance. Human rights are synonymous with individual civil and political rights within the nation-state" (Muzaffar, 1993, p. vi). He points out that while cultural rights are given some attention, economic and social rights, such as freedom from hunger and disease, are not even considered human rights among "certain circles in the North" (p. vii). Muzaffar (1993) argues that the dominance of the United States, which some argue is the single remaining superpower, is a historically unprecedented form of authoritarianism in international relations. He warns that it is now imperative for their survival that the peoples of the developing world and the marginalized within the industrialized nations insist upon their rights to equal access.

> There is no denying that what has emerged in the course of the decades is an international system in which the poor and powerless who constitute the overwhelming majority of the human race have very little say over their own destiny. A system which virtually disenfranchises the majority cannot be democratic. It cannot claim to protect human rights or human dignity. (Muzaffar, 1993, p. 15)

What is missing from Western concepts of human rights, according to many critics, is a balanced between individual rights and collective rights within the state, with individual responsibilities in addition to rights, and with the rights of nations and peoples within both the national and international system (Muzaffar, 1993; Musa Bin Hitam, 1996; Osaghae, 1996). These critics point to the arrogance of Western government officials and human rights workers who uncritically consider their own nations as in a more "advanced" state of political development specifically because of their attention to political and civil rights.

Like any discourse, the rhetoric of human rights is manipulated in pursuit of specific aims. In Umphien Mai the refugees used the concept of rights to call attention to discrimination against the Karen by both Burmese and Thai officials, but also to rationalize the attacks on the Burmese embassy and the Ratchaburi hospital. Comparisons between the outcomes of these two incidents evoked nationalistic responses among the refugees, as people described their "nation" or their "people" being unfairly attacked by the Thais and the Burmans while the Burman students were allowed to go free. The refugees constructed a mythico-history of the Karen as naturally peace-loving people who had been forced to fight in self-defense as victims of the Burmese and Thais, emphasizing the nature of abuses they faced **as Karens**. They used the discourse of

rights to direct attention to the killing of the God's Army gunmen by Thai commandoes rather than other violent consequences of the action, such as the suffering of the patients in the hospital who were taken hostage.

By emphasizing their rights as a group, the refugees called attention to what was missing in most media accounts. These were concerned mostly with the individual rights of the ten gunmen who were reportedly killed after they'd surrendered. What this story about individual rights neglected to take into account was the underlying structural violence in which a largely civilian population was targeted on two sides by "enemies" engaged in political maneuvering. The control and manipulation of ethnic minority groups in the power plays between different governments was also obscured by the attention to individual rights, as was the Burmese government's abuses of civilians caught in rural areas of the country. I have already detailed in the previous chapter how at the international level, the rhetoric of rights has been used as a justification for the *non-entrée regime* in international refugee policy, acting to support the continued existence of Karen refugee camps in Thailand rather than encourage the refugees' resettlement in third countries. What all of this suggests is the need for a more critical and contextualized examination of the meanings and uses of human rights as a concept in different situations, and how these various uses promote specific interests and act to hide other ways of understanding a given event.

Also important to consider in terms of political mobilization is the observation that the Karen refugees discussed almost exclusively their own situation, providing an example of the segmentation required for continued militarization. This isolation also

supports the argument raised in Chapter 5, that alternative media targeted to a specific group can provide fertile ground for a process of "inbreeding" that stunts the development of inter-group contact necessary for democratic change (Pellegrini, 1996, p. 97). The fact that the refugees made so few references to other Burmese groups has important implications for those attempting to promote pluralistic dialogue and tolerance, a stated goal of many opposition media staff. Opposition journals were writing about other Burmese ethnic groups facing similar oppression, but whether or not the refugees read these stories or discussed them is unclear. They did not raise them as significant in reporting their media use in the course of interviews for this study.

What became clear during the course of this research is that many refugees and women felt discouraged and inadequate when considering their role in the opposition movement. The introduction of NITs had caused many of those without access to feel anxious about how quickly the world was changing and leaving them behind. Nevertheless, women and ethnic minorities were organizing and actively participating in various (often invisible) ways in the struggle. Women's groups also showed signs of organizing differently than groups dominated by men, indicating that they might very well use NITs differently if they had training and access to them. This can only happen, however, if there is a recognition that conventional ideas about gender and gender roles act to reinforce the militarization of not only the regime, but also the opposition.

Gender, militarization and peace

Let us now return for a moment to the discussion presented in Chapter 1 of how militarization, gender and ethnic discrimination interact and mutually support one another. In that discussion, I introduced the work of critical scholars detailing the ways in which the colonial project was upheld by specific notions of Victorian femininity and masculinity that worked to demasculinize or "feminize" colonized Asian men. This worked through exalting a specific notion of the Victorian "lady," and by claiming that colonized men were not yet "manly" enough to protect and revere their women as men in "civilized" societies had learned to do.

The global emphasis on human rights is in some situations becoming the newest "civilizing" influence in contemporary neocolonialist maneuvers. The discourse is used in ways similar to the use of the "civilizing" discourses of the colonial period to justify what is, if not explicitly stated, then implicitly understood to be the "superior" western model of democracy and human rights. By repeatedly emphasizing the status of Burmese women as victims, media reports contribute to a subtle demasculinization of Burmese men. This is especially the case with ethnic minority men. The fact that it is largely ethnic minority women who are perceived as victims of rape and other violence by Burman soldiers works to lend credence to these perceived differences between Burmans and non-Burmans. Yet the picture is more complicated than that. The varying emphases on political and civil versus economic, social and cultural rights tends to reify images of Burman men as the most politically savvy while ethnic minority peoples and women are relegated to "second tier" status because of their unspoken association with the "second

tier" group of rights. To the extent that these stereotypes uphold unquestioned assumptions about "the way things are" and about who does what best, they contribute to militarization by sustaining "us" versus "them" dichotomies that tend to make invisible acts of violence **within** each community. These stereotypes also limit our understanding of people's abilities and potential contributions to the opposition movement. This, I came to realize, was the subtle but powerful process at work in my own earlier marginalization of Burmese women, described in Chapter 2, which I recognized with a shock during the women's issues panel at the Free Burma Coalition conference in 1997.

Concluding thoughts

The year 1988 was a turning point in Burma's history. It was also the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the tenth anniversary of UNESCO's Mass Media Declaration, seen by many as the threshold event in attempts to establish a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), envisioned as a means to put the mass media at the service of peace and international understanding (Bruck, 1993; Frederick, 1989). This raises the question of how different the current situation in Burma and worldwide might look if negotiations on the development of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) had turned out differently. Superpower status has provided the United States with the capacity to push for increased globalization and privatization, particularly in the fields of economic and cultural power, and especially through the organization of media, so that "a Third World journalist working for the local CNN bureau is the closest the Third World seems to come to a new

international communications order" (Galtung, 1998, p. 215). What would the situation in Burma look like now if there were a global agreement on the rights of peoples not just to speak but to be heard – both as individuals and as groups – and not only when their interests coincided with those of the U.S. and other world powers?

Although there is evidence that a more inclusive public dialogue is developing among the Burmese groups in exile, the ethnic minority groups continue to be marginalized despite and perhaps **because** of the introduction of NITs. The Burman elements of the opposition benefited earlier than other groups by employing the language of human rights and democracy that coincided with the foreign policy interests of Western powers funding the opposition. This allowed them to take advantage of those skills that ensured their continued support from foreign funding groups. This has increased the perceived differences between Burmans and non-Burmans, who have generally been portrayed in a stereotypical fashion, exacerbating their marginalization. This has been accomplished through advancing a gendered division of labor that promotes militarized ways of thinking about the situation in the country. The concept of human rights as disseminated through the media at both local and global levels has become a discursive tool through which local and global power struggles are negotiated, and as such has been put to oppressive as well as liberating uses.

Much has been learned since 1988. It is clear, for example, that technologies will not end suspicion and bridge ethnic rifts for us. Oppressive structures trade on insecurity in order to justify repressive measures, and this is accomplished in part through preventing the circulation of alternative ideas and contacts. It is in this regard that the use

of communications technologies and media become so crucial. To break down the distrust that has developed over decades in Burma the country's various peoples must talk to each other. This means that each group must have the ability and the means to be heard and to disseminate their messages through the media. In other words, despite the failure of the NWICO, there continues to be a need for recognition of a peoples' right to communicate. The struggle for democracy will require that attention be paid especially to the concerns of the least fortunate, and that those least often heard are provided with the means of expressing themselves so that they can be included in the development of a democratic Burma. This will require not just the improvement of the communication skills of those most silent, but also the listening skills of those most often heard. This is as true for different countries and groups globally as it is in Burma and within the Burmese opposition.

Attention by the opposition movement to the least fortunate among them will help to head off the regime's own attempts to use the language of peace to further its own agenda. Already the Burmese government has been quite effective in its use of this rhetoric. The regime has recently been countering the human rights claims of the opposition activists with talk of reconciliation, aimed at wooing back to Burma those providing support to the remaining armed opposition groups. This is most apparent in the junta's ceasefire agreements, but the regime has moved beyond these efforts recently to target refugees as well. *The Irrawaddy* reported in April, 2002, that the regime was distributing leaflets in refugee camps in Thailand promising people peace and amnesty if they return to Burma, aimed at both the Karen refugees and at KNU soldiers staying there

(Ko Thet, 2002). The pamphlets appealed to them to return to their families back home, and guaranteed that they would be welcomed home as "peace delegates." Although the *The Irrawaddy*'s article dismissed the effects of these pamphlets and many opposition media reports write disparagingly of the ceasefires, it may be worthwhile to give this more thought. It is clear from interviews in Umphien Mai that at least some refugees are war-weary enough that they are ready to accept even difficult terms in order to go home to their villages in peace.

The regime's "peace" is a superficial one that works to conceal its violence, much as the work of international organizations such as the IMF and WTO has wrought "benefits" that are unequally distributed throughout a structurally violent global system sustained by an undemocratic decision-making process. Those in opposition to these trends can gain the upper hand to the extent that they recognize them as weaknesses and use them to develop their own strengths. To attain a lasting peace, forms of violence at every level will need to be unearthed and rooted out, especially from within each organization in the opposition movement itself, and from within each home. These differing types of violence are inter-connected and are not unique to the regime. We all have blind spots built into the assumptions by which we live. These are powerful because they are invisible. Each of us can find examples of such blind spots; my own blindness to the significance of Burmese women is a good example. An authoritarian approach to dealing with our own prejudices attempts to mask both the violence of these prejudices as well as its consequences. Yet when violence of any kind occurs, a demilitarized approach requires that we expose it, name it, and deal with it.

Tehranian (1999) has pointed out that today's violence tends to be structural and invisible at the international level, its invisibility aided in large part by the workings of global media.

> Although all reality is socially constructed, when the commercial media manufacture it to achieve high entertainment value and ratings, the sensational and abnormal take precedence over the routinized forms of human suffering, such as malnutrition, child mortality, forced migration, and short life expectancy. (p. 172)

To the extent that local media mirror their global counterparts by focusing primarily on the violent and the stereotypical, such sensationalized stories continue to deflect attention from structural inequities at every level and our role in sanctioning them. These forms of structural violence, if not addressed, manifest themselves in overtly violent ways, which can only be understood through the kind of careful and detailed analysis precluded by militarized approaches to communication. The development of equitable means of **hearing** from all of the world's people requires the promotion of various forms of media, especially those local media that allow communities the access and the ability to counter both the stereotypes and the emphasis on violence and controversy characteristic of mainstream media. Only in this way can we counter the increasing militarization and restricted content of mainstream media both locally and globally.