

The McVickar Essay
HIGHWAY ROBBERY:
HOW ROAD CONSTRUCTION EXPANDED
THE BURMESE MILITARY'S RESOURCE ACCESS

David Corson-Knowles

Internally threatened military governments can meet a number of their needs at once by seeking out natural resources in contested areas. Using their authority as a sovereign state, they contract out the extraction of that resource to a foreign company. Doing so provides the military with pro-regime lobbies abroad, foreign currency useful for procuring weapons, and the intelligence and data gathered and shared by the foreign investor. Moreover, developing these resources reduces revenue sources for local people and the regime's insurgent opponents. The central benefit, explored herein, is the infrastructure, especially roads, that allows the army entry into contested areas and the mobility provided by company vehicles.

Logging provides an example of the principle of political ecology whereby the forms of nature determine social relations; it reduces the cover used by rebels and internally displaced persons while at the same time making the landscape more legible to the military state. Furthermore, a threat of war often provides justification for silencing internal dissent as well as offering an Orwellian "rally-round-the-flag" effect even in the most unpopular states (Fink). This military expansionism is usually cloaked in the rhetoric of "development" and justified in terms of bettering the nation-state and the people. By comparing government pronouncements to human rights reports, this paper will demonstrate how damaging this "development" is to affected local people.

The particular focus of this paper is a case study of Burma under the control of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (1988-1997) (World Resources Institute). References will also be made where appropriate to southern Sudan, Chiapas, Aceh, and Ogoniland; all of which are sites in oil-fueled wars. Integrating the historical context of Southeast Asian patterns of counterinsurgency shows how the techniques of the British in Malaya and Americans in Vietnam have been adapted to this style of natural resource conflict. This paper will trace the development of a technique by which the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) increased its capacity to move troops eastward towards its border with Thailand. This strategy, which involved forced relocations and the creation of roads, depended on financing

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from logging and the construction of two natural gas pipelines.

Historically, the interests of the Burmese state have shifted emphasis from controlling labor to territory to natural resources. This maps a shift from pre-colonial galactic polities, to British and post-colonial rule, and then to the new SLORC regime. This final shift from territoriality to resource control was provoked by the military regime's move from autarky to a semi-open market economy. Meanwhile, demands for labor and territorial integrity persist in this new economic and political order.

Whence Burma, Whither Myanmar

Burmese have traditionally identified the government as one of the five enemies, the others being fire, water (floods and storms), thieves and malevolent people. Ordinary people had never had much control over the political process and felt it was best just to get on with life regardless of who was in power.

Christina Fink, Living Silence: Burma Under Military Rule

To give an account of contemporary politics in Burma without an account of the past would be forced and artificial. The country does not have a simple history. Before the British colonial enterprise reached the east side of the bay of Bengal, there was a long history of competing states and autonomous or semi-autonomous peoples engaged in shifting balances and struggles for power and self-determination in the region. The British conquered most of the territory of what they called Burma in a succession of three wars, annexing it to their colonial possessions in India. They took the southern peninsula in 1824-1826, the bottom half, or the "Pegu," region in 1852-1853 (Laurie) and the north on January 1, 1886 (Tucker). The British chiefly succeeded in exerting control over the lowland areas, not the mountains. They confronted the same inaccessibility and lack of mobility as the Mon, Burmese and Shan kingdoms before them.

Some groups retreated to the mountains from which they staged raiding parties on the British. These raiding parties were called *dacoits*. The British tried to rule the hill tribes independently, under direct supervision of the Governor, as opposed to making them a part of British India. Banditry continued in the midst of British territory. In the lowlands, no sooner had they conquered the country than resistance started. The *dobama asiayone* or "we Burmans association" started agitating for independence. Buddhist identity and the integrity and respect for that religion became an organizing principle in central Burma, while Christian missions and schools produced a small and educated elite among the Karens and more widespread conversions among other hill peoples. In 1930 there was a grand peasant revolt, which came to be known as the Saya San Rebellion after a charismatic leader (Lintner, "Outrage"). The British used one of their classic imperial management tech-

niques and suppressed the revolt using “martial minority” troops, including in particular ones drawn from the Karens. The urban movements did not coordinate their resistance with the peasants, but the brutal quashing of the rebellion galvanized additional resentment of the British.

In 1937, Britain separated central Burma from British India. Britain also granted diarchy, modeled after India’s newly granted system of government, leaving the Burmese mostly responsible for internal affairs. In 1940, a group of thirty young men went to Japan for military training in order to organize an armed uprising. These *Thirty Comrades* then snuck back into Burma and along with the *thakins* nationalist movement organized an anti-imperialist army that—working in concert with the simultaneous Japanese invasion in 1941—drove the British from the area in a year of bloody fighting. Several armies organized along ethnic lines, including a Karen contingent, fought on the Allied side. Burmese and Japanese forces retaliated against civilians. Lasting racial discord is often attributed to this fact (Appadurai 225-247). In 1942, the British retreated into India. After two years of occupation by the Japanese, the Burmese nationalists were disillusioned with their allies, particularly with forced labor, and changed sides, inviting and aiding a British reinvasion to remove the Japanese. At the end of WWII, the now powerful army, and its young leader Aung San, viewed as a national hero, along with the student and communist movements were able to make clear to the British the extent of the population’s ability to mobilize for anti-colonial agitation. The British agreed to decolonization in principle, and set out a swift timetable to work out a new constitution and hand over power to a central government. The Panglong Agreement of 1947 gave ethnic groups the right to secede. It was negotiated by Aung San, who was later assassinated on July 19 of that year, and was signed by Kachin, Chin, and Shan leaderships. These arrangements were boycotted by the main Karen political organization, the Karen National Union. The British granted independence to a central Burmese government on January 4, 1948, giving the new government power over both Ministerial Burma and the areas that had been under control of the Frontier Areas Administration. The following day, the KNU declared Karen Independence as “a statement of feeling” (Falla).

The Karen National Union rebelled in 1949, and its army—the Karen National Liberation Army—nearly reached Rangoon. The army fractured largely along ethnic lines (regiments were organized by race). Up to 60 percent of troops were in rebellion at one point. The Rangoon government slowly retook central Burma and tried to extend control over the border regions, leading to more insurgencies. The military which set up export-import businesses at first to supply troops became more and more involved in the economy of the country. Finally in 1958 a coup was planned, but at the pleas of the parliamentarians a caretaker government was formed instead

(Tucker, “The Kleptocrats”). Elections followed in 1960, with the military backing a candidate who lost to the previous prime minister, U Nu. In 1960, the newly minted country also fixed its last official border, the one with China (Maung 194-199, 332). In 1961, General Ne Win staged a coup, and ruled the country in various roles until 1988. Major disruptions came in 1974 after which Ne Win relinquished the “full executive, legislative and judicial powers” granted to him by the Revolutionary Council the day after the coup (Lintner, “Outrage” 55). However, it was not until 1988 that he stepped down amidst the outbreak of widespread protests, particularly among students and monks. The ethnic armies and states chose not to intervene at the time, regarding this as a power struggle among Burmese (Fink). On December 5, 2002, Ne Win passed away in Rangoon (Zaw).

Pro-democracy activists failed to unite quickly enough behind a plan to form an interim government and set up elections. The military took direct control of the country, forming the SLORC, and viciously crushed the uprising. It agreed to hold elections and undertook a campaign of severe repression against the democracy party. 1989 was the year of name changes, the reason the country is now officially called Myanmar.

In 1990, elections were finally held, and the regime lost. The regime did not recognize the results, and held on to power by registering the clergy and clamping down on students and democracy activists, as well as using the techniques outlined below (World History Archives). Burma presently has a population estimated around 52 million. The ethnic composition of this population is widely debated. Given estimates of four to seven million for the Karen population, it is fair to think of Karens as making up about ten percent of the country’s population. The Kachin and Shan are almost as populous. The other 140 or more recognized ethnic groups have much smaller populations.

The Scorched Earth and the Four Cuts

Moreover, a society so cruel and indifferent to the general human interest is heading for ecological disaster.

Keith Hart, The Memory Bank

Let us now examine how the regime changed its plans to control the borders. In historical perspective, we should briefly dwell on the four cuts policy. This policy, implemented by the army since at least 1974, called for the cutting off of food, intelligence, recruits, and funds to the insurgent armies. Its implementation has drawn from the history of counterinsurgency operations in Southeast Asia, including the division of territory into white, gray, and black zones depending on the extent of government control there

(Stubbs). In practice, the four cuts policy was implemented as a scorched earth policy, based on the logic that if there is no one and nothing in the landscape, opposition armies will have no support. It works by associating local people with the insurgent groups drawn from and organized around the principle of defense of their ethnic stock and provides political justification for repression of those people.

What came next was another scorched earth policy, still under the rubric of the four cuts, but with significantly different terms. I argue that this change pivots around natural resources. Thus the four cuts policy has become both a method of getting at insurgents and a method of clearing space for resource extraction. David Steinberg of Georgetown University, in 1992 remarks concerning the prospects for Burma, “soon after the SLORC came to power, it seemed to be planning to rely on future on-shore oil revenues (thus the ten foreign exploration concessions) to right the economically listing ship of state. These have proven illusive to date, but very recent off-shore gas and oil findings may now revive that hope, and by doing so slow the process of internal economic reform” (55). Steinberg also notes, “the leadership recognizes that it needs foreign technology (e.g. for its oil industry), and foreign investment for its infrastructure to exploit its natural resources, to employ its labor force, and to generate foreign exchange through exports” (10).

To extend its power the Burmese military needed to exploit natural resources in order to build infrastructure for military movement, extract value and exert control through forced labor, and to generate foreign exchange with which to buy military equipment. A forthcoming chapter “Beyond Greed and Grievance” by Jake Sherman from IPA Press and an article in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* make the financial predicament of the regime at this time apparent (Lintner, “Burma” 25). There was an urgent need for cash, which the government managed to generate from rent-yielding assets, in particular timber and oil, but also fishing rights (Lintner, “Outrage”) and gems. The SLORC also made moves to tap into the revenue stream from heroin and opium production. Their main focus was thus on the resource rich border areas.

Two points illustrate the emphasis on border development. First, in 1991 the government transformed the Institute for National Minorities, which had functioned “as a cadre training unit for the Burma Socialist Program Party,” into The University for the Development of the National Races of the Union which had 1066 students. Second, in May 1992, SLORC established a new Ministry of Development of Border Areas, the only place where ‘social service spending’ actually increased with \$120 million of expenditures on the ministry’s activities (Steinberg and Sherman).

But what does this development mean on the ground? A major com-

ponent has been the construction of roads and bridges. First, roads in their own right need to be examined. The roads going into Burma's border regions are mined, fenced or patrolled. The penalty for a civilian using, or simply crossing, the road is summary execution, provided that soldiers are on hand to enforce the order. A road allows the military to send in and maneuver troops more quickly. It allows resources to be taken out at a faster rate. However, these roads do not just increase the movement of the Burmese military; they also cut territory into discrete contained units that residents cannot easily move through. Difficulty reaching crops in the field, visiting neighboring villages, harvesting from the forest, or even fleeing to the border must inevitably result.

How is it that the regime goes about building roads? On the Thailand border, in their campaign against the Karen, there have been two main ways: opening logging concessions and the construction of two natural gas pipelines. This puts an especially sinister tone on the revelation by an Asia Development Bank analyst's report on conservation in Burma which narrates how the FAO and UNDP backed off from collaboration with the regime because of demands to put money into developing roads in 'conservation areas' (Clark). This can be read as a particularly vicious third case of what Nancy Peluso has dubbed "Coercive Conservation" (Peluso 199-217). She describes the use of force and extrajudicial killings in Kenyan game park reserves and the threat of force employed in Javanese teak production (199-217). SLORC even used conservation organizations to provide cover for the natural gas pipelines by redesignating the Karens' Kaserdoh Wildlife Sanctuary in the KNU's self-declared state of Kawthoolei as a national Nature Reserve under the control of the central government with aid and training from the Smithsonian Institute and the Wildlife Conservation Society. The area was targeted because the Sanctuary obstructed the path of the planned gas pipelines (Thompson).

Logging

The rate of deforestation in Burma has more than doubled since the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) came to power. Satellite and economic data, as well as eyewitness reports, indicate that increased deforestation is principally caused by logging in Burma's border regions.

"Logging Burma's Frontier Forests," World Resources International

Although the resources at the borders have always been a component of why the regime wants to control them, the idea of not waiting until it actually does so is something novel. This policy change parallels the selling of "booty futures" have fueled civil wars in Africa, most notably in Sierra Leone (Ross, "Booty Futures". With regards to the Thai-Burma border, the intrica-

cy of the connection between warfare and commerce is amply demonstrated by the fact that one of the major logging firms operated as a local arms dealer (*The Bangkok Post*, “Thai loggers”). A Bangkok Post article on the teak trade demonstrates how what was once a war of politics and ethnicity has become an armed struggle over natural resources:

To smash this impediment to lucrative ties with Bangkok, Rangoon’s military rulers this year launched an offensive against the Karen, routing six of their eight main bases on this stretch of border. “There’s no question the Burmese are out to crush the Karen because of the goldmine they are sitting on,” a diplomat said (*The Bangkok Post*, “Teak trade”).

Another article shows how the regime gained access roads from granting these new concessions:

Burma awarded the contract [a logging concession] after the company offered to build two roads with a total length of 330 kilometres in exchange. He [the company chairman] said that the Burmese Government had altered its previous policy of granting logging concessions in rebel held areas, opting instead for safer areas to avoid problems with the Thai investors (*The Bangkok Post*, “Burma grants”).

Thus the policy evolved over time in response to the problems faced in extracting timber from rebel areas. The cash from the concessions still helped stabilize the finances of the struggling new regime though, even if the logging companies did not get returns as high as they wanted (Guyot). Another article makes the tradeoff of logs for roads explicit. It is also significant because it implicates an actual agency of the Thai government, not just military and party officials with sideline careers, in this type of logging arrangement:

“Burma would get roads as a return which will also help develop the country, he said. He said the state-run Forestry Organization of Thailand was also awarded a similar concession on this term” (*The Bangkok Post*, “Burma grants”). Finally, this investigative piece in the Bangkok Post makes the multiplicity of benefits explicit:

Soon after the Rangoon Government, led by Gen. Saw Maung, crushed the pro-democracy movement in September 1988, a series of top-level Thai government and private sector delegations visited Burma. An attempt to convince Burma to open its forests to Thai concessionaires following implementation of the Thai logging ban was among reasons for the visits. According to sources in the military delegations, Thai military officers discussed various measures by which Rangoon could suppress ethnic insurgency in Burma, including the Karen, Mon, Shan, and Kachin as well as 1,200 hard core Burmese students and intellectuals who fled military suppression. These ideas included cutting off the insurgents’ income from the illegal, yet lucrative logging trade. Top military officers, the sources said, cited Thailand’s success in defeating communist insurgency by implementing the so called 66/2523 policy of using

political means over military might. This included pardoning insurgents and finding them a place to live and work. As far as logging was concerned, it was suggested the best way to cut ethnic control over logging was for Rangoon to grant concessions to Thai firms which would cut logging routes or roads through rebel territory, the sources said. Rangoon could then obtain foreign currency from logs sold to Thai firms and, at the same time, use the routes built by the firms to develop the areas (*The Bangkok Post*, "How the West").

Writing in 1984, Robert Taylor takes a fairly benign view of this sort of development, attributing the military's successes in fighting insurgents at the time, to the policy "to develop the power and control of the central state in the border regions" through the use of "consolidation columns which follow in the wake of the Army, bringing with them the institution, political, economic, and social of the central state, [in an] attempt to create lasting physical and psychological ties with the government" (Dhanasettakorn).

A number of articles appeared by 1990. Soon after, logging relations changed slightly. The Burmese refused to renew Thai logging concessions, and then banned foreign logging all together. The regime opted instead to develop internal processing and harvesting programs, allowing foreign capital only in joint ventures with local agents.

There are several reasons relations with the loggers soured. One is that the military did not follow through on its promises to aid in suppressing the ethnic groups. The Shan insurgents come from the same race of Tai people's as the Thai, and there is a recognized affinity (Sturgeon). There have been well integrated Karen communities in Thailand for hundreds of years (*The Nation*, "Rebel support"). The regime was probably also angry that the ethnic armies were able to extract taxes, perhaps as great as the value of the original concessions in some cases, from the companies who depended on them to allow passage of the timber (*The Bangkok Post*, "True Confessions"). The SLORC also undertook an effort to encourage internal production of finished products in order to gain more foreign exchange by selling value added goods rather than raw materials (B.U.R.M.A.).

One other striking point in the Bangkok Post passage alludes to historical continuity with Thailand's own anti-communist counter-insurgency program. This program was intricately linked to campaigns in Malaysia and Vietnam. Another thread in understanding these events is the historical continuity represented by the use of similar tactics for suppression in Southeast Asia, and how they moved from military to military.

A tactic the Burmese military has fruitfully employed from the arsenal of 'low intensity conflict' is that of sowing and encouraging division. The SLORC notably succeeded in this by breaking off the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army from the KNU/KNLA. The Karen National Union leadership positions are heavily concentrated in the hands of Christians. Bo Myr, the leading general until his retirement in 2000, is a fundamentalist Seventh

Day Adventist (SDA). The first tier leadership tends to be SDA, while the second tier consists mostly of Baptists. Support for the DKBA rose out of the understanding that this leadership “didn’t treat the Buddhists very well.” They displayed a lack of trust for them or gave them little place for advancement. Worst of all, some Buddhists felt they were “sent to the front” more often than Christians: used as cannon fodder, not properly fed. Even families of deceased Buddhist soldiers were not as well looked after. One specific grievance along these lines arose in 1992. After a battle at Tepimacha some the surviving Buddhist soldiers felt they were basically left to die. Supplies did not reach them, nor did aid arrive to help them get back to headquarters. Finally, there was a feeling that their religion was not respected. The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army formed in December, 1994 and broke away from the KNLA. The DKBA was tightly controlled by a Pwo Karen monk, U Thuzanu, whose brother is an official in the *Tatmawdaw* and a major player in the logging trade. The DKBA aligned itself with the SLORC and in 1995 led a contingent of 10,000 Burmese soldiers against KNU headquarters at Manerplaw, which fell before the onslaught in January 1995 (Gravers).

The SLORC also undertook the task of dividing the ethnic groups from each other, mainly by offering cease-fire negotiations, but only through negotiations with individual armies. Shelby Tucker notes that twenty-three groups signed cease-fires between 1989 and 2000. The online research pages of *The Irrawaddy* list fourteen main ceasefire groups and eight other arrangements the government does not always publicize. These ‘informal’ alliances include the DKBA and two small splinter units from the KNU.

The importance of forest resources is further illustrated by the fact that the Karreni ceasefire fell apart over arguments about access and distribution. A detailed discussion of how these new changes in logging set off a competitive race between the KNU, the DKBA, and the SPDC is beyond the scope of this paper, but a forthcoming report by Global Witness should shed light on the intricacies of logging politics. A research paper by Flow Karen, a graduate of the Earthrights International School, investigates the changes in cultivation by Karen farmers that the displacements and logging have caused including shorter swidden cycles, greater deforestation, and lower yields from poorer soils. This loss to Karen civilians was a boon to the army, one of the many benefits the SLORC saw.

Myanmar has a long history of oil and gas production. The modern petroleum industry started in 1896 with the formation of the Burmah Oil Company. Myanmar gained independence from the UK in 1947 and in 1965 all foreign oil companies were excluded from the country following the nationalization of the oil industry. The nationalization gave the Myanmar Oil Corporation (MOC), renamed the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) in 1985, exclusive rights to explore, develop, and produce petroleum both onshore and offshore.

"Subregional Energy Sector," Norconsult International

In 1990, the Burmese started using another tactic that they could have learned from the Thais or perhaps gleaned from their own readings on colonial interventions in Southeast Asia: forced relocation. They relocated entire villages in order to clear a route through the rainforest in the middle of the Burmese panhandle. The government planned to attract international capital to pump gas out of the Yadana gas field, in the Andaman Sea, for sale to the Government of Thailand. After an escalated campaign, they cleared enough of the route to begin construction, and in 1992 the government signed contracts with foreign oil firms—Total from France, and later UNOCAL from the US. The oil firms then turned around and contracted with the Burmese military to provide security (*Energy Compass*) for the construction of the thirty-nine mile overland route. This involved funding the raising and upkeep of entire regiments of the Burmese army, posted explicitly to operate in the pipeline region and suppress rebels. The discovery of a second gas field, the Yetagun, allowed the regime to sign additional contracts with Premier Oil of the UK and Nippon Company from Japan to lay a second pipeline along the same route.

Development institutions, although not doing business in Burma proper, did aid in the project. In January 1995, an article from *The Nation* quotes an Asian Development Bank spokesman, "If we are requested to put in our money, I think we should. This is basically a commercial project" (Traisawasdichai). He spoke only two weeks after a Karen National Army or All Burma Students Democratic Front battalion opened fire on a convoy of Total oil company vehicles carrying Burmese soldiers.

The political leadership of the ethnic insurgent groups in the area knew exactly what the pipeline held in store for them: "Leaders of the ethnic Karen and Mon guerrillas have in the recent past repeatedly threatened to obstruct and destroy the Yadana gas pipeline. They charged that the revenue from Yadana gas exports to Thailand would strengthen the Rangoon military junta's ongoing human rights abuses" (*The Bangkok Post*, "Oil Firms"). At some points they tried to start direct negotiations with the oil companies. They demanded right-of-way fees. They asked that negotiations be carried out directly with them and with the democratic opposition. They also asked that construction be halted until the ouster of the current regime. None of

these efforts were successful. Threats to use force against the pipeline generated stark counter-threats from Thai and US officials, both governments that had been rather sympathetic to the Karen cause (Kao Wao News Group). They even knew how costly the project could be for the Karen.

An internal memo from the US Embassy in Rangoon shows that military intelligence officials took advantage of the company helicopters and surveillance photos in order to provide security on the pipeline. This knowledge could easily be generalized to enhance overall counterinsurgency operations. Turning to a discussion of the road cut across the panhandle along the pipeline route, the authors also note:

“The real extent of the road’s impact on the environment will depend on how it is used, something Robinson [a UNOCAL employee] suggested is beyond Total/Unocal’s responsibility. He readily admitted the road could open up the area of the pipeline to new settlement and so threaten the environment...In order to lower road maintenance costs, Total/Unocal would prefer that the military keep people off the road” (US Embassy Internal Memo).

The consortium made efforts to facilitate the movement of arboreal animals between the two divided jungles they created, by placing nets from one side of the canopy to the other. Such an effort may not mitigate the damage to these species as much as they have intended, since soldiers have reportedly taken advantage of their placement for easy hunting. Despite acknowledging the disruption the road posed to free movement of arboreal and jungle creatures, similar concern was not directed towards the human residents of the area.

On October 12, 2001 USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios stated, “Oil has only helped to fuel tension, bitterness and war...The forced displacement of tens of thousands from around the pipeline has swelled the ranks of the country’s IDPs.” An astute reader could easily match this quote to the situation in Burma. Indeed, perhaps the only clue that Natsios is referring to the Sudan is that he names oil, not natural gas, as the commodity in the pipeline fueling this conflict and displacement. Nevertheless, it could just as easily have referred to Colombia, Nigeria, Aceh, or Ecuador.

In his essay “Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity,” Michael Watts lays out eight principles on the nature of petroleum. It is useful to employ aspects of his analysis here, because of the similarities to natural gas extraction. He thoughtfully compares and contrasts extraction and the resulting politics in Ecuador and in Nigeria. The oil producing Ogoni region after thirty years of devastation from oil extraction gave rise to the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Their Ogoni Bill of Rights called for “autonomy within an ethnically (and hence geographically) reconfigured federation,” and sever-

al other groups, some in even more financially significant oil producing regions, rose to the call issuing their own demands. The military government cracked down, arresting identified leaders, destroying houses and committing massacres (Watts 189-212). The Nobel Laureate Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others were hung after a military trial. The Ogoni identity is at least as fractious as Karen identity, but again common state policy has led to a reaction negotiated in terms of identity and place. Despite Nigeria's transition to democracy, petro-violence continues in the Delta region. Some of the themes Watts develops, bear fruitful contrast with Burma's situation.

Despite having to engage "with some of the largest and most powerful forces of transnational capital," the Burmese state has withstood the command of "petro-imperialism" (Watts 205). I would venture that they have done this by picking relatively small actors or perhaps benefited from their rights abuse record in being able to only attract second-tier oil firms such as Total/Final/Elf and UNOCAL.

Like in Nigeria and Ecuador, the pipelines symbolize both loss and threat. The loss is reflected in the demands of insurgent groups, the KNU and Mon, to channel some revenue back to the local people (*The Bangkok Post*, "Burmese rebels"). At the same time, it's a threat: a threat to these groups' sovereignty, a threat to the land rights of local people, who are being displaced, as well as an even further threat to their way of life and their safety as they are pressed into slavery—labor camps, holding pens, and forced work clearing jungles. *Total Denial Continues*, a report by Earthrights International, even documents the use of forced labor to build a helipad so that a company delegation could arrive on a "fact-finding mission" to determine that forced labor was not being used.

Burma partially defies the "hypercentralization" feature that Watts attributes to rentier states. By 1997, the regime switched to an even more feudal model of decentralization. Each local command became responsible for its own sustenance and had to pay revenues into the central coffers. On the other hand, the regime consolidated its political power by relocating the powerful regional commanders to the capitol. Thus the regime became more politically centralized, but economically decentralized. Perhaps this divergence from the predicted pattern took place because the government did not depend on one monolithic resource as in the case of oil in many Middle Eastern state and other oil rich regions. It extracts such diverse and geographically disparate resources as teak, rubies, copper, jade, off-shore natural gas, and now possibly on-shore oil. Still, forestry accounted for only one percent of the Burmese labor force by sector in 1990, while mining and petroleum accounted for a second one percent (Guyot 30). These figures are unlikely to have increased significantly, because the technical labor for the pipeline was imported and small in scale. In addition, most logging employ-

ees still come into the country from Thailand or China, and do not constitute a large workforce. This would qualify revenues from these sources as contributing to a rentier state as discussed by Michael Ross. Ross cites Hazem Beblawi for refining and clarifying the definition of rentier states as “one where the rents are paid by foreign actors, where they accrue directly to the state, and where ‘only a few are engaged in the generation of this rent (wealth), the majority being only involved in the distribution or utilization of it’” (Ross, “Does Oil Hinder” 325-361).

Watts also touches on the enclave character of extraction and refinery. The anthropologist James Ferguson elaborates eloquently on this point, applying it to Africa, “where capital has been coming to Africa it is in spatially segregated mineral enclaves hopping not covering the landscape...The Global doesn’t flow, but hops, efficiently connecting enclave points in a network and efficiently excluding spaces in between the points.” He has even compared the overland routes for removing resources from Africa to an offshore oil route, for most intents and purposes disconnected from the space they inhabit. However, he also noted that the military operations needed to maintain this effect due flow out from the resources extraction sites and their transportation channels. Ferguson’s analysis of how capital does not flow out, but hops between discrete areas through otherwise closed channels of transportation and communication need not be limited to the African continent (Ferguson). Capital from logging quite literally made inroads into Burma’s border regions, but the rents from that activity did not flow into the country. The returns quite literally hopped over the territory and residents of the country and went directly to Rangoon or to the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok, from which they may have gone directly into the coffers of foreign arms suppliers. Those weapons in turn did begin to flow out into and suffuse the Burmese countryside. Likewise, despite attempts by the oil consortia, their investment did not bring economic growth and social development. It brought inflation, higher taxation, increased disease, infrastructure that was not only off limits to the local population but actually limited their movement, forced labor, relocation, land seizure, and military operations

The pipeline has also generated new types of resistance. The millenarian movement known as God’s Army of the Holy Mountain, or just God’s Army, led by two young twins Johnny and Luther Htoo, started in the pipeline region. After a Burmese sweep drove hundreds of refugees across the border in 1997, Thai military patrols stopped the Karen villagers, sorted the men of all ages from the women and told the men to “go back and fight” (Thompson, “Personal communication”). The movement was crushed by 2001 with Thai collaboration. Under the terms of their contract, the Thai government was scheduled to begin receiving gas from the pipelines in 1998. It has been paying for the gas since then, even though it did not finish con-

struction of its power plant to take the gas until 2000. It began receiving gas from the Yadana pipeline in 2001 and from Yetagun in 2002. Forced labor to serve the pipelines continues

Roads

I think most of our troubles began that night. They began... with the blood mingling with rain and flowing right into the mouth of the road. I heard the shaking of the road's unquenchable thirst. And blood was a new kind of libation. The road was young but its hunger was old. And its hunger had been reopened. The roads were not even flooded that night although the rain didn't cease.

Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*

The importance of roads to the SLORC is demonstrated by the very existence of the regular column "Construction of roads and bridges during the time of the State Law and Order Restoration Council" in one of the government's English language mouthpieces (Union of Myanmar). One of the pop up boxes with wordy propaganda, so peculiar to this genre, makes the centrality of ethnic issues to roads explicit: "All nationalities of the union are urged to give all co-operation and assistance in this great task" of creating "security and efficiency in transportation and communication."

Road construction has been an important part of counter-insurgency operations in Southeast Asia. In Malaya, the British used roads to link their New Villages. The "villagization" efforts, which consisted of forcibly relocating people to networked and patrolled centers within the governments reach, were as much an exercise in state building as a defensive military strategy (Logevall). During the communist insurgencies from the 1950s to the 1980s, the US and China competed to build roads in and to Thailand. Governments in Malaya, Vietnam and Thailand all undertook similar policies of road building and relocation to extend their control over both people and territory, simultaneously building a state and fighting a war (Marks).

In 1991, the SLORC announced a plan to build thirty strategic roads in the border areas and "asked Thailand to support the plan by encouraging Thai construction companies to build some of the roads in exchange for teak logs." Thai officials declined to encourage them, but allowed private companies to participate. In response the KNU ordered its units to attack or sabotage road construction and arrest all construction workers, because the SLORC wished "to facilitate transport of troops, weapons and equipment for suppression" according to Bo Mya, the KNU general (*The Bangkok Post*, "Karens set to attack").

A report by the Karen Human Rights Group in 1992 was compiled to counter the SLORC's claim that it "had suspended the offensive against the Karen people in April." The document reads as a list of roads to which vil-

lages in Karen state were forcibly relocated: thirteen villages with 830 households to the Hlaing Bwe - Dta Greh car road, six villages with over 350 households to the Toungoo-Mawchi car road and so on.

The KHRG summary report for 1996 notes roads in eight instances:

- (1) Forced labor to construct a military access road.
- (2) Forced labor on a car road "to give the military access to the border area."
- (3) Use of the same relocated villagers to convert a "car road into an all season road." (Previously forced labor had been employed for annual rebuilding. "Making it an all-season road will give the military rainy-season offensive capability in the region").
- (4) The difficulty that refugees in Thailand reported in crossing a major road to flee, even at night because of the increased presence of SLORC troops.
- (5) An increase in forced labor on roads and an increase in refugees from Dooplaya, both attributed to possible plans by the SLORC to attack the KNU headquarters there.
- (6) Forced labor on a car-road running parallel to the Ye-Tavoy railway.
- (7) Forced labor on the service road which runs along side the pipeline route as well as on a road to a new jetty which will supply the project by sea.
- (8) Another road north of the pipeline (the purpose of this road is not clear, but it is "probably for supply").

On the eve of the SLORC regime, the editorial "Compete for Development" in *The New Light of Myanmar*, lays out their ideological motivations. Starting from the premise that "all national races of the Union of Myanmar" are "all based on the common blood of Union kinship and spirit like a hundred fruits from a common stem" even though "traditions, customs, languages and social criteria of each race may appear to be different," it lashes out at colonialists and the scars left by World War II. It laments that "our nation has been lagging in development compared with others as we could not build and modernize it as others did, but spent nearly five decades in vain to iron out the internal strife." The prescribed solution is "national integrity and stability of the State for national development, which are requisites for a nation to prosper." General Maung Aye encourages towns to compete with each other to develop, "especially, the regions where peace has been restored after the armed groups... exchanged arms for peace," which "should take the General's suggestion seriously and work to comply with it so as to materialize the Government's avowed aim to bring equal development to all regions." In 1997, the SLORC was reorganized and renamed. In the shift, regional commanders were promoted to posts at the center, where they presumably had more perks but less power. With the reorganization, and with the decline in foreign investment brought about by growing concern over the human rights situation, there was another shift in policy. The new State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) clamped down even tighter, in an attempt to bring every village under its control. As the KHRG reports:

Troops have just completed construction of a military access road into the Bu Sah Kee area, which was formerly very difficult to access, and they have been increasingly clamping down on the civilian population there. At the same time, SPDC troops are pushing a military supply road straight across the affected areas ... directly eastward to Saw Hta on the Salween River, which forms the border with Thailand. This road is expected to be used as a springboard for an offensive to secure the Salween River and the entire region, to block off KNLA supply lines and the escape routes of refugees and to allow the establishment of new military camps and further sweeps through the area to wipe out the Karen civilian population. The troops have burned and destroyed all villages along the route and have been constructing the road with bulldozers under heavy military guard. The troops cannot capture enough villagers in the area to use them for forced labour on this road, but the fact that they are using bulldozers instead of bringing in forced labour from elsewhere makes it apparent that they are in a hurry to complete it. It was heavily damaged in rainy season, but is expected to be completed by mid-1998.

The SPDC's present policy is to bring all rural villages under direct military control. This policy has meant establishing more Army camps throughout most of the Karen areas, and forcible relocation of villages too remote to be controlled by an Army camp to Army-controlled villages. The relocated villages are then destroyed by the soldiers. This has happened in the plains along the Sittaung River, in parts of Papun District along the lower Bilin and Yunzalin rivers, and near Papun town where the Army already has some control. Most people in the small villages in the rugged Papun hills have never been under SPDC control and usually disappear into the hills before the soldiers can get to them, so the SPDC began to systematically destroy hundreds of these villages in 1997 without even formally ordering them to relocate. The villagers are still in hiding in the hills, so the soldiers search out and destroy their food supplies and shelters and shoot them on sight to force them to come down to the SPDC-controlled relocation sites. They also leave 'Peace Passes' in the destroyed villages to encourage the villagers to come down, saying "*Do not think, take this pass and come to the nearest Army camp.*" While this continues, the SPDC is pushing in new roads and upgrading the existing ones to further solidify its control and to supply the new Army camps in the area. These roads are heavily patrolled, fenced and landmined to give them the added effect of blocking and 'cornering' villagers and resistance forces who find it difficult to cross.

The SPDC then designates these villages as "white" or *Nyein Chan Yay* ("Peace"), villages and allows them to remain, although under threat of further relocation. The Army increases its presence making it very difficult for the villagers to contact the resistance groups. The new 'stability' of these vil-

lages allows the SPDC to demand more forced labour from them, while also allowing it to demand more formalised taxes, fees and crop quotas from the villages through both the Army and the local township administration, the Township Peace and Development Councils. Throughout all these phases the Army hunts down, and shoots on sight, those villagers who choose to live outside its system in the forest and hills. The end goal of this is the regime's 30-year-old policy known as the 'Four Cuts': for the KNU to be completely pushed out of the area by denying it access to the food, funds, intelligence and recruits provided by the villagers (Karen Human Rights Group, "Flight, Hunger"). SPDC and DKBA troops have used landmines to keep villagers in their villages by mining the paths between them. This has also resulted in the villagers being unable to work their fields ("Information Update").

Alternatively, in the words of Secretary-1 Gen Khin Nyunt, "Solidarity among the national brethren in the border areas was established and the government's border region development projects have been successful with the participation of the local people" (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific).

Comparison

Whenever a pattern is recognized or a discovery made by an author, whenever dealing with issues that concern humanity *in the present*, the temptation exists to label this phenomenon as "new." It would be tempting to say that the military significance of road-building or the struggles by the state to control sites of natural wealth or even the combination of these two things has somehow been created by the "new global economy." But to tell such a story would be to overstep the bounds of credibility and historical evidence. Roads have linked conquest with trade and resource extraction at least since the Roman army developed an engineering corps. Rather, I hope to demonstrate that this is an *old* pattern, one with historical roots in Southeast Asia, and one with close parallels across time and space.

Forced labor on roads, timber, and natural gas have all played into resistance and rebellion among the indigenous communities of mountainous Chiapas. John Womack's unindexed book "Rebellion in Chiapas: an historical reader" takes up the theme from 1545 to 1998 through a procession of carefully introduced historical documents (Womack). The above criticism of SLORC's development projects allows me to suggest that the armed uprising in Chiapas in 1994 did not take place *in spite of* President Salinas' massive new investments in infrastructure through the Solidarity program, as much as it may have taken place *because* of this new investment. For preliminary evidence, look no further than the same book which details how the collusion of landlords and the state's first road building project in the late nineteenth century combined to force *Indios* into debt peonage and to create a

labor pool for logging operations (Harvey). Thus three generations back, a suitable wariness about state road construction developed among the people of Chiapas. Later, "the completion of the Pan-American Highway in the state in 1947 meant that livestock could be transported to Mexico City." This, along with the construction of other new roads, led to a boom in ranching, resulting in an almost inevitable consolidation and concentration of land ownership in the state. In Carranza, for instance, "nineteen families controlled 40% of private property" by 1970 (Harvey). Then two new regional development plans were announced in 1983, Plan Chiapas and the Plan del Sureste:

The border region [for Chiapas borders Guatemala] clearly received the lion's share of investment in communications and agriculture. Road construction was designed to facilitate border control, while 300 million pesos were spent to increase the number of immigration posts. In fact, the success of several components of the plan was intimately linked to the road construction program. The goal was to "advance the completion of the Southern Border Highway, to help develop the petroleum and tourism industries, the incorporation of the Marques de Comillas region, the development of the state and greater vigilance on the southern border...by 1985, the flow of refugees [from the civil war in Guatemala] had significantly decreased, and the road construction came to a halt... It would take the Zapatista uprising for the road construction to resume, this time for internal military objectives" (Mexico, "Plan Chiapas" 18). Thus the importance of roads for border control, resource extraction, and military mobilization is as clear in Chiapas as it is in Burma.

This case study of Burma has more startling similarities with events in the Sudan. Both countries are former British colonies with artificial boundaries designated during hasty decolonization. Both have internal divisions along ethnic and religious lines that are reinforced by geography. Northern Sudan has a largely Arab Muslim population, while Southern Sudan largely has a black population of animists and Christians. When the British withdrew in 1956, the southern units of the army mutinied against the North-dominated government. Various incarnations of that government have been waging war against the south intermittently since independence. Their program of Islamicization parallels the Burmanization program of homogenization that the post-colonial government has been attempting for 50 years. The discovery of oil in Southern Sudan by Chevron in 1979 has added new fuel to the war there. The state owned oil companies of China, Malaysia, and India have all invested in the petroleum sectors of both Burma and Sudan, but Western oil companies in both countries have been essential for their provision of technical expertise in the extraction process (Calvert). Since 1998 Talisman Energy, a Canadian firm, has been operating in the contested

areas of southern Sudan. The company has provided funding for all-weather roads, and has constructed landing strips from which government owned helicopter gunships have taken off to attack the civilian population in the area (*Amnesty International News*, "Sudan"). The foreign exchange used to purchase those weapons came from oil investment (Harker).

The political science literature on the natural resource curse has amassed evidence that a country's resource wealth could actually detract from economic growth and can promote or foment civil war. Most recently, it has been argued that resources can even inhibit a transition to democracy. Does oil really hinder democracy? Ross, in a time series analysis of 113 states, concludes that it does. He also provides an analysis of the causal mechanisms. He further concludes that minerals have a similar effect as petroleum in this regard. My case study of Burma falls mostly within what Ross has dubbed "the repression effect," whereby "resource wealth retards democratization by enabling governments to boost their funding for internal security" (Ross 328). My study also indicates that even the possibility of oil can hinder democracy. By dangling exploration concessions before international oil firms, the Burmese government, which had just requested least developed nation status from the UN for help in refinancing its loans, and which had just demonetized 60 to 80 percent of its currency, was able to shore up its sinking finances. The fact that commercially exploitable oil was not found, does not take back the \$5 million minimum price paid for each concession. The offshore gas fields did prove to be commercially viable and have proven to be highly lucrative. The oil and gas sector has seen the largest inflow of foreign investment of all sectors, making up nearly one third of the total (*Irrawaddy Magazine*, "Foreign Investment"). "According to official statistics, since Myanmar opened to foreign investment in late 1988, contracted investment in the oil and gas sector has so far reached \$2.563 billion" (*Malaysia General News*, "S. Korean Company"). The government takes in \$150 million annually from the Yadana pipeline (*Agence France Presse*, "Offshore"). The *Oil and Gas Journal* indicates that this project alone is worth \$1 billion. *The New York Times* cites it at \$1.2 billion.

But, oil and gas were not the only things keeping the regime financially solvent. For the most up to date summary of the evidence that laundered drug money was used to pay for the \$1.5 billion in arms that the regime began importing from China in 1990, see Sherman's forthcoming book at IDP press. Cash crops like the opium poppy have certain similarities to minerals and petroleum that other agricultural sectors do not. For one, a very small part of the population is usually engaged in their production. Secondly, the value of the commodity is highly concentrated. Teak shares this property of a highly concentrated value. Some trees reputedly sold for as much as \$20,000 each in 1995 (United Nature). The preceding discussion

makes it clear that there have been certain resource-specific effects in Burma.

Logging provides an example of the principle of political ecology whereby the forms of nature dictate social relations: it reduces the cover used by ethnic armies and by internally displaced persons while at the same time making the landscape more legible to the military state. The disruption to people's lives in the logging areas has led to an exodus of refugees. On the other hand, the construction around the pipeline has also led to massive population displacement, but in this case due to forced relocation to create a local labor pool. The forms of nature create different patterns, but the regime has been able to bend them to virtually the same result. The resources also differ in the value of their returns and their geographic dispersion. The regime succeeded in monopolizing the natural gas supply, and even succeeded in laying the pipeline overland through territory they did not hold when the gas supplies were discovered. As for logging, the dispersed resource has not allowed the central state to monopolize it yet. A variety of actors have staked competing claims. The government accommodated insurgent groups willing to sign cease-fires and breakaway factions of the ethnic armies by granting them formal or informal logging rights. The ethnic armies have been able to keep up their logging trade and to tax foreign loggers, albeit on a diminishing scale, despite a drastic reduction in their control of territory. Extraction of these two resources even created different patterns of roads. Again, the regime adapted by asking Thai companies to not only cut their logging routes but also build specific, strategic roads like the ones they planned for the pipeline region.

Territoriality

Annan said Myanmar Foreign Minister Win Aung... had assured him his government was committed to moving toward a multiparty democratic system "but at the same time stressed the need to build a strong nation that could withstand any challenge to its territorial integrity."

Reuters, "Annan Worried"

Historically, the state's interests in Burma have shifted emphasis from control of labor to control of territory and now to control of natural resources. The galactic polities that existed before British conquest and acquisition rooted their power in the control of people. It was the control of people, from the king down to the nobles who were his clients or who merely paid tribute, to their slaves and serfs. Of course the value of these people's labor was realized through working the land to produce rice, and to a lesser extent through the collection of valuable resources like the gems and gold used in Buddhist architecture and at the king's court (Sturgeon). Still the system has been described as "embodying wealth in people rather than in land

or territory," which is accurate because power was not measured by number of fields or land mass but in number of people (84-85).

The British emphasized control of territory, as is clear from their creation of a market in land and their fervent patrolling and policing of the borders. In particular, they desired to control the Wa, Kachin, Chin, and Karen *areas* opposed to the Kachin or Karen *people* that previous kingdoms were built around. The British emphasis on land ownership is apparent from their Permanent Settlement of Bengal, which overnight turned land revenue collectors into landlords. A similarly radical transformation took place in Burma as the British instituted a new legal regime. Likewise, most parts of neighboring Thailand and China have also "modernized" with respect to landownership and control of delineated borders (Sturgeon 89). This emphasis on control of territory persisted in the post-colonial Burmese governments in the emphasis on Unity of the state, the land nationalization carried out under Ne Win, and the persistence of new forms of private land ownership brought about by settlement. Thus the shift from controlling land to controlling territory is the result of a shift in governments: from the pre-colonial galactic polities to British and post-colonial rule. Then the SLORC's rise to power in 1988 amidst widespread revolts and financial crisis precipitated a further shift in what was *emphasized* as the medium of control by the regime. This final shift from territoriality to resource control was provoked by the military regime's move from autarky to a semi-open market economy. Abandoning the quasi-socialist ideology and the commitment to a closed society that characterized the Ne Win regime paved the way for the sale of these commodities on global markets. Their exploitation for home use would not have been economically efficient, nor did the state possess the capital or technology to make border resource exploitation fully feasible as an internal initiative.

None of these state interests went unchallenged. The demand for territorial integrity and unity of the state has led to widespread insurgency, organized along both ethnic and political lines. The demand for corvée labor, justified as a Burmese tradition, is both hated and contested by the peasants, who flee, burn their own villages, give aid to the ethnic armies despite the risk of widespread reprisals, and sometimes begrudgingly consent out of a desire to stay close to their fields and homes. It is also the subject of international inquiry. The International Labor Organization has taken more action on rights abuses in Burma than anywhere else in the world. It is currently encouraging its members to boycott all goods from the country. The state's demand for natural resources and the resulting unsustainable extraction has raised concerns among the democratic opposition, the ethnic governments and parties, Burmese refugees and dissidents abroad, and individuals and organizations with environmental interests. The reports they have generated

and their demand for information has brought about further inquiry by the press and by international institutions, which make essays such as this possible. Even the Thai loggers could be considered as contestants against the state, in that they log outside of their concessions, log too much, violate the regulations by cutting trees that are too small, and generally try to take maximum advantage of their territorial access and available workers to extract teak with its highly concentrated value. Finally these policies have had the effect of linking up environmental and human rights movements. Back in 1993, the "Bangkok Declaration on Human Rights" called for opposition to the pipeline and challenged Burmese dam building projects. The report, which documents the human rights situation in every country in the region and addresses general themes, makes no references to environmental issues outside of its section on Burma ("Our Voice"). Even though human rights and the environment are widely linked (Martinez-Alier), the regime in Burma stands out for so overtly linking its plans of conquest and the control of its borders to environmentally harmful extraction (Greer and Giannini).

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