theories and methodologies

Representing Burma: Narrative Displacement and Gender

TAMARA C. HO

TAMARA C. HO is an assistant professor of women's studies at the University of California, Riverside. Her recent publications include essays on Burmese immigrant Buddhism and the gender politics of Burmese supernaturalism. Her work on Wendy Law-Yone has been published in *A Resource Guide to Asian American Literature* (MLA, 2001), *Word Matters: Conversations with Asian American Authors* (U of Hawai'i P, 2000), and *Amerasia Journal*. She is at work on a monograph on Burmese women's literature, human rights, and transnational ethical engagement.

Ethnic Spectatorship (c. 1976)

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, IT SEEMED THAT MOST AMERICANS HAD NEVER HEARD OF BURMA. SINCE COMMUNICATION WITH BURMA WAS constrained, I was curious about its culture, which my family carried so near to their hearts. My first memory of seeing "Burma" involved watching *The King and I* (1956) on television. I was captivated by Rita Moreno playing Tuptim, a Burmese girl who is given to the king of Siam by the prince of Burma and is secretly having an affair with her escort. The new British governess gives Tuptim *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to improve her English. The Burmese concubine articulates her frustration by staging an adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel for the king and some European visitors. During the performance, Tuptim attempts an escape with her Burmese lover.

It is no surprise that Tuptim's play for liberation is thwarted nor that my first lesson about Burmese femininity was mediated through Hollywood. What I emphasize here is the pedagogical weight and uneven representational effects of displacement. As a Sino-Burmese immigrant, I learned about the country of my birth by watching a Puerto Rican actress playing a Burmese concubine who protests her servitude to an Asian patriarch by transposing a famous novel written by a white American woman. The Hollywood musical suggests that Burmese women's resistance cannot manifest itself without the tutelage of a British governess and an ideological frame provided by American women's abolitionist discourses. As counterpoint to such mass-mediated orientalist representations, this essay focuses on the displaced Burmese woman as author and translator in order to demonstrate how modern Burmese women's literature offers alternative standpoints on gender and transnational encounters.

Journalism and Human Rights (c. 2011)

In the new millennium, the human rights spectacle of Burma has gathered critical momentum through various discursive currents.

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The government crackdown on protests in 2007 was countered by the transnational afterlife of digital records: *Burma VJ* (2008) and wide media coverage of the protests reified international disapproval of Myanmar's military repression while simultaneously masculinizing heroic activism through the illuminated throngs of maroon-clad monks, secular protesters, and male videojournalists. I suggest that a myopic focus on military violence obscures the ways in which colonial legacies, orientalism, and human rights discourses buttress the imperialist project of the United States and the displacement of Burmese women. For example, Burma's human rights crisis has been translated into numerous news stories about Laura Bush "finding her voice" (e.g., Sheridan). "Speaking out" for Burma enables the former First Lady to occupy a spotlight as "America's most outspoken and prominent critic" of the Myanmar military (Mooney; McCartan). The reportage of Laura Bush's "tough words" suggests that hypervisibility of white women's postcolonial adjudication and messianic feminized paternalism may contribute to the obfuscation of what Leslie Bow calls "the gendered subject of human rights" ("Tough Words"; "Gendered Subject" 37–54, 63–69; see also Lwyn, "Mission" 11).

Gender, Discourse, and Displacement

Since the sixteenth century, European accounts have marveled at Burmese women's exceptional independence.[1] Regionally, Southeast Asian women have traditions of financial control and political/ritual agency that challenge Western hierarchies. Stereotypes about the "high" status of Burmese women have long circulated in popular and scholarly discourses, but often in oversimplified and essentialized forms (Ikeya, "'Traditional' High Status"). By the end of the twentieth century, however, representations of Burmese women had virtually disappeared, beyond stories about Aung San Suu Kyi and human rights abuses. How were Burmese women transformed from agentive figures of autonomy to silenced victims of trauma? Considering what Shu-mei Shih calls the "technologies of recognition," this essay maps vexed dynamics of representation and gender in relation to Burma.[2] Inspired by Tuptim's defiant translation, my analysis seeks to trouble the assimilation of Burmese women into the ranks of orientalized and silenced abjection.

Narratives by and about Burmese women map a history of discursive and gendered displacement. Tinzar Lwyn demonstrates how Western colonial and postcolonial discourses have rendered Burmese women as paradoxical, Janus-faced others, who either exhibit monstrous agency or are objectified as passive vessels ready for civilization and rescue. In contrast, Chie Ikeya illustrates how Burmese women's bodily practices and activism unsettled and renegotiated gender relations within a matrix of popular stereotypes and politically motivated discourses about modernity: women functioned "in the capacity of producers, arbiters, and transmitters of knowledge" ("Modern Burmese Woman" 1296). Lwyn also highlights the tactical resistance of Burmese women involved in late-twentieth-century armed struggles ("Stories" 73). Translating these insights into literature, I suggest that modern Burmese women writers negotiate the combined discourses of Burmese dictatorship and Western hegemony by using what I call flexible tactics of displacement.

Burmese women perceive visibility as a political necessity and a problematic of uneven power: "The front line does not simply face the Rangoon administration but is also paradoxically positioned at our rear facing the West" (Lwyn, "Mission" 7).[3] Displacement and incarceration have come to characterize the postcolonial Burmese condition (cf. Fink); however, Burmese women's narratives testify to competing forms of authoritarianism: censorious forces stemming simultaneously

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from Burmese postcoloniality and Asian and Western hegemonies.[4] The novels of Ma Ma Lay and Wendy Law-Yone map these multiple "fronts" of cultural contact and hypothesize transnational ethical engagement. These allegorical fictions also offer reparative counterideologies and alternative paradigms of relationality. By imagining Burmese women who struggle to write their lives, the novels challenge gendered subordination while testifying to the limits of legibility (cf. Rajan 9–10).

The work of Ma Ma Lay and Law-Yone dramatizes their conditions of emergence: displaced women negotiating colliding cultures. Born in Burma, imprisoned, and marginalized as treasonous writers, these authors demonstrate a tactical dexterity within the discourses that limit and/or liberate Burmese women. Dancing a discursive tango, Ma Ma Lay and Law-Yone maneuver between orientalism/imperialism and globalization. Mobilizing diverse grammars, they transform their discursive imprisonment into states of productive constraint.

Not Out of Hate, the first work of Burmese literature translated into English (and French [*La mal-aimée*]) and published outside Myanmar, augurs the gendered crisis of transnational modernity and its deleterious effects on Burmese women. Ma Ma Lay's celebrated 1955 novel resonates with Burmese anticolonial politics and with a Western literary tradition documenting oppressively solicitous, middle-class husbands.[5] *Not Out of Hate* tracks the emergence of masculinist discourses in mid-twentieth-century Burma, a moment shaped by the end of British empire and the formation of a new postcolonial nation. The toxic intimacy between the main characters illustrates how Burmese modernity, as a refraction of transnational ideologies, threatens "traditional," local, and gendered authority.[6] Ma Ma Lay's novel illuminates an epistemic crisis caused by Western patriarchy and Burmese modernity, a conflict violently borne by the gendered native body.

Modern Burmese literature emerged as part of a counterhegemonic effort to create an alternative public sphere: a forum for collective social analysis, an avenue to articulate new epistemologies, and a means to marshal discontent and politicization. During the late colonial time frame of *Not Out of Hate* (1939–42), "serious fiction" was expected to be a corrective for British imperialism (Allott, Introd. xxiv). Moe Hein explains that Burmese regard their literature "as public education . . . as a source of mental and physical progress. . . . [Its] importance is measured more as a means of . . . enlightenment than as a means of entertainment" (2).[7]

Not Out of Hate (hereafter *NOH*) is an allegorical tragic romance reflecting Ma Ma Lay's politics as a prominent feminist author and activist influenced by Marxist nationalisms (Allott, Introd. xv). *NOH* centers on Way Way, a young Burman managing her family's home and business because her mother has become a Buddhist nun (*thilashin*).[8] Way Way marries U Saw Han, a British-educated Burman employed by a British firm. He attempts to "civilize" Way Way by molding her into an ideal of British femininity: "a rosy-faced girl, the heroine of many a novel written in the English language" (43). U Saw Han institutes Western regimes of dress, diet, and medicine, causing Way Way discomfort and distress. Way Way tries to follow her husband's "modernized" rules of conduct but returns secretly to her father's house to perform a more "traditional" lifestyle (e.g., eating Burmese food with her hands).

The novel indicts a possessive Burmese modernity shaped by colonialism and Western patriarchy,[9] while conjuring locally resonant spiritual and secular signifiers to illuminate "enlightened" relationalities and to warn against destructive temptations. After her beloved father dies, Way Way visits her mother at the Sagaing "center of Buddhist faith," which Ma Ma Lay plots as a homosocial space of education and reflection (6n4).[10] Although Burmese Theravadan Buddhism in-

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stitutionally categorizes women as ineligible to enter the highest ranks of the sacred and enlightened (Kawanami, "Buddhist Nuns" 210), the cloister in *NOH* functions as a refuge from patriarchal imperatives and sexualized violence, where Way Way feels "she might in time gain control over her mind" (134). Fictionally displacing Buddhist androcentrism,[11] *NOH* maps a culturally sanctioned institution where women are engaged in edification and mutual support: Way Way's mother "was in charge of vocabulary, articulation of words, and basic chemical knowledge. She also . . . counselled the young novices" (134). Ma Ma Lay's Buddhist convent and Christine de Pisan's *cité des dames* are sister sites: homosocial communities ideologically countering compulsory heterosexuality and misogyny by offering discursive shelters of Rectitude / "right understanding." Supported by "enlightened" Burmese traditions (represented by U Po Thein, who evinces an increasingly disenfranchised form of local masculinity),[12] the Sagaing retreat protects the disempowered. Way Way's discovery that she is pregnant, however, compels her return to her Anglophilic husband's house.

Ma Ma Lay associates science and patriarchy with modern, foreign-educated Asian men while linking Buddhism, sovereignty, local ecologies, and indigenous medicine with feminized and minoritized Burmese bodies. U Saw Han's "love" justifies the censorious circumscription of the female body and intellect. His blind faith in Western medicine, combined with a fear of Burmese contagion, intensifies his surveillance of his wife. U Saw Han forces Way Way to drink milk:

> [W]ith extreme distaste, Way Way . . . gulped some down. . . . She stood with her lips tight . . . afraid to move. . . . "Another swallow, one more swallow. After this one you can stop." . . . Way Way tried to control herself . . . her lips tightly closed, and tried to push him off with her hands. U Saw Han laughed and brought the glass to her lips quickly. Unable to control herself any longer, Way Way suddenly brought it all up. (150–51)

This allegorical scene of rape documents the Burmese female body's resistance. Way Way vomits the milk, while a later miscarriage signals her body's refusal to carry her intimacy with U Saw Han to term.

NOH tactically resignifies autochthonous elements (renunciation, herbal remedies, local foodways, Maekala,[13] etc.) to chart an "alternate action sphere" (Jordt, *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement* 143).[14] Buddhism may counter masculinist possessiveness, but its influence is threatened by secular, rationalist modalities predicated on acquisitive desire. Way Way's miscarriage and tuberculosis incarnate a consuming, transnational modernity—shaped by foreign contact, elitist hierarchies, and paranoid surveillance—that facilitates the erasure of the local, native, and "traditional."[15] As a postcolonial extension of the West, the modern Burmese man's disciplinary regimes, instituted in the name of love and science, intensify Way Way's sense of displacement and obliteration.

U Saw Han augurs the oppressively managerial logic of Myanmar's ruling juntas and symbolizes a transnationally inflected repression of Burmese women's circulation (cf. Muller). An uncanny harbinger of the Press Scrutiny Board,[16] U Saw Han confiscates the books given to Way Way by her mother and limits his wife's correspondence:

> "You will tire yourself out writing so much. You will strain yourself and get a neckache." So she resorted to writing in a tiny script. . . . She wrote to seek relief. . . . Her weekly letters were filled with the minutiae of her life. . . . "Do you remember how we enjoyed . . . a marvelous *ngapi* dish . . . with . . . pickled sour radish as dip? Do you remember this?" . . . "Do you remember that?" (156)

Way Way attempts to maintain her lifelines through family books and letters, but the diminishing size of her handwriting literally

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marks the obliteration of Burmese women's discourses. The narrative is haunted by the West: conjured by U Saw Han, the absent presence of Western femininity possesses the native female body and drives Burmese gendered articulation into exile (cf. Kang; Scarry). Promises of "modernization," "progress," and "liberation" demand and justify the expunction of alternative discourses (of spirituality, gender, culture, and power).

Four decades later, *Irrawaddy Tango* continues the Burmese literary exploration of displacement, intimate labor, sexualized violence, and contact zones. The first Burmese diasporic author to write in English, Law-Yone introduced into the anglophone literary frame Burmese immigrant characters who negotiate language as a tool of oppression *and* as a means of resistance.[17] Law-Yone uses eccentric figures, plot reversal, and rhetorical techniques such as parapraxis, punning, polyglot accents, and deconstructive turns of phrase to underscore the violence in intimate relationships that demand acquiescence, silence dissent, and naturalize domination through imperatives of fidelity and gratitude.[18] Law-Yone's novels translate Burmese displacement and migration to the United States as a circular journey through Asian and Western paternalistic discourses that uncannily reflect each other. Her protagonists refuse the favor of becoming "*neutralized* American" stories about the "Turd World" (*Irrawaddy* 247, 248). Instead, Law-Yone's Southeast Asian migrants struggle to articulate and write their own stories. These minoritized yet literate exiles displace United States claims of "freedom and democracy" with self-authored testimonies about intersecting forms of power.

Creatively capitalizing on the Burmese love of puns and perverse wordplay,[19] Law-Yone challenges overlapping hegemonies through a deconstructive use of language and atypical protagonists. *Irrawaddy Tango* is the eponymous tale of a Southeast Asian woman shuttling between worlds. Law-Yone's roman à clef fictionalizes Burma as "Daya," thus sidestepping questions about authenticity or historical accuracy (Law-Yone, "Beyond Rangoon" 196; Ghosh, "Foreword" xi; Bow, "Gendered Subject" 43). The epigraph by Derek Walcott ("*either I'm a nobody, or I'm a nation*") underscores the protagonist's figuration as land and labor: Irrawaddy is the name not only of the protagonist's village but also of Burma's largest river and most important commercial waterway,[20] while learning the Argentine dance enables Tango to leave home. Bartering her body for mobility, the picaresque protagonist moves from areas of marginality to centers of power. Tango leaves her village to become the wife of Supremo, the nation's dictator. Their life in the capital city, Anika, is interrupted when Tango is kidnapped by minority insurgents. Instead of negotiating with the jungle rebels, Supremo divorces his wife. Tango becomes mistress to the guerrilla leader and is declared "Rebel Queen" and "La Liaison" when he is killed. She is then arrested by Supremo's army, imprisoned in Anika's former zoo, and tortured. An American human rights activist named Lawrence negotiates Tango's release and marries her, taking her to Hollywood and Washington, DC. When the two separate, Tango becomes caretaker to other Asian refugees. After an unexpected pregnancy terminates in a miscarriage, she returns to Daya to seek closure. Law-Yone's protagonist inserts herself into a transnational circuit of exchange yet finds herself inscribed or imprisoned no matter where she goes or whom she beds (101). Tango refuses to share her story—resisting both Asian military interrogators and curious American audiences (234). Instead, she reiterates that she is a "free-tinker" (sic; 192), a "brazen" opportunist, and the stubborn author of her own story (16).

Irrawaddy Tango illustrates how the civilizing gaze operates under the guise of Western benevolence. While others (Bow, "Gendered Subject" and *Betrayal*, esp. ch. 5 [137–67]; Chua) have examined Tango's rela-

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tionship with her abusive Asian (ex-)husband Supremo, I underscore Law-Yone's refusal to idealize the United States as a site of liberation. Tango's ethnographic view of the blue-eyed, Euro-American humanitarian who becomes her second husband indicts the orientalist narcissism and existential dysphoria still circulating under the umbrella of transnational activism. Lawrence's relationship with Tango is driven by his messianic desire for the traumatized (Asian) other.[21] A late-twentieth-century version of Ali Behdad's "belated traveler," Lawrence repeatedly imposes orientalist stereotypes and silences Tango's specificity: "He sighed, implying that I didn't know what I was talking about, even when it concerned my own past" (204).

The prison appearing at the novel's opening, middle, and end—the site where Tango writes her story—represents institutionalized technologies of recognition. The narrative frame of the incarcerated female writer suggests that authorial privilege is bound by one's marked embodiment and delimited by hegemony. Tango's miscarriage mirrors Way Way's. When Tango "gives birth" to a "thing . . . not human" in the United States (288), her body bears witness to the dehumanizing trauma suffered in the Dayan prison even as it flushes out the dissolution/dis-illusion of the American dream. Law-Yone alters the trajectory of the American immigrant bildungsroman by refusing to privilege the United States as the site of liberation for the Southeast Asian refugee mother and her citizen child. Instead, Tango returns to Daya and reunites with Supremo, only to murder the old dictator by pummeling him to death with a fan. The scene highlights Law-Yone's deft use of reversal and contradiction: "I was in the wild throes of laughter. Through the residual sobs came the raucous, maniacal hooting. . . . I repeated . . . the phrase I'd offer in explanation: *The fan hit the shit*, I'd say, *The fan hit the shit*" (287). Tango's perverse autoethnography documents her dance across continents. She critiques transnational patriarchies while recasting the notion of the silenced Burmese woman as a subaltern or Third World victim who needs to be saved by benevolent intervention (Lwyn, "Stories" 65; cf. Mi Mi Khaing 913). After Tango writes her story in a Dayan cell, she awaits an uncertain sentence: will she be named national savior or murderous traitor? Law-Yone's indeterminate conclusion refuses easy resolutions.

Irrawaddy Tango offers counterhegemonic modalities by invoking the Burmese "butterfly soul." After Tango's brutal revenge, she finds neither unfettered freedom nor triumphant resistance (286). Instead, *Irrawaddy Tango* conjures the *leip-bya*. Burmese believe that "[w]hile the body plods through the lumpish tasks of living, the butterfly soul ranges unfettered through the open spaces of dreams, trances, wishes, reveries, and unconscious desires" (221). This ontology displaces Western reality with a Southeast Asian–inflected standpoint, highlighting a potential avenue out of embodiment and incarceration. During the colonial era, the *leip-bya* thwarted British regimes of punctuality and racialized authority (Shway Yoe 391, 394–95). Recent ethnographies underscore how Burmese distinguish between "things done with their enduring consciousness (designated as 'mind') and . . . actions carried out by the temporary, decaying, corporeal dimension of their person." Resistance of the mind "entail[s] a conscious decision not to accept a mandated form of the present and, more important, of the future" (Skidmore 175–76). Similarly, Burmese prisoners creatively transform incarceration into opportunities for intellectual exchange and collective production: "prison is a place where people have a chance to think and analyze issues deeply and intimate bonds are formed. . . . [P]eople of different views are able to engage in lengthy debates together, a chance they rarely have outside" (Fink 161). Transposing into fiction these Burmese tactics for countering repression, *Irrawaddy Tango*

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hints at the possibilities of contingent subjectivity and transnational ethical affiliation.

Law-Yone's use of the *leip-bya* proposes a paradigm shift. Tango's concluding daydream reunites her with Rex, the only man who never wanted Tango for sexual or representational labor. Described as a butterfly spirit "in the guise of man" (222), this itinerant American figure shares the protagonist's state of dispossession. No longer motivated by desires for wealth and fame, Tango renounces the need for a house, the structure of property-based affiliation and a metaphor for the nation (cf. Houtman 178); instead, she seeks only temporary shelter and perhaps an attentive companion. Law-Yone's novel raises the question of how First World readers consume "minority" narratives. *Irrawaddy Tango*'s conclusion hypothesizes a *nonpossessive* mode of witnessing and co-occupancy, represented by Rex, king of the road.

Conclusion

Ma Ma Lay and Wendy Law-Yone call attention to the problems and limits of representation while resisting the ways in which dissident (Burmese) subjectivities are disciplined, disappeared, and silenced. Their novels signal how alternative knowledges can provide the disenfranchised, brutalized, and forgotten a way to resist oppressive structures of being. In "everyday states of emergency" (Skidmore x), writing and ex-centric discourses displace power by refusing the dominant script(s) mandated by the state (Ho, "*Coffin Tree*" 113–14; Lee). Using autochthonous epistemologies like Buddhism and the *leip-bya*,[22] Burmese women writers tactically displace paternalistic disciplining and empty promises of liberation. *NOH* and *Irrawaddy Tango* bear witness to imprisonment and chart the limits of gender, culture, and "the human" while refusing to be confined by these concepts.

Recently, there has been a boom in literature and films related to Burma.[23] At a moment when it seems fashionable for privileged adjudicators to speak for Burma's oppressed, Ma Ma Lay and Law-Yone remind us to critically consider what Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith call "the ethics of recognition."[24] Burmese women's literature warns of the toxic consequences of turning minoritized life-and-death struggles into fetishized objects of consumption used primarily to enhance one's own cultural capital—particularly if such interpretive orientations serve to buttress scattered imperialist hegemonies and the privileges of Western (white) subjectivity around the world (e.g., Laura Bush). The ending of *Irrawaddy Tango* suggests that if we can find more mindful ways of apprehending difference, voyeuristic consumption might give way to a nonpossessive mode of witnessing that does not reify "simplifying fictions" (Jordt, *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement* 13). If we can realign the relationship between minoritized storyteller and privileged listener or reader, disparate worlds might come together and cross to create a more reparative chiasmus of relationality.

Notes

1. E.g., Rudyard Kipling's poem "Mandalay" (1890), Harold Fielding Hall's *The Soul of a People* (1898 [Ikeya, "'Traditional' High Status" 54, 57]), George Scott's *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information* (1906 [Ikeya, "'Traditional' High Status" 57]), and George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934 [analyzed in Ho, "Through a *Burmese Looking Glass*," ch. 1 (50–93)]). See also Kipling, *From Sea to Sea* 206.

2. This essay uses "Burma" and "Burmese" to refer to the culture and peoples. "Myanmar" signifies the post-1988 nation-state and military government(s). The country was renamed in 1989 and 2010, but the name changes have not been universally recognized.

3. Rangoon (Yangon) is the former capital and the nation's largest city.

4. Despite economic sanctions, the Myanmar military benefits from joint ventures with "oil companies from Australia, Britain, France, Canada, China, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Russia, South Korea and Thailand" (Callahan 48).

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5. The intertexuality between *Not Out of Hate*, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is striking although there is no evidence that Ma Ma Lay read Ibsen or Gilman: Way Way is described by her husband as "a doll he had come to own" (89), "the precious little doll he had created" (119), a "little lady" (56), a "tiny, weak creature" (91), and a "delicate piece of porcelain" (114).

6. Callahan 36. While China and India are key partners of Myanmar, Callahan suggests, "Anglo-American critics—the British in particular—should look in the mirror" since the "repertoire of ethnic division and state repression upon which the *tatmadaw* [Burmese Armed Forces] draw is the reflected legacy of their own rule" (63).

7. Moe Hein is a contemporary Burmese writer and Ma Ma Lay's son. The first Burmese novel appeared in 1904 and, with the short story, became an established literary genre by the 1920s (Allott, Introd. xxiv). Aung San Suu Kyi characterizes the 1920s as a time when *wunthanu* (patriotic) spirit focused on "a preference for traditional values and the eschewal of things foreign" ("Literature" 143). Ikeya's archival work demonstrates how anxieties about Burmese modernity and the power of the West "became fixated on the body of the modern Burmese woman" ("Modern Burmese Woman"). See Aung San Suu Kyi, "Intellectual Life" and "Literature."

8. *NOH* uses "nun," but Mi Mi Khaing explains that *thilashin* designates female renunciates devoted to Buddhist study, service, and meditation: "Keepers of the Precepts" (79). See also Kawanami, "Patterns"; Jordt, "*Bhikkuni*" and *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement*.

9. Ikeya, "Modern Burmese Woman" 1294–95. Intermarriage and the rights of Burmese women in a marriage to a foreigner or non-Buddhist were points of much debate in British colonial discourses and Burmese nationalist, protofeminist organizing in the early twentieth century (Ikeya, "'Traditional' High Status" 66–75).

10. Mi Mi Khaing explains, "'Nunnery' is merely a convenient English equivalent. . . . The Burmese word is *Gyaung* . . . used to mean a quiet nook, especially a secluded hollow or cave surrounded by woodland . . . chosen for meditation. . . . The word for 'monastery' [*hpon-gyi-kyaung*] . . . may not be as applicable. Some Burmese translate *gyaung* as a vale, with poetic connotations of a remote retreat. . . . Cloister is perhaps the more generally applicable, to urban as well as woodland centers" (80). I use *convent*, *cloister*, *nunnery*, and *retreat* interchangeably to designate the Sagaing retreat.

11. Jordt, "*Bhikkuni*" and *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement*; Kawanami, "Patterns." Skidmore writes, "The concept of the Buddhist refuge is another example of the creation of alternate worlds" (203).

12. Way Way's father, U Po Thein, donates supplies and money to the nunnery and never contests his wife's renunciation despite missing her terribly.

13. Maekala is the "goddess who saved the embryo Buddha Mahazanaka from drowning" (4n1), invoked in Buddhist Jataka stories found throughout South and Southeast Asia (Ho, "Through a *Burmese Looking Glass*," ch. 2).

14. Burmese prisoners, activists, and students "have created a kind of public space in the interior of their private spheres. Individuals who may have never met face to face in public spaces encounter one another through serial communication in an underground realm of public life" (Jordt, *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement* 143).

15. Allott, Introd. xvi. Ma Ma Lay did not feel that "modernity" and "tradition" were necessarily at odds: "What was offensive was the mentality of chauvinistic men, the root of censorious representations of the modern girl" (Ikeya, "Modern Burmese Woman" 1295).

16. For extended discussion of the Press Scrutiny Board, see Allott, *Inked Over*.

17. *The Coffin Tree* (1983) and *Irrawaddy Tango* (1993) track Southeast Asian migrants who travel through the United States. *The Road to Wanting* (2010), Law-Yone's third novel, also demonstrates a deconstructive, polyglot play of language and shares themes of migration, gender, Southeast Asia, and intimate labor.

18. See Lee, "Erasure," for how Law-Yone's first novel performs an (unfaithful) "re-siting of empire."

19. Burmese is rife with puns, rhymes, proverbs, and deconstructive turns of phrases. A rhyming popular proverb—"If you cannot speak, you offend/curse/abuse. If you cannot sit, you gape open"—warns that inattention to the nuances of language, particularly the tonal inflections of Burmese, can cause gross offense or insult (akin to being incapable of properly managing the folds of one's *longyi*, the Burmese sarong). Cultural fluency, linguistic skill, and rhetorical dexterity—the ability to successfully code and decode—have taken on more political implications in an age of censorship. As an exilic and diasporic writer, Law-Yone uses slips of the tongue, Asian dialects, polyglot accents, and other rhetorical turns to reveal the latent or profane: e.g., an Asian character asks to learn English by saying, "[W]ill you please teach me anguish?" (*Road* 68).

20. The river is now called Ayeyarwady.

21. Lawrence is "overwhelmed by a desire for the Orient, mediated through orientalist intertexts" (Behdad 116).

22. Jordt explains, "Vipassanā meditation . . . is a practical technique and method for a *moral* empirical theory of knowing, praxis, and being" (*Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement* 61).

23. E.g., James Mawdsley's *The Iron Road* (2001), Daniel Mason's *The Piano Tuner* (2002), Amy Tan's *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005), Wai Wai Myaing's *A Journey in Time: Family Memoirs (Burma 1914–1948)* (2005), Guy Delisle's *Burma Chronicles* (2008), Sao Sanda's *The Moon Princess: Memories of the Shan States* (2008), Zoya Phan's *Undaunted: My Struggle for Freedom and Survival in Burma* (2009), Carolyn Wakeman and San San Tin's

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No Time for Dreams: Living in Burma under Military Rule (2009), Emma Larkin's *Everything Is Broken: A Tale of Catastrophe in Burma* (2010), and Karen Connelly's *Burmese Lessons: A True Love Story* (2010).

24. Cf. Cheung 172. Related work can be seen in scholarship on trauma, incarceration, autobiography, and testimony (e.g., Scarry; L. Gilmore; Kang; Chuh) and on prison abolition (e.g., Rodríguez; R. Gilmore; *Visions*; *Critical Resistance*).

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