CHAPTER 2

# *Intimate Violence*
## *Rebels, Heroes, and Insurgent Sovereignties in Burmese Anglophone Literature*

### The Elusive Terrorist: Tropes, Figures, and the Intimacy of Violence

In a postwar story about the tragic intimacy of two amputated legs, an investigative team of inspectors descends upon a battle zone to collect evidence. "28 legs in all," cries out an inspector, "19 military personal and 9 militants."[1] "No, our boss won't accept that," responds the officer, "we can't have odd numbers, we need two legs per person." Even if we assume that one of the military personnel was an amputee from a previous battle, we still have one militant leg to account for. So, the investigative team needs either to wait until one of the insurgents steps on a mine or to chase some of the local villagers from the militant-controlled areas in the direction of a minefield and hope that they will get an odd number of blasts to even out the number of legs in the end. But we will have a problem if one of the military personnel steps on a mine accidentally. That is exactly what happens in Mitali Perkins's novel *Bamboo People* (2010), in which a fifteen-year-old foot soldier of the Burmese junta, forcefully recruited, loses his leg in a landmine explosion. Left to die, with a missing leg, he is eventually rescued by another teenager from the enemy's camp, a Karenni insurgent, who takes pity on him, gifts him a prosthetic leg that was meant for the teenage amputees of his own camp, and sends him back home.

The boy goes home to Rangoon, proudly displaying his "Karenni leg"[2] to his Burmese friends, in an overt gesture of political bonhomie that allegorically reinforces the notion that Burma – the nation – needs two legs to trundle along, one organic and one inorganic, one aesthetic and one prosthetic, the Burman and the Karenni, which stand side by side, as it were, but are never even on the ground or in life. The Burmese teenager can walk only at the expense of a Karenni amputee. The conflict that holds the two legs of the same body together and apart is therefore binding and



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intimate at the same time. As Moira Fradinger observes in the context of the Dominican Republic under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, the relationship between "the most powerful and the powerless" is structured by an enmity that forms the basis for a fantasized national community.[3] It is the very intimate enmity which is conditioned by the paradoxical coexistence of harm and peace, division and unity, that is characteristic of the Burmese literary texts featured in this chapter: Pascal Khoo Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (2002), Lucy Cruickshanks's *The Road to Rangoon* (2016), Wendy Law-Yone's *Irrawaddy Tango* (1993), Charmaine Craig's *Miss Burma* (2017), and Aung San Suu Kyi's *Freedom from Fear* (1995). These five texts, as this chapter argues, unfold in the intersections of intimacy, violence, and sovereignty. While the first section of the chapter examines the embodiment of violence in the private as well as public lives of the characters in Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, Craig's *Miss Burma*, and Cruickshanks's *The Road to Rangoon*, the second section extends this conceptual dyad of intimacy and violence to the desires of sovereignty in Aung San Suu Kyi's *Freedom from Fear,* and again in a rereading of *From the Land of Green Ghosts*. Wendy Law-Yone's *Irrawaddy Tango* serves as a bridge narrative between the two sets of readings, representing intimate terror and deferred achievement of sovereignty through violence. That intimate violence is inseparable from political violence; or rather, the violence that enters the intimate spheres of the Burmese subjects is charged with a political function – a central argument of the chapter – that countervails the ideological determinism of terrorism or the totalizing impulses of anticolonial, postcolonial ethno-nationalisms by laying bare the individual, familial, and communal determinants of insurgency.

In contrast to the accounts of imperial armies, royal families, and the social or business elites in the historical fiction of the mid-twentieth century, or the Golden triangle political thrillers of the 1980s–1990s at the onset of Cold War rivalries, the contemporary Burmese novel sheds light on the suffering as well as the uprising of individual actors, particularly ordinary citizens, in the domestic sphere of familial, local, and civic relations. This overt move from the totalizing themes of anticolonial nationalism or authoritarianism in contemporary Burmese literature is inflected in, if not shaped by, the banning of the English language in universities under Ne Win's regime (1962–1988), and the frequent shutdown of universities in the late 1980s and 1990s by the junta. The disruption and discontinuities produced by these developments are preceded by what has indeed been a unique historical precedent: unlike India or other Anglophone colonies, the lack of a post-independence educational

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elite has led to a less restricted, less organized system of English education as well as Anglophone literary production. In Aung San Suu Kyi's own intimate account, her father Aung San was less fluent in English than the political elites of her generation. As the readings of this chapter reveal, including Suu Kyi's own literary oeuvre, the exposition of intimacy, most specifically the violation and violence of the intimate sphere, becomes a signature theme of the contemporary novels, which record the disjunctive local conditions shaped by erratic, unstable regimes and fractured economies surrounding natural resources wherein political legitimacy is contested by ordinary citizens with weapons. Each text analyzed in the chapter makes legible this dislodged sovereignty from the state to the individual, from the public to the intimate sphere, thereby making the embodied insurgent cultures of Burma intelligible.

Put simply, I refer to intimate violence as a product of conflict that is familiar, generational, inherited, inevitable, and indispensable; it is a violence that turns brothers, sisters, neighbors, and entire communities who share the same cultural space against one another in the name of new national identities and destinies. It is a violence in which the brush with the lover and the brush with the leader become the same thing; a violence in which the loss of an intimate partner and the loss of a national leader could trigger the same insurgent response; a violence that is unencumbered by the ideologies of redemptive justice, figural terrorism, mythic violence, or any other sovereign arrogation of terror that is unleashed upon its populace in the name of the greater good; a violence that rallies around lovers, losers, limping insurgents, famished revolutionaries, unpaid mercenaries, and rebels with more than one cause. The inimical "conversion of kinsmen into enemies," as Shruti Kapila argues, can be traced to the decoupling of sovereignty from "its mooring in the state and deposit[ion] in the political subject" by the postcolonial elites.[4] This process, which holds the individual as the sovereign agent of violence rather than the state, enables the colonial fraternity to create an enemy within, in which the individual subjects, communities, and non-sovereign entities can be pitted against other(ed) such entities. Thus, by disseminating violence on the societal and communal level, the state flexes its muscle and frees its hands of actual violence, and through "logics of murder and affinity" promises "the creation of fellowship."[5] And because intimate violence is so familiar to every stakeholder involved in the *longue durée* of conflict, and because it is carried out in *known* social sites and communal spaces, its ideological containers become so strained and porous that they render essentialist as well as figurative categories such as terrorist and counter-terrorist.

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The seeds of Burmese civic dissent can be traced to the intimate affects such as trust and loyalty vested in the colonial benefactors: while the Central Burmans, a Theravada Buddhist majority, fought on the side of the Japanese, who had promised liberation from the British Empire, the ethnic groups of the frontier region such as Karen, Kachin, Chin, and Karenni fought on the side of the British, who had promised them political autonomy and sovereignty. Following the assassination of the nationalist leader Aung San in 1947, post-independence Burma came under the leadership of U Nu, who failed to implement the promised autonomy to the ethnic minorities in the frontier region. Soon after Burma gained independence in 1948, minority groups such as the Karen, Wa, Kachin, and Shan, among others, had each founded secessionist insurgencies. Despite the fact that U Nu remained a staunch advocate of the Non-Aligned Movement, Burma was threatened by the arrival of Chinese nationalists (Kuomintang) who sought refuge from Mao's Communist forces in the Shan State. This has led to Burma's unwilling participation in the geopolitics of the Cold War, as the CIA provided support to the Kuomintang, who in turn introduced the Shan to opium cultivation in the Golden Triangle region from the 1950s onwards.[6] The proceeds from opium cultivation, alongside natural resources such as minerals and gems, have often provided an economic incentive to the escalation of the conflicts. The texts discussed in this chapter shed light on the implications of these events for insurgent minorities, individual actors, and, particularly, for ordinary citizens. Set against the backdrop of the 1988 regime change that gave rise to the State Peace and Development Council (SLORC), the euphemistic acronym of the military junta, the texts respond to the growing political tensions since Ne Win's ascension to power in 1962. As the clashes between the Burmese state and the insurgents have been underway for over seven decades, the parties involved in the conflict remain equally, if not intimately, familiar to one another.

Given this conflictual heritage, Burma has been implicated in the discourses of terrorism in myriad, often bizarre and unpredictable ways. To begin with, the military junta that overthrew the democratically elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021 has called the latter's shadow government a terrorist group for allegedly inciting violence against the military.[7] It is the same military junta, known as the Tatmadaw, that has been labeled by many Western states as a terrorist government since 1962. Yet the insurgents fighting the junta, who had evidently been American allies, were classified as terrorists by the CIA and other agencies in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. The fact that Suu Kyi was awarded

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the Nobel Peace Prize also served to legitimize the perception of the junta as a terrorist or rogue government, a label that was used, ironically, to describe Suu Kyi's own political party – National League of Democracy, which shared power with the Tatmadaw until the 2021 coup – on an earlier occasion, and for an entirely different reason: its passive compliance with the Rohingya massacre in 2016–2017. This was followed by appeals from various statespersons and intellectuals, including former Nobel laureates such as Desmond Tutu, to revoke her Nobel Peace Prize. Not just in Suu Kyi's case, but, historically, there has been an unavoidable collusion and complicity between Nobel Peace Prize winners and terrorists, as in the case of Menachem Begin, Nelson Mandela, or Yasir Arafat, who were labeled as terrorist by their respective colonial governments but went on to win Nobel Peace Prizes.[8] What such uncanny intimacy between the figures of terrorism and the icons of peace tells us is that if one is to aim for the Nobel Peace Prize, terrorism is actually a good place to start.

This inverted paradox of the same person being nation builder, terrorist, or pacifist of our times is also central to the constantly morphing subjects of intimate violence. Consider, for instance, how the fictional hero of Charmaine Craig's *Miss Burma*, a Burmese-Jewish tradesman, reflects on the endless metamorphosis of Aung San, who invited the Japanese to Burma to overthrow the British:

> the destruction of four hundred Karen villages ("not villagers, villages!") within the span of a few days by Aung San's army. ("Man, woman, child – no matter. They shot them and pushed them into heaps – eighteen hundred of them just in that one place.") News of . . . thousands of released dacoits joining Aung San's ranks.[9]

In the same breath, the narrator recounts:

> The loyal are fully capable of deceit. That was something Benny told himself four months later, in May 1945, after the last of the Japanese had evacuated Rangoon and more than twelve thousand of their troops had been killed by Karen guerrillas supplied by British airdrop . . . in the final weeks of the campaign, Aung San's renamed Burma National Army. (Benny heard that when a British military commander had quipped that Aung San changed sides only because the Allies were winning, Aung San had told him, "It wouldn't be much use coming to you if you weren't, would it?") They had all fought the same enemy, yet what they had been fighting for apparently diverged widely.[10]

In spite of this bloodthirsty and almost terrorist portrayal of Aung San, when Benny encounters Aung San for the first time at a political rally, after it has become clear that Burma was going to gain independence, he

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observes: "There wasn't evil anywhere in the man's face that Benny could spot. There was anger, ancient anger, to be sure, and the focused ferocity of someone who would stop at nothing to free Burma's people."[11]

From being the leader of an insurgent national army to becoming an opportunist anticolonialist, a murderer of 1,800 Karens, a man of "focused ferocity," and, finally, the "father of the[ir] nation,"[12] the label "terrorist" uncannily eludes Aung San, but always lingers around, especially in a nation where the familial, generational, and national become inseparable. Consider, for instance, the views of Aung San's daughter as expressed in 1994, and then her fall from grace after the Rohingya massacre:

> The present armed forces of Burma were created and nurtured by my father. It is not simply a matter of words to say that my father built up the armed forces.. . . Let me speak frankly. I feel strong attachment for the armed forces. Not only were they built up by my father, as a child I was cared for by his soldiers.. . . I would therefore not wish to see any splits and struggles between the army which my father built up and the people who love my father so much. May I also from this platform ask the personnel of the armed forces to reciprocate this kind of understanding and sympathy? For their part the people should try to forget what has already taken place, and I would like to appeal to them not to lose their affection for the army.[13]

Sympathy for the devil, and scorn for the terrorist. It is not that Suu Kyi's views have become aligned with the terrorist junta overnight; it is just that she now reloads and then relaunches the term terrorism against another group of people: the Muslim minority in her own country. The boundaries between father, national father, family, military, foe, and terrorist not only become porous here, but they do so precisely with the invocation of a collective threat by virtue of the same reductive principle that subsumes all social identities into the trans- and disfigurations of a terrorist, in a conflictual world where each life comes under a perceived threat, and every form of fellowship and intimate relationship can pose a potential terrorist threat.

Such a strained, if not constrained, relationship to alterity in the context of threat, terrorism, and social and civic unrest evokes two theoretical cues. The first one refers to Emmanuel Levinas's thesis on violence in the face of alterity, or our ethical bind to the familiarly unfamiliar Other. For Levinas, our very relationship to the Other is pure violence, because the face of the Other – not simply as a physical encounter of the visage but as an affective countenance – is vulnerable to the hazards of nonrepresentation, as he writes: "The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill."[14] Yet the

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face is also a source of invitation to violence and conflict as a trope of radical otherness: "The Other is the only being that one can be tempted to kill. This temptation to murder and this impossibility of murder constitute the very vision of the face."[15] Sure enough, in what Levinas terms "theodicy"[16] there is always a justification for the suffering of the Other in the name of the greater good or the preservation of the Self, which is being carried into the secular institutions of the day that justify the killing, suffering, and torture of the dangerous Other – in the present instance, the terrorist. Against this intimacy of face-to-face violence, Levinas calls not for the end of wars or pure violence as such but for a primordial ethical imperative toward alterity, via a non-useless suffering in the face of the other, and in effacement with the other.[17]

Slavoj Žižek's interjection in, or rather rejection of, Levinas's face-to-face ethical pact serves as a bridge to my second cue: rather than worshipping the face of the Other as a pathway into transcendence, Žižek advocates for the smashing of the Other's face because it is a sign of internalized Otherness: "Far from displaying 'a quality of God's image carried with it,' the face is the ultimate ethical lure . . . the neighbor is not displayed through a face; it is, as we have seen, in his or her fundamental dimension a *faceless monster*."[18] Ashis Nandy gives a face to this *faceless monster* of Žižek and calls him the intimate enemy, the Other *within*. For Nandy, the Other not only is encoded but is embodied within the Self, at least in the colonial context. In order to perform the hostile dominance, the colonizer and the colonized need to both invoke and negate the Other within. This results in what Nandy calls the intimate animosity whereby "what others can do to you, you also can do to your own kind."[19] "The colonial mantle is now worn by native regimes," Nandy affirms, "who are willing to do what the colonial powers did."[20] In an erstwhile colonial context, Stephen Morton and Elleke Boehmer formulate such intimate enmity, via Achille Mbembe, in an equally paradoxical manner: the violence that enters the colonized subject is the same violence that exits through the subject as cathartic terror: a form of release from a permanent state of being in pain.[21]

Intimate violence is thus a violence that is omnipresent, routine, and endemic to the communal fabric, a violence that becomes an immediate response to myriad claims for agency. It is not only immediate but equally indispensable, as Kimberly Theidon puts it in the context of Peruvian villagers who suddenly find themselves in conflict with their fellow peasants and had to learn to kill their own brothers.[22] Accordingly, Theidon argues, via Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman, intimate violence concerns itself with "how people engage in the tasks of daily living, reinhabiting

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worlds in full recognition that perpetrators, victims and witnesses come from the same social space."[23] In such a scenario, the mechanisms that prevent recognition that the murderers and friends cohabit the same cultural place play a vital role in preventing retributive violence and enacting redemptive justice.[24] The eventual breaching of this secret pact between intimacy and inhabited violence is what leads to civic uprising and insurgency. If the victims of terrorism are those who are likely to use terrorism – both literally and metaphorically – against others, intimate violence is then both binding and divisive:

> It is the friend whose difference is manufactured in times of crisis to be placed in liminal space, between the outside and inside, in order to differentiate the interior and exterior whose borders have been thrown into crisis. It is the friend become enemy who reminds us how a given political fraternity was built on foundational violence.[25]

The fact that Suu Kyi's shadow government is labeled a terrorist group by a terrorist junta – the very junta instituted by her father and one by which Suu Kyi was cared for as a child – is a glaring reminder of the interplay between intimacy and enmity bred by the foundational violence of power-harnessing in postcolonial Burma. The wheel now has turned full circle: in an ironic turn of events, the same Suu Kyi, showcased by the West as the champion of democracy and rights, and denounced as a terrorist-ally when the Rohingya massacre was underway, begins to garner international solidarity as the last vestige of hope against the military junta that deposed her.

Such porousness of iconicism entails the topological substitutions vested in the figures of terrorists, the military, militias, saviors of the nation, and insurgents that are endemic to the notion of intimate violence. The term "elusive terrorist" here best captures this porosity of its implications, namely, its canniness to weaponize the enemy and mobilize support for a whole host of collective causes: national liberation, ethnic secession, and personal acts of vengeance. Although the term is used typically by a contending party to discredit the political grievances of its enemy, the recipients of the term terrorism are equally capable of using it on others whose political grievances they neither recognize nor approve. This is best illustrated in Achille Mbembe's use of the term *homo ludens*, wherein the colonized subject shows their capacity to change persona, accommodating to the needs and demands of the colonizer's subjugated power to gain a strategic advantage.[26] Similarly, Hamid Dabashi's notion of *epistemic endosmosis* holds that canonical discourses such as Orientalism and terrorism by implication lose their epistemic significance after having served

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their purpose – Orientalism to the service of colonialism and terrorism to the war on terror – and could be weaponized by anyone, often by the victims of such discourses, for strategic purposes.[27] What this constant mitosis of the term terrorist does, in the context of this chapter, is neither unprecedented nor entirely unwarranted: it shows the figure of the terrorist to be a porous, elusive, and contentless subject, and lays bare the rhetorical chimera of the term: it becomes devoid of content as soon as it is endowed with a political function.

Yet the interchangeability of terrorist and nationalist or nation builder is made possible precisely because of the epistemic intimacy of the violence involved: "If the terrorist is the dissolution of order, the counterterrorist is its reconstitution."[28] Sjoberg further contends, via Cynthia Weber, that much like the power dynamics of the intimate relationships between the masculine and the feminine, the very figure of the terrorist is susceptible to the violation of the "'counter-terrorist' [... which] is made possible by the epistemology of intimate (in)violability constituting the existence of 'the terrorist' even without his/her materiality."[29] To put it differently, if masculinity is considered "inviolable," any challenge to its constituent elements such as "bravery, independence, protector status and honour" leads to the construction of the Other as a threat.[30] Thus, the very existence of the category of terrorist, which serves as a fleeting and floating metaphor for those who are in a position to effectively impose it on others, is an exegesis of foundational violence through which nations are born, societies are made, citizenship is gentrified, and, simultaneously, communities are destroyed. It is this very simultaneity of terrorism and counter-terrorism – the dissolution and reconstruction of order – embedded in *foundational violence* such as the dominance of central Burmans over the minority tribes that makes the enduring conflicts all the more intimate. Such foundational violence is a common trait of intimate relationships that are subject to "radical shifts" in power dynamics that "frequently involve a more powerful partner who, over the course of the relationship, exercises control."[31]

## Intimacy and Militancy in *From the Land of Green Ghosts* and *Road to Rangoon*

Pascal Khoo Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts* features a series of allegorical cues on the intimacy of private and political violence. Thwe's memoir was written during his exile at Cambridge, after having been rescued by a Cambridge don named John Casey from the persecution of the junta for the author's role in student mobilization. Although Thwe

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inevitably joins an insurgency led by the Karennis during his flight from the junta, his decision to become an active political campaigner is shaped by the abduction and murder of his lover Moe, the daughter of a Burmese military officer who was killed in the conflict with the Shan insurgents. Since Moe is the only Burman in his life in the land of "Green Ghosts" – the name Thwe's Padaung tribe gave the Burmans – who shows unconditional affection and love, her murder marks a decisive moment in his subsequent encounters with violence. As Thew writes: "I believe that in the months to come, some part of her spirit and defiance entered into me, for this loss I have no words. Moe's body was never returned or recovered."[32]

Admittedly, this intimate loss manifests itself in Thwe's life as defiance, which in turn transforms into an act of rebellion against his father who, Thew believes, had long been impaired by his own docility and submissiveness to the regime. From defiance to rebellion, Thwe channels his pent-up anger into an allegorical insurgency in one of his jungle hunts:

> I waited until the target could be seen distinctly. At the clearing in the bush a forked tongue appeared, an inch or two from the hutoo's nest. I pulled the rubber of the catapult. Off it went, and hit a dry twig and the snake's head. Such was the impact that the snake fell to the ground, sinking into a heap like a silk ribbon, but in slow motion.. . . The creature didn't die at once. Its center of life is not in the head, as it is with humans and animals – you can chop the head off and it will still wriggle and trash and not die. You must break the spine to render it lifeless. I held it in triumph.. . . Looking into the nest I found that it contained three baby birds, about two or three days old. Poor creatures, they almost ended up in the snake's belly, I thought, without ever having the experience of flying freely. I took my trophy to the hut and rubbed it with ash. I cut off its head, skinned and gutted it, then buried the inedible parts near the bush where it fell. I felt satisfied and had no wish for further hunting that day.[33]

Here, not only does the hunt itself become a source of intimate psychological catharsis that brings Thew much "satisfaction," but its description alludes to a topological substitution wherein Moe stands in for the bird he could save, whose spirit, as it were *enters* into him[34] and invokes the insurgent impulse in him to shoot the head of the snake and save the bird. The synecdochic formulation "the snake's life does not lie in its head" is indeed befitting of the intimacy of the singular body of the junta and the dismembering of its organic parts: if we read the junta's leader Ne Win as the head of the snake, the spine of the snake is his henchmen in the junta itself. Taken together, they make a toxic body of a regime splashing venom

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mixed with blood at the moment of their death, to say nothing of the satisfaction and triumph one gets from the crushing sound of each death blow to one's enemy. The perilous freedom of the birds in the nest that cannot fly shall remain. This organic allegory, or rather the allegory of dismembered organisms – the head, the body, the spine – resurfaces frequently throughout the text, most particularly in the form of a radio interlude between the Karenni militants and the Tatmadaw:

> "So you don't love the old man anymore? I'm really shocked. By the way, how many men have you got?. . . And how many civilian porters?"
> "They're all volunteers, all volunteers. It's a lie that we kidnap them."
> "Well, you said it. Pretty impressive that they volunteer to wear chains, volunteer to walk through the minefields, volunteer to be blown to bits."
> . . . "Why are you trying to kills us?"
> "Orders. And it's my duty."
> "I bet you enjoy your duty – you know, all the mowing down monks, women, unarmed students. You must feel pretty good after that, I suppose. After all, what could be more satisfying than murdering your own children."
> . . . "I'm not going to talk politics. I have a job. I have to feed my wife and family. Don't try to teach an old crocodile how to swim."
> "Talking of old crocodiles, how is your boss, your *father*? Still the benevolent ruler?"[35]

The allusion to the *father* metaphor to the junta *head* Ne Win as the poisonous head of the snake and his henchmen as its spine evokes both the organic intimacy innate to one's body and the estrangement stemming from the presence of murderous venom in the same being. The radio banter, too, bears testimony to an indivisible belonging in a divided community, wherein duty and desperation are thrust upon each party to kill and to be killed in the name of preserving the self, the greater good of the community. Such indivisible presence of what can be called "estranged familiarity" is akin to Patrick Rotman's reading of intimate enemies in the context of Algeria: "having lived in close proximity as coloniser and colonised for almost 130 years, fighters on both sides had the sense of a foe at once completely other, yet strangely familiar."[36] Thwe captures another such intimate encounter with violence when he stumbles upon the corpse of his enemy:

> It was the same army officer who had told me in the restaurant in Mandalay that I was worth only one bullet. "Surely," I thought, with a cruel and exultant sense that justice had been done, "he was worth a lot of bullets."

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> Then I looked down at his puckered face, and all I could feel was pity at the waste of it. After all, he had been courageous, I could not sum up his worth by the number of bullets needed to kill him.[37]

In this disconsolate encounter with the death of the enemy, it is as if only through certain familiarity, that is, an intimate understanding of violence, that an ethical alterity could be forged. As a case in point, the bittersweet vengeance of seeing his enemy fall is immediately undercut by Pascal's acknowledgment of the courage of his enemy, who, like himself, knowingly walks into the enemy's jaws. Yet, in Thwe's exultant remark that "justice had been done," there is an iota of vengeance that reveals its intimate bonds with violence. If vengeance is retributive violence, then, as Jacky Bouju and Mirijam de Bruijn assert, "in the course of this cyclical negative reciprocity, the permutations of the position of aggressor/victim ensure a replication of fears ... In spite of this, revenge is always an opportunity, as it remains the only recourse for defending one's interests or seizing lost power in an inescapable relationship."[38] However, Thwe converts his fleeting moment of vengeance into a moment of ethical alterity by virtue of his own intimacy with violence, one that enables him to acknowledge the suffering of the Žižekian faceless monster. Such suffering, however, does not necessarily amount to a *useful* suffering in a Levinasian sense, so long as Thwe's response is based on his encounter with the ill-fated visage of his enemy when he turns his body over, not on its countenance that invokes his own suffering for the Other. The chief culprit here is neither the vengeance nor the desire for retribution, but the inherent unpredictability, opacity, and uncontrollability of redemptive violence, which, as Bouju and de Bruijn observe, "is so old that nobody knows anymore who the original aggressor or victim was," owing largely to the fact that "the unexpected consequences and outcomes of violent deeds usually exceed the perpetrator's initial intentions."[39] This is certainly the case with Thwe's own foray into the Karenni insurgency, the insurgent group that takes him under its wing. Its leader concedes that he is no longer sure who exactly his group is fighting, and that he prefers a federal solution to the multiple insurgencies, because the separatists "are tired of killing each other."[40]

An equally arresting tale, Lucy Cruickshanks's *The Road to Rangoon* follows the lives of two orphaned siblings – Kyaw and Thuza – in the militarized zone of the small town of Mogok in the Shan State. While Kyaw becomes a member of the rebel army (Shan State Army), Thuza makes a subsistence living as a small-time ruby pilferer with the help of her brother from the rebel-controlled areas, and acts as a messenger between

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the Tatmadaw, the rebels, and a Thai arms dealer. In the absence of any kin, except for an opium-addicted grandmother, Thuza comes under the paternal care of a Buddhist monk, Zwatika, a secret Tatmadaw agent, who tells Thuza that her parents were imprisoned in a jail near Rangoon, and manipulates her to accumulate rubies in order to bribe the prison officials and free her loved ones who, as we learn later, had been killed by the Tatmadaw the moment they were abducted.

The subsequent story evolves through a series of intimate yet violent relationships between four sets of characters, each consisting of entangled friendships, loyalty, and brotherhood: Thuza, Kyaw, and Zwatika; the Tatmadaw officer Than Chit and his son Min; Michael, son of the British ambassador, and Sein, the son of a university professor, both hailing from the upper echelons of Burmese society; and, finally, Thuza and Than Chit. Each of these dyadic, at times triadic relationships is bound by acts of violence and, in almost every instance, by the loss of a loved one that sets them on a path toward vengeance, redemption, and retribution. Since all the characters have lost something intimate through the conflict, their families are both split and bound by the war. This enables the actants of violence from each end of the spectrum to morph and metamorphize their roles at will: from the loyalists to the Union of Burma to infiltrators, smugglers, terrorists, and, finally, to insurgents vis-à-vis the saviors of their nation. In each case, the manifestations of intimate relations, such as care, safety, and justice, take a violent course, or rather take recourse to violence to such an extent that intimate acts and political acts can no longer be seen as separate. For the son of the British ambassador, his own intimate feelings of shame and guilt for abandoning his friend Sein – a friend who becomes his sole companion by virtue of his class and habitus in a land of "injured charm"[41] that he barely understands – at a bomb blast turn him into a rebel sympathizer. Yet Michael's bid for affective redemption here is neither ideological nor premediated, but one triggered by intimate feelings of pain, loss, and guilt:

> This guilt was different from the constant, ignorable, low rumble of nervousness he had about Sein being his friend, and from the moment he had let the car drive away with his bleeding body in the boot, and even from the moment that he'd fled from the hospital. He realised now that he'd turned away often, in the way he admonished his father for doing – and Sein's father too, though he understood why.[42]

Upon learning that the bomb was actually planted by the Tatmadaw but blamed on the rebels, Michael teams up with his teacher, a former member of the Shan State Army, and embarks on a risky venture to deliver a supply

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of arms to the insurgents in the jungles of Burma. Despite the hazard of being exposed, Michael grows intent on using privilege, and thereby risks one intimacy – that of his relationship to his father, an ambassador in service – to offset another, that is, the retribution for his friend's loss.

Like the dramatic metamorphosis of Michael Atwood's role from a member of a British diplomatic family to a rebel aide, another significant exchange of roles occurs between the siblings Thuza and Kyaw, whereby the split in the intimacy of the family mirrors the split in their respective political ideologies and allegiances. In a clash of insurgent alternatives of their own peculiar brands, the siblings stand on opposite ends of the political spectrum:

> "They taught you to fight, like I do. Why haven't you listened?" Thuza shook her head and stared at the ground. "Our parents are nothing like you, Kyaw. They never touched a weapon."... "They wouldn't support you, Kyaw. You know that."[43]
>
> ...
>
> "After all the Tatmadaw have done to our people – after all they've done to you, Thuza Win – I don't understand how you simply ignore them. Why don't you want to fight?"
>
> "I'm fighting, brother. I am. Everyday."[44]

This "everyday fight" is indeed the most intimate aspect of violence, and if only for its familiarity, knowability, and ability to naturalize itself, such violence risks being discounted as ordinary or unspectacular. Evidently, Kyaw discredits any fight other than insurgent labor as a passive submission to the regime, in spite of Thuza's own fight on an daily basis: having lost her parents at an early age, she is forced by the circumstances of her life to be a ruby smuggler, bird catcher, pilferer, and double agent. The extraordinariness of these occupations becomes transformed into a new "ordinariness" of life. As Susanna Trnka observes in the context of Fiji,

> events that had previously been "extraordinary" became a part of everyday life and discourse, but also in the ways in which the "ordinary" events of daily living became implicated as sites of communication and understanding of political conflict. It was as if there could be no event that was not in some way narrated as a part of the political situation.[45]

In this sense, hidden from the "extraordinary" and the "spectacular," Thuza's everyday insurgency, as Laura Sjoberg would put it, is "evidence that everyday/intimate violence is one of the greatest threats to people's security globally, and one of the greatest sources of terror to people – certainly as grave as if not more grave than the acts that policymakers in

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global politics traditionally and easily label as 'terrorism.'"[46] By placing intimate violence at the heart of the global terrorism debate, Sjoberg appeals to the policy makers to turn their attention to the intimate sites of violent production that are often misread as people's motives for terrorism. Much the same way, both terror and counter-terror reproduce violence "in the intimate sphere, manifest as a violent act of control,"[47] which holds particularly true for the orphaned siblings who take divergent paths to insurgency – one fighting the odds of everyday violence, one fighting the everyday odds of violence – and are bound by an intimate cause, that is, to free their parents from the Insein prison. Thuza's aversion to bona fide insurgency remains short-lived, however, as she first turns to vengeance, indulging in the only intimate act of violence in her life: she kills her paternal figure Zwatika with her own hands upon learning that the monk was a military agent who had her parents killed, and evolves into a full-blown insurgent after the killing of Kyaw by the Tatmadaw.

But it is another intimate encounter of familial violence, almost as if mirroring the siblings' own forked path toward insurgency, between the Tatmadaw officer Than Chit and his wife Malar over the fate of their teenage son Min, that plays a decisive role in Thuza's journey toward insurgency. Ever since he was rescued from the streets by the Tatmadaw, Than Chit channels all his loyalty to the military institution, idolizes Aung San, the founder of the Burmese National Army, and dreams of turning his son Min into a fine soldier of the Tatmadaw. But his wife Malar, who is a victim of intimate violence by way of her father, who nearly died in the service of the Tatmadaw, sees things differently:

> "They fear them, Than Chit."
> "It's the same thing. They keep us together, sweetheart. What's not to love? Without strong men like Min and me to hold the insurgents at bay – all murderers and rapists wherever else they are – the whole country would collapse."[48]

The tragic death of Min – who is sent to the battlefront by his superior, unbeknownst to Than Chit – at the hands of the Shan insurgents is inimical to, if not proleptic of, the violent ending of the argument between the intimate partners: "he slapped the wall beside her face [Malar] and she yelped and flinched then scurried away."[49] Ironically, though, it is not Kyaw's but Min's death that inspires Thuza to embark on an insurgent path of vengeance and redemptive justice in which a member of her enemy camp, Than Chit, becomes an unlikely ally. Even before the funeral of Min, the head of the Tatmadaw sends Than Chit on a mission to capture

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ruby pilferers, and when captured, Thuza makes an assault on the weaker constitution of a father who has just lost his son:

> "You knew my brother was a rebel but you didn't make me say it. You knew he fought with the SSA. Their men killed your boy, but you didn't need to throw me with them.. . . You showed me mercy, Officer. You're a good man. You understood what I was feeling. My loss. You don't want others to suffer like you have done. That makes you more chivalrous than the Tatmadaw deserves. More gallant. Show me mercy again."
> "The Tatmadaw has robbed us both. Your son was a soldier but he was a brilliant boy.. . ."
> "Pass me the keys, sir. You won't be sorry. Pass me the keys and turn your eyes sideways, and I promise I'll punish them all for us both."[50]

The fact that Than Chit sets Thuza free in order to avenge his son's death with her help, and sees the injustice he has done to Min by forcing his own ambitions upon his son, unravels what Ashis Nandy has called the intimate enemy, or the enemy within:

> Ultimately, modern oppression, as opposed to traditional oppression, is not an encounter between the self and the enemy, the rulers and the ruled, the gods and the demons. It is a battle between de-humanized self and the objectified enemy, the technologized bureaucrat and his reified victim, pseudo-rulers and their fearsome other selves projected on to their "subjects."[51]

In an unholy union of sorts, terrorist and counter-terrorist join ranks to kill *their* collective terrorist, the head of the Tatmadaw, who was indeed responsible for the killing of their loved ones. The intimate loss at both ends of the spectrum – the military and the militant – through violence forges a connivingly just political bonhomie among sworn enemies: the prisoner and the imprisoned – Than Chit and Thuza – join hands and pass on intelligence to the rebels to ambush the head of the Tatmadaw and blow him to pieces. In this intimate interplay of violence, no usurpers, no agent provocateurs, and no agents of violence remain ideologically frozen or figuratively fixated: insurgents are repeatedly, and at times interchangeably, equated with terrorists,[52] and a terrorist such as Kyaw, in turn, is variedly labeled as a "notorious insurgent, a sniper, a bandit and a critical money-cow";[53] a ruby pilferer becomes an insurgent; a Buddhist monk secretly acts as a counter-terrorism agent; an aspiring soldier models his career after the nation's father; and the father of the aspiring soldier aids and abets the very terrorists who kill his son.

My next example, Charmaine Craig's *Miss Burma*, is yet another tale of intimate violence in which a beauty queen inherits an insurgent past from

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her Karen mother and Sephardic Burmese father and forges an alliance with a rival Karen insurgent to seek personal retribution for the murder of her husband, the leader of the insurgency, and to carry the baton of Karen liberation. From her humble beginnings in Rangoon, Louisa finds herself in an awkward position with her newfound fame as the first ever Miss Burma. The Burmese junta, keen on using her image as a poster child for Burmese national unity while killing the Karens wherever they can find them, draws her and her family into the elite circles of Rangoon. Rumors break out that Louisa is the mistress of the country's dictator Ne Win himself, but in truth she keeps a secret lover, none other than a militant leader of the Karen army, Lynton, who is suspected of using Louisa to get closer to Ne Win with an insurgent plot.

In a world of intimate lovers, cruel dictators, hardheaded insurgents, and CIA plots to use the local insurgents to stave off the Chinese communists in what is now known as the opium triangle, it is Louisa's loyalties for her Karen minority as well as her socialite circles that shape the violence coursing through the novel's plotline. As soon as Louisa learns that the henchmen of her rumored lover, Ne Win, have captured her (now) husband Lynton, killed him, and dumped him in the ocean Osama Bin Laden–style, she takes over the reins of the insurgency and walks into the den of a rival insurgent to forge an alliance. The narrator of *Miss Burma* captures the surge of this insurgent yet intimate violence in the following manner: "Lynton. The picture of him riddled with bullets all at once exploded across her consciousness, across her reflected, horrified face. And without wasting another minute she picked up the shears, grabbed a fistful of hair, and began to cut it."[54]

If the chopping off of hair, a part of one's body, is a symbolic act of rebellion against her celebrated beauty, or rather her transformation into a militant appearance, then her decision to assume her husband's role as the leader of the Karen insurgency could be best described in Che Guevara's famous words: "The true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love,"[55] or by Arundhati Roy's assertion that to rebel against one's own nation is not a sign of treachery or sedation, but a gesture of love for that nation.[56]

Throughout *Miss Burma*, the intimate, the romantic, and the political become so entangled that their genesis, their purpose, and their pathways become impossible to distinguish. Following the kidnapping of Louisa's father Benny in 1944, and his torture by the Japanese secret police, his wife Khin finds consolation in the men surrounding her, particularly Benny's friend Saw Lay, a fellow soldier in the British war against the Japanese.

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Upon his return home, Benny bears the brunt of a domestic revolt in the shadows of an ethnic insurgency:

> if she loved Saw Lay still, it was not just for his blood, but for his feeling that he was no better than the cause they rallied around, that he had no more right not to fight than the poorest peasant. And if she'd shut herself in with the servants more and more, it was in stoic revolt against the trappings of a world that her children had come to assume was comfortable and secure.[57]

At a later point in life, Benny further reflects on this act of rebellion:

> For a long time I believed it to be a kind of rebellion against me. Retribution for my philandering. If she were to leave me – now that would be a revolution! But she stays, and she endures a loveless, trapped life, and she hates herself and life all the more.[58]

Benny's musings project Khin's infidelity as an inevitable, if not indispensable, rebellion against the loveless yet comfortably numb life in the confines of her family. Such revolt, in turn, manifests itself not merely as an intimate revolt but also as a political revolt, given that Khin remains in love, even after her husband's return, with a man, who, like a poor peasant, *cannot not* revolt. For his part, by graciously accepting his wife's infidelity as an extension of her political views, Benny becomes an anchor of affective insurgency, as, for instance, in his reflection on beauty, homogeneity, and revolution following Louisa's crowning at the beauty pageant:

> But there was nothing rational or democratic about beauty itself, Benny told himself. And still, beauty was not classist or racist. . . . Perhaps beauty alone had the power to transfigure people so. And yet, Benny reminded himself with a shudder, there was something insidious about beautifying the country's image by means of a girl, whatever her background, for somewhere in the darkness beyond the delta, innocent people continued to be shot and killed.[59]

Reminiscent of Arundhati Roy's remark on aesthetics and revolution that "if there wasn't beauty to preserve, we would not be there [fighting],"[60] Benny's euphoria about "beauty's power to transfigure people" is immediately undercut by its potential for abuse. Therefore, the implications of private and individual achievements such as using Louisa as an icon of Burmese unity to the wider society share much in common with Nichole Duncan's efforts to "disrupt the understandings of intimate violence as something that is secluded to the private or personal sphere, and instead, demonstrates that intimate violence and state violence cannot be

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disentangled."[61] In a similar vein, intimate conflicts as "localised instances of violence need to be thought as part of a wider assemblage of space . . . connected to wider sites of power."[62] Just as in the junta's tactics to use Louisa's success as a template for national unity in order to win the confidence of the minority, intimate violence consists of "cultural and psychological occupation, just war, and collateral damage."[63] At this juncture, Rachel Pain's observation that "intimate war gains its devastating potential precisely because it does not concern strangers, but people in relationships that are often long term" serves as a bridge to an equally prominent aspect of *Miss Burma*: inherited violence.[64]

Drawing from the Zimbabwean context, Otrude Moyo observes that "violence is inherited when the perpetrators are excused and the victims are blamed for not avoiding violence."[65] This holds true for Louisa's case, as her mother Khin and Benny begin to blame themselves for their association with the dictator's family. Although inherited violence is not directly experienced but implicated, it tends to survive its disappearance from present lives and circumstances. As Moyo further remarks:

> If you are the victim, you are supposed to endure such treatment as perhaps one day you will be able to get back at these who tortured you by torturing others. This is the inherited violence that is structurally entrenched and carried over to the public and private spheres.. . . This is not to say that this is the norm, but people have become accustomed to violence. Outbursts of violence from the state, fellow citizens and institutions of public life have become part of everyday life.[66]

Benny is a specimen of such inherited violence because of his ability to reflect upon his Jewish minority status and the persecution of Karen minorities: the "Burma for Burmans" campaign led by Aung San "for all Benny could see, emphasized the supremacy of the ethnic Burmans, thereby aligning itself with the master-race ideals of the Nazis."[67] As he attempts to reason with the American agent Hatchet, the violence inflicted upon the Karen minority with which he now identifies himself could potentially be redemptive:

> One of the things I've been trying to find out all these years in my journals is whether or not we – in defending our rights with this revolution – have the right to kill. I'll admit to you that I am nowhere near finding my solution. It seems clear enough that violence, murder even of the murderous, is a surrender of a kind, as doomed to end in bitterness as a life of slavery. But have we the right to stand by and watch people be made slaves – to watch them murdered, as through Ne Win's policies, in the most disgusting and undignified ways?[68]

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Like Benny, Khin inherits violence by virtue of her minority position as a Karen, a group that is persecuted by the Japanese for their loyalty to the British. Here, too, Khin's inheritance of violence cannot be separated from the intimacy associated with it, that is, Benny's capturing by the Japanese, and her flight from Rangoon to Karen territory into the arms of insurgents such as Saw Lay, who provide a sanctuary for her and thereby initiate her into the Karen liberation movement. Khin, in turn, lets Louisa literally inherit her revolutionary past, by allowing her daughter to marry *her* lover – Lynton – almost as if passing on the intimate partner as an insurgent to the next generation.

In the context of intimate wars between known enemies, however, Ashis Nandy notes that not all forms of inherited violence are faced with the same odds:

> The first was violence that was direct, open and tinged with legitimacy and authority.... The second was the violence of the weak and the dominated, used to facing violence with overwhelming disadvantages. There is in this second violence a touch of non-targeted rage as well as of desperation, fatalism, and, as the winners of masters of the world would have it, cowardliness. This violence is often a fantasy rather than an intervention in the real world, a response to the first kind of violence rather than a cause of justification for it.[69]

Lynton becomes particularly weary of these unequal odds of violence inherited by the weaker groups, and for this very reason, against the will and wishes of his community, he favors the route of a peace agreement with the enemy as opposed to all-out insurgency:

> "We are a peaceful, conciliatory people," he said, taking the canteen back. "It's true we've been betrayed, that we had reason to rise up. But does that mean we should give in to endless war?"
>
> "I don't believe in peoples or nations," she found herself abruptly, emotionally answering. He turned to her with surprise, and, in fact, she had surprised herself with the radical thought. Something about the death of their child had led her here, to this feeling that it was wrong for anyone to claim exclusive rights to a corner of the earth – wrong for no other reason than that everyone was passing.... The paradox was that she was suddenly sure that Burma's most beautiful feature was its multiplicity of peoples. "We have to find a way to reconcile," Lynton said gently, in tacit understanding of, if not agreement with, her dangerous assertion. "We must find a way to get over the past."[70]

Despite her initial misgivings for the federal solution, Louisa momentarily relents, as she literally inherits Lynton's leadership as well as vision for the

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future of the Karen people: "'if Lynton is responsible for the Karen Union dissolving, I will believe it is the best thing.'"[71] Yet, given the intimacy of political violence, Louisa cannot resist the possibility of vengeance:

> One instant she had the evil fantasy of surprising the Burmans who had shot at Lynton, surprising them in their beds with a volley of shots from her own rifle.. . . Who will we be from now on? She seemed to be asking herself. Shall we be described as the crystallization of revolution, too? Shall we be defined by hatred and suspicion and contempt, absolved by righteousness and a bloody thirst for revenge?[72]

Despite the nobility of their vision, both Lynton's and Louisa's move away from nativism, purity, and exclusive rights and toward a hybrid construction of identities as their vision of a pluralist Burma is not entirely unproblematic, given their own inheritance of the rhetorics of anticolonial violence. Moreover, the problems of pluralism, ethnic insurgencies, and the desire for federalism are essentially tied to the mythical unity of Burma, the idea of having to live as intimate enemies under *one* national roof. As such, Lynton's and Louisa's penchant for federalism comes too close to the rhetoric of Ne Win's campaign for the unity and oneness of Burma, modeled after Aung San's anticolonial rhetoric of a unified Burma, as if reinstating Rachel Pain's assertion that the victims of intimate violence often "feel love for the perpetrator."[73] Pain's observation proves particularly relevant in the context of Craig's novel, as it exposes the fangs of the perpetrator whom Lynton blindly trusts: Ne Win's henchmen, who lure him into a trap under the auspices of peace talks and ruthlessly murder him. Louisa's decision to lead the insurgency, as an act of both intimate war and political vengeance, can thus be read as resistance, if not a countermeasure, to what Henry Giroux terms "familiar violence that occurs daily [and] is barely recognized, becoming, if not boring, then relegated to the realm of the unnoticed and unnoticeable."[74] It is through this very subversive act of *returning to*, thereby *resignifying* violence, that insurgent violence is intimated by its inheritance, as in Benny's reflection that "their [the insurgents'] ruthlessness seemed to come indistinctly from the same source as the Burman nationalism now taking the country by storm, claiming anticolonialism as its cause."[75] While documenting the violence that was infiltrated into the intimate realm of the civic life in the aftermath of the coup, these novels lay bare the internal displacement, exile, and abandonment that, in turn, fuel insurgency violence. The clash of inherited, familiar, and intimate violence between the insurgents, liberators, and nation builders is taken to another level in Wendy Law-Yone's

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*Irrawaddy Tango*, where the protagonist, a celebrity tango dancer who much resembles Louisa, marries the dictator, if only to kill him, thereby unraveling the inextricable relationship between intimacy, affects, and insurgency as personal acts of violence laden with (counter) sovereign desires.

## Intimate Sovereignty? Affective In/Justice in Wendy Law-Yone's *Irrawaddy Tango*

Featuring female protagonists who are displaced either from their families, from their homeland, or even from their own bodies, Wendy Law-Yone's novels deal with matters of carceral power, affect, intimacy, resilience, and rebellion. *Irrawaddy Tango* perhaps best exemplifies all these signature themes of the author and is set in a fictional country called Daya (allegorical Burma) ruled by a ruthless dictator called Supremo. The protagonist, who goes by the name of Tango, eventually marries the dictator, sleeps with the leader of the rebel army when abducted, finds herself in forced exile in Thailand and then in America, and returns to Daya to kill Supremo during an intimate sexual encounter. Caught in the crossfire between two powerful men – the rebel leader Boyan of the Jesu Liberation Army and the Supremo of Daya – Tango becomes an affective anchor of sovereign desires that are mediated through intimate acts of romance, sex, and, as this reading reveals, Tango's quest for affective justice. Toward the end of the novel, a cathartic closure between the intimate, affective, and sovereign realms is brought into existence by Tango's vengeful murder of Supremo:

> The Lion of Daya, good and dead now, at long last: the tenacious martinet who for so long had refused to step down and refused to die. And I was the one finally who'd done the deed. *Sic semper tyrannis*. If ever death seemed meet and just, it was his. Killing him was as necessary as putting a wounded man-eater out of its misery once and for all: a service to the terrorized and a service to the beast.[76]

Tango did what no one could do precisely because she was intimate enough to do it. Although Tango's confession above is suggestive of her insurrectional act of restoring the first order of injustice – structural injustice – the rest of the narrative is dedicated to the restoration of the second order of injustice, that is, Tango's fight for affective, intimate, yet cathartic justice that unfolds deep within the fractures and fissures of Dayan society.

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The novel opens with Tango's return from the United States and switches immediately to the lazy backwaters of the Irrawaddy, a puzzling small town of cosmopolitan proportions – named after the eponymous river – frequented by French piano teachers, Portuguese Goans with a penchant for tango, and greedy but tasteful Indian entrepreneurs who invest in musicals and dance performances. To one's surprise, in the entire section of the novel that narrates the vibrant neighbor of Tango, there is hardly an inkling of the tragedy looming large in the outer rims of the town: Supremo's rule of Daya with an iron first, or the trouble with the Jesu insurgents a stone's throw away. Conversely, the opening chapter is deeply invested in the artistic, affective, and political freedoms enjoyed by the small-town cosmopolitans of Irrawaddy in which Tango is surrounded by a group of idiosyncratic neighbors who are obsessed with gossip, gramophones, transistor radios, Argentinian tango, piano lessons, and bandoneon music. Carlos, the son of a Portuguese settler couple from Goa, spots Tango's talent and begins to train her in the great Argentinian tradition. What becomes an aesthetic bond (not necessarily a romantic one) between the two takes an affective turn at their first public performance: "I wasn't pulled by invisible strings; I was guided and wooed by a partner who strode and leapt as one with me. A partner for whom I could swivel or twist away in seeming pique but could still trust to sweep me off my feet."[77]

The metaphorical cues of this passages serve as a guiding post to Tango's quest for affective justice through what I call intimate sovereignty in the remainder of the narrative. In tune with Tango's involuntary, uninhibited pull toward her aesthetic freedoms choreographed by the "invisible strings" of her partner, I read intimate sovereignty as a site of agency where affective and political sovereignties converge. However, for Amia Srinivasan, structural or political injustice "need not be accompanied by affective injustice" because being able to express one's anger about "some first-order of injustice" could make one feel better and even help one make better political decisions.[78] Tango's case proves particularly challenging given her romantic involvement with two men in power: a dictator and a rebel. However, as Srinivasan rightly surmises, the task of affective justice is *not* to make the oppressed subject feel slightly better, but to make a transformative impact on structural injustice, even if it takes a violent response. Srinivasan invokes the case of Achilles only to shun it:

> If there were no anger, there would be no Achilles: no men to risk their lives, defend honour, and punish wrongdoing. . . . But for the Aristotelians and Stoics alike, the question "ought one ever get angry?" was implicitly

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> understood to be about the powerful: free, wealthy men, with the capacity for unchecked violence. The question was whether such men should make themselves into a new kind of man, with the power of a civic ruler rather than a tribal warrior, but powerful nonetheless. It was simply taken for granted that women and slaves had no business getting angry; the debate about anger was never about them.[79]

Thus, for Srinivasan, the principle of justice accorded to the anger and rage of the stoic men of Western mythologies should equally be applicable to "slaves and women who have the power of neither the state nor the sword."[80] The protagonist of *Irrawaddy Tango* is an exemplar of this thesis who weaponizes her intimate anger and directs it toward sovereign ends. Curiously enough, the affective injustice in *Irrawaddy Tango* begins with a glaring disconnect in the narrative from the lazy, placid neighborhoods of a small town and the violent world of the Supremo. Burma is, and has always been, a nation of extreme political interruptions by various colonizers, dictators, and ethnic-national insurgencies. These are reflected in the jarring narrative disjunctures in the literature: the displacement of Louisa from her vibrant social life into the elite circles of Burma following her newfound fame in *Miss Burma*, the rift between the "golden era" under the British and the Burman dominance as reminisced about by Thwe's tribal ancestors in *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, and the glaring rift between Tango's life in the backwaters of the Irrawaddy and the carceral den of the Supremo. Like Louisa, Tango draws the attention of the Supremo at a public performance, and, almost uncannily, she anticipates her fate in her most intimate moment with Carlos: "I felt a rush of affection for the tango, a dance that allowed me to stand up straight and tall. *It did not oblige me to crouch as if in pain, as if my back had just been broken*."[81] Tango's emphasis of her affective freedoms with the use of negative imagination provides an intuitive narrative clue to what is to come: broken back, crouching postures, and dynamo (electrocution) treatment. Like the unceremonious arrival of Supremo into Tango's life, her new role as the wife of the country's leader is welcomed by literally choking all her affective freedoms formative to her life as a Tango dancer:

> He was of two minds about the way he perceived my effect on men too. "I've got the most beautiful wife in the world" he'd boast when we were alone.. . . Then he'd have my neck in a stranglehold, accusing, demanding and threatening. "I saw the way that American son of a bitch had his big hand on your flesh, there where the back of your waist was bare. Did it feel good?. . . Did you feel that nerve running down the center of your crotch swelling and twitching?"[82]

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From a tango dancer swiveling and twisting away with her graceful partner, Tango is reduced to counting the moles on Supremo's body. The loss of her affective liberties in her imprisoned luxury is accentuated by Tango's proximity to Supremo's bizarre, at times grotesque fetishes: caged tigers in the palace, shooting street dogs in Daya, and infiltrating the farmers to keep a pulse on insurgent activity in the countryside. Supremo's paranoia is not entirely unwarranted: it would prove proleptic when Tango is abducted by a rebel group known as the Jesu Liberation Army, demanding the release of their comrades in exchange for Tango's freedom. The Supremo relents, and eventually abandons Tango to the rebels, a situation Tango describes, in the parlance of affective injustice, as falling "into a pit of loneliness so deep, so black, so airless I could scarcely breathe. *I must not suffocate. I must breathe. I must get out of this pit – pull myself out by the hair, if necessary*."[83]

It is this paradoxical gesture of pulling herself by her hair, if necessary, in order to restitute her state of affective injustice that provides a metaphorical cue to Tango's incarnation as an insurgent leader, "a Rebel Queen," in the footsteps of the rebel leader Boyan, who becomes both her lover and her political mentor. Tango's entanglement with Boyan becomes a moot point in her life trajectory, where affective desires come to converge upon sovereign ambitions. After the killing of Boyan by the Burmese army, Tango recounts her moment of epiphany in a conversation with the rebel:

> "I'll tell you something about freedom," he'd said. "I've known what it is to be 'free.'. . . One person's liberty – the little choices in the course of a day about what you eat, what you wear, which friend you'll visit, which bioscope you'll see – the kind of freedom counts for very little if there is no purpose, no meaning to the choices. That kind of freedom even becomes a burden and leaves you empty. But when you're part of something bigger than yourself, a purpose bigger than your own single life, you feel free in a different way – even in worse straits, with fewer choices."
>
> "I know what is not to have a choice," I had said.
>
> "You still don't understand. That's just you. Just one person. One unlucky person. I'm talking about a whole race not having a choice."[84]

As if heeding Boyan's wisdom about the impenetrable romance between the personal and the political, the singular and the social, the affective and the sovereign, the *burden* of the personal and a *bigger purpose* of the collective, Tango marches forward into the insurgency, only to be captured by the Burmese military after a short stint with the rebels. Following her capture, Tango is locked up in a zoo in Supremo's palace, which is now a

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sophisticated torture chamber. The affective assaults thrust upon the captives of this facility, which is rightly called "the zoo," through carceral terror tears Tango apart:

> You shout and hammer on the door, your bladder, bowels, and lungs at a bursting point, long after it's clear that you can end up in a model jail with access to zithers, xylophones, and weight-lifting facilities, but not to a latrine. Yet even when it becomes unbearable, and – eyes stinging, cramps shooting through the gut – you let go, you still hold on to some little show of neatness.[85]

Apropos Srinivasan, affective injustice does not necessarily lie in the anger and rage evoked by the use of violence, but in the denial of emotional responses to such violence to the violated subject. For Tango, then, it is the pretense of human dignity and decency, "some little show of neatness" in the face of carceral terror, that bespeaks of the injustice visited upon the affective constitution of her being. Yet it is in those moments of extreme carceral terror that her thoughts stray toward power: "a resource I had so brazenly denounced."[86] Tango soon realizes that the only way she can break the spell of her suffering is by reclaiming that very denounced resource. Soon after her rescue from the zoo – thanks to Lawrence, a former military man and a supporter of the Jesu cause – Tango moves to the Thai border, where she discovers what jungle life has done to her:

> The Perennial fire! Some or other was always burning something or other in some way or other.... I used to be able to tell when the burnings involved human settlements. The smoke was different: dark brown over smoldering villages, gray over mere foliage. But brown or gray, that sight of smoke over jungle brought home once more a sense of inescapable strife. Impossible to imagine jungle without war. What an idea! As absurd as a jungle without ambush. The terrain was meant for ambush, earmarked for it – as I well know.[87]

Although Tango is no longer an active insurgent, she becomes an embodiment of insurgency with an uncanny knack for smelling death, an instinct to attack, or an urge to ambush at the mere sight of the jungle. Unable to bear the proximity of her demons, Tango convinces Lawrence to migrate to the United States, where she finds temporary solace in the company of other Dayan political exiles. The more Tango tries to distance herself from the objects of her affective injustice – the jungles, the militants, the Jesu insurgents, the Thai border – the more she realizes the need to salvage herself from her pent-up anger and rage. On one particular occasion, she does so symbolically by freeing a gibbon presented by Lawrence, shortly before they migrate to the United States:

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> "I'm like that gibbon. You could have loosened her string, given her more rope, let her roam. But if I hadn't cut her lose, she still wouldn't have been free. I'm not free, Lawrence, can't you understand that? I'm too close to that terrible place to be free."[88]

Though Tango's urge for affective liberation becomes her single-most obsession, she soon comes to realize that rather than feeling "that terrible place" that is "too close" to her, she must confront her own demons. Surrounded by her compatriots in America, Tango finds herself pitying their ways of dealing with affective injustices: by turning to therapists and public displays of their traumas and pains in the presence of an audience on television:

> Accompanying it all, the exhortation to feel, feel, feel. What did it feel like then? How does it feel now? Allow yourself to feel. All feelings are valid. Acknowledge the feelings. Above all share every feeling, every little suspicion or hint of a feeling. Leave no feelings unearthed, unfelt. Trust the feeling. Feeling is all. All feelings – I once heard – are "on schedule."[89]

Such staged catharsis of one's pains and sufferings, Tango infers, referring to a fellow Dayan named Sonny, is "unable to get across the merest hint of his experiences, able only to express solidarity with the Turd World, his entire history neutralized, trivialized in one sound bite."[90] Fearing that one day her turn would come, Tango defends her right to remain faithful to her steadfastness: "I didn't want to be rehabilitated; I didn't want to be healed. I wasn't drawn to therapy to find out why I was wounded and angry. I knew why I was wounded and angry; and it was my right, and in some way my salvation, to hold on to that wound, that anger."[91]

It is at this very juncture of affective stasis that the notion of affective justice finds a renewed significance: "After all, it is possible that getting aptly angry about some first-order injustice would actually improve one's situation."[92] The opposite, however, is equally true. Sometimes it is only by correcting the first-order of injustice that one could appease one's anger and rage. Although in Tango's case, holding on to that anger *does* improve her situation rather than trivializing it, thymotic desires such as rage and anger "can be a force not just of cathartic purification from holding a grudge and reestablish sovereignty, but also a major tool for creating justice and gaining power of the oppressed."[93] Seen this way, Tango's right to feel angry cannot be an end in itself in order for it to be transformative: "Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. . . . Anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification."[94]

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Audre Lorde's views are well in tune with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s caveat, aimed at Malcolm X, that expressing danger and despair without a vision for an alternative "can reap nothing but grief."[95] Tango suffers from such paralyzing grief, in many respects, before arriving at the knowledge and realization to act. She reflects on this affective paralysis among her fellow Dayans, waiting for something or someone else to act, before they could take matters into their own hands: "So, yes, we're on hard times, dreadful times, but why bestir ourselves?... Let's just dream a little meanwhile and go on hatching our grand plans for those better times to come."[96] As if translating the right to feel angry into the right conditions to rebel, Tango draws an allegorical comparison between the affective paralysis of the Dayans with those of trapped insects:

> I watched a column of black caterpillars climb into the pot. Following their leader, the insects had reached the rim and were making an endless circuit round and round the lip. Not for minutes, not for hours, but for days they circled the pot, unable to break out their roundabout, even after collapsing periodically; even after – at long last – one member would actually strike out on its own. In the end every adventurer returned to fall back in step with the column. And on went the march – an endless looping of the loop by witless troops who'd lost their leader but were simply unable to abandon their path.[97]

As an outside observer of these failed attempts at liberation, Tango, as it were, takes it upon herself to lead this caterpillar revolution and returns to Daya when an opportunity presents itself: the Supremo invites Tango to come to live her life freely with him when the state astrologers and numerologists advise him that not doing so would cause a misalignment of his stars, which could end his reign. Tango returns to the Supremo's palace, past the zoo, past the torture chambers, and enters straight into his bedroom to wait for an intimate moment to strike:

> I sucked; I licked; I blew.
> "Oh!" he croaked. "Ah!" he crooned.
> "I'm finished!" He shouted at last. "O my God, I'm finished . . .!"

Tango literally finishes him off at that very intimate, orgasmic moment: she bends over and reaches for a heavy fan and strikes several deadly blows on his head: "I'd killed the beast out of revenge – nothing but revenge. Had I really done the state some service? Had I even succored the beast? Revenge – what a taste is left!"[98] If intimate sovereignty is understood as acts of political liberation channeled through acts of personal vengeance, then Tango is the *agent provocateur* of such emancipatory, albeit

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imaginary, discourse. Although Tango paints this intimate murder as a mere cathartic moment, a corrective measure of her affective injustice, she is fully aware of its implications to sovereign justice, as she proudly proclaims the act as a collective desire of the Dayan people: "a service to the state" and "a service to the terrorized": "I was the one finally who'd done the deed. *Sic semper tyrannis.*"[99] Seen this way, *Irrawaddy Tango* provides a compelling case for conceptions of the "relationship between *feeling* intimate violence and *feeling* political violence."[100] Given that "love, fear, hate, responsibility, duty, care, shame, and pride that victims of intimate violence often feel"[101] are also the feelings that motivate political actors to resort to violence, Rachel Pain makes the audacious claim that both "domestic violence and international war can be understood as intimate war."[102] Pain's notion that "feelings and behaviors" that shape political desires "mimic intimate relations"[103] is more closely examined in the two works of national autobiography discussed below, which, by virtue of their generic conventions, lend deeper insights into the intimate aspects of making and unmaking of sovereign power.

The operational concepts of intimate violence developed through the readings presented above – namely, everyday violence, inherited violence, affective (in)justice, and intimate sovereignty – each make the subaltern underpinnings of insurgency legible by drawing attention to the shared sphere of violence between perpetrators and victims, and by unraveling how the cramped political space in culturally isolated contexts such as Burma immediately connects the private sphere of violence to the political. In tune with the peripheral realism of the Global South, each text featured in this section contains disruptive or disjunctive elements that rally around the everyday lives of the individual characters who strive to derive a political meaning out of their heretic existence. Such disjunctive aspect of postcolonial realism, as Eli Sorensen observes, is often "articulated through the unwanted, mysterious, and accidental, and underneath, the problematic, illegal, and disillusioning."[104]

## From Intimate Violence to Insurgent Sovereignty: Aung San Suu Kyi's *Freedom from Fear* and Pascal Khoo Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts*

If the violence inflicted by the two fictional daughters of Burma, namely, Tango and Louisa, is subject to their intimacy with sovereign figures – be they rebels, dictators, or pretenders to the throne – then the violence incited by the first and real daughter of Burma, namely, Aung San Suu

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Kyi, could be attributed to *her* intimacy with a real-life sovereign figure: her own father as well as the father of the nation, Aung San. Not long before Aung San was seated as the prime minister of Burma, he was regarded by both the colonial powers – the British and the Japanese – as an insurrectionist, a rebel, or an anticolonial revolutionary of maverick proportions given his ability to switch sides to the British in March 1945 when the tide rose against his allies, the Japanese. For the British, yesteryear's rebel and anticolonial insurgent became a peace-maker, or rather a piecemeal-maker of a nation, who would eventually quell ethnic insurgencies by means of counterinsurgency: razing of Karen villages, as Benny reminisces in *Miss Burma*, which led to thousands of deaths among the Karen minority population.[105] Yet Benny's offhand remark that "their [the insurgents'] ruthlessness seemed to come indistinctly from the same source as the Burmese nationalism now taking the country by storm, claiming anticolonialism as its cause,"[106] serves as a guiding statement to the intimacy between the insurgent violence of the rebels and the counterinsurgent violence in the name of Burmese sovereignty. This intimacy of violence at both ends of the spectrum is equally inherited, as Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly declared her love for the "guerrilla action" army built by her father to liberate Burma from imperialism, even in the face of the ongoing persecution of the Rohingya people:

> People don't like me for saying that. There are many who have criticised me for being what they call a poster girl for the army – very flattering to be seen as a poster girl for anything at this time of life – but I think the truth is I am very fond of the army, because I always thought of it as my father's army.[107]

On Suu Kyi's account, such intimate entitlement of a daughter to an insurgent paramilitary force is imposed upon all the mothers and fathers of the nation:

> Parents of Burma
> You must give birth to heroes
> Like *Boh* Aung San . . .
> He will make history
> His deeds will be recorded in annals
> The noble *Boh* Aung San . . .[108]

Like Rolly May's famous remark that "[c]ivilization gets its first flower from the rebel,"[109] the affective, intimate, yet adulatory tropes surrounding the militarist ideology are mythologically grounded in the autobiographical or life narratives of the nation and its makers – most of whom started their careers as rebels. What follows is an account of a clash of two

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such militant modes of narrating the nation: the fraternal or the filial, which critics call national autobiography, and the subaltern and the marginalized, which I call subalter-nation. As the convergence of the intimate sovereignties from opposite ends of the spectrum – subaltern (*From the Land of Green Ghosts*) and fraternal (*Freedom from Fear*) – reveals, it is the ordinary members of society confronting matters of personal injuries, indignations, and intimate injustices as opposed to revolutionary romantics, terrorist outfits, or nationalist ideologues who make the insurgency possible, legible, and credible.

In the national autobiographies of the 1960s, the national hero typically positions himself "within a tightly woven *genealogical network*, that is, to claim pedigree"[110] through an "intertextual network of emulative self-fashioning that is frequently fraternal and filial in nature."[111] As my reading reveals, an affective filter may be added to such emulative self-fashioning given that fraternity and filiation in the nation-building process often unfold through intimate relationships of, say, fathers passing over power to daughters or sons, or wives replacing husbands as the heads of the state: for example, the Gandhis in India, the Sukarnos in Indonesia, the Bhuttos in Pakistan, the Kenyattas in Kenya, the Trudeaus in Canada, the Bushs in the United States, and so forth. Apropos of the leadership traits of national heroes or heroines, the leader's past mirrors the nation's past, as the national autobiographies invariably "function within the nation as documents of – and indeed, by being read as incitements to – the production of citizens of the new nation state."[112]

In tune with the emulative and affective self-fashioning of national autobiography, the very chapter titles – "Inheritance" and "My Father" – of Suu Kyi's treatise are replete with intimacy and possessiveness that override the distinction between the nation and her father. On the surface of *Freedom from Fear*, Suu Kyi maintains a seemingly objective, value-neutral, if not a scholarly tone throughout, but makes frequent yet lengthy authorial interventions into the narrative when describing her father's rise from humble origins: Aung San as someone who had struggled among his more privileged peers to rise up in the ranks of the Young Men's Buddhist Association in the 1920s. Although Suu Kyi is not unaware of her affective privilege, her persistent equation of *her* family with that of the *national* family culminates in what I would call *affective pedagogies* of an assimilable nation in which privilege becomes a quotidian property. For instance, when extending her solidarity to those who fear the Burmese junta, she invokes her own fearlessness as the product of her experience in "free societies," which instilled some sense of bravery in her.[113] On another

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occasion, she calls for inclusiveness of all religions and races in Burma based on her mother's treatment of non-Burmese minorities at her home in Rangoon: "[W]e always had people from various ethnic groups living with us. At that time my mother was working with nurses.... She would invite those from ethnic minorities to stay at our home. I was taught to live closely with people from other ethnic communities."[114] While there is nothing inherently wrong with affective privilege as such, its presumed manifestation as the general condition of Burma or as the norm that ought to be embraced by all Burmans tends to produce nationalist pedagogies that Homi Bhabha describes as "the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of 'the people' or 'the nation' and make them the immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives."[115]

In what Bhabha terms the "advent of the epochal," nationalist pedagogies concoct a historical discourse by "looking to the legitimacy of past generations as supplying cultural autonomy," thereby signifying their "people as an *a priori* historical presence."[116] For Suu Kyi, Buddhism becomes the anchor of such a priori historical presence. In her chapter "Intellectual Life in Burma and India under Colonialism," she goes so far as to equate Buddhism with Burmese ethnicity – "To be Burmese is to be Buddhist" – by distinguishing Buddhists from the Shans, another Buddhist group of Thai ethnic origins, who took up Theravada Buddhism from the Burmese in the sixteenth century.[117] Thus, she portrays the Shans as an integral part of Burma since the reign of King Bayinnaung (1550) and separates them in the same breath as non-Burmese ethnic others who evidently had "taught" the Burmese the dangers brought forth by foreign invasions.[118]

Taken together, the various narrative elements in Suu Kyi's autobiography – from emulative self-fashioning to pedagogic nationalism – forge the means of exclusive sovereignty: a mode of "political power concentrated in the state [which] constitutes an indispensable medium for constructing and shaping large social relations, for establishing, shaping and maintaining all broader and more durable collectivities."[119] In *Freedom from Fear*, this is best exemplified in the latent narrative shift from nation-building to state-building, wherein Suu Kyi envisions re-sovereignization, that is, the reaffirmation of the nation-state order, of an otherwise dysfunctional Burmese state through a calculated infusion of her fraternal heritage, self-image, reinstitution of the military, and Western democratic principles infused with Buddhist values.

Having established Buddhism as the anchor of the Burmese nation, Suu Kyi turns to re-sovereignizing such durable collectivities by nullifying,

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abdicating, or even entirely abrogating the secessionist aspirations of the minorities such as the Kachin, the Karens, and the Shans, who have taken up arms against Burmese dominance since the formal end of colonial rule. She writes:

> On 12 February 1947 an agreement was signed by Chin, Kachin and Shan leaders and by my father as the representative of the Burmese Government. This agreement . . . is a proof that the Union of Burma is based on *voluntary decision* of different ethnic peoples to unite in the building of an independent nation and 12 February is designated as Union Day.[120]

Here, not only does the suggestive emphasis on "voluntary decision" delegitimize the ongoing insurgencies of the Chins, the Kachins, and the Shans as subversive, if not entirely antinational or antisovereign in spirit, but Suu Kyi's invocation of Aung San "as the representative of the Burmese Government" helps reify the foundational sovereignty of the national hero as the ultimate way forward. Furthermore, it forges the means of an exclusive sovereignty infused with Buddhism as the only antidote to insurgent troubles: "the majority of people of Burma are Buddhists . . . the spiritual dimension becomes particularly more important in a struggle in which deeply held convictions and strength of mind are the chief weapons against armed repression."[121]

If Buddhism could be used to purge armed repression, then it is her own nostalgia for her father's foundational sovereignty that could purge the sins of the military regime:

> *Boh* is the official Burmese term for an army lieutenant. But in common parlance a boh is any military officer, a commander, a leader. It was in that sense that the word was applied to officers of the fledgling Burma Independence Army when it first made its appearance on Burmese soil in 1942, vibrant with the hopes of a country poised to realize its dream of freedom. In the febrile, hazardous atmosphere of wartime, heroes were at a premium and every *boh* was seen through a haze of glamour and romance. Foremost among them was Aung San, barely twenty-seven, intense, upright, the very image of the patriotic young commander-in-chief, inspiring poetry and song.[122]

With the benefit of hindsight, it comes as no surprise that Suu Kyi came to power in 2016 with the help of the same army that her father had built, the same army for which she holds such an unabashedly nostalgic affection. Yet, declaring her struggle for a transition from military rule to modern democracy as a "second struggle for national independence,"[123] Suu Kyi's path to re-sovereignizing Burma is paved with conflicting, contradicting, if not incommensurable models of state and state formation, and a "military

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democracy" – a mishmash of popular assembly, elders, and an elective supreme chief – infused with Buddhist values.[124]

Although widely regarded as a champion of democracy in the West, even by the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Suu Kyi's vision of a democratic state is perhaps as convoluted as her father's tainted legacy of militant anticolonialism. In her famous speech at the Shwedagon Pagoda in 1989, Suu Kyi quoted her father in familiar fervor and frequency: "We must make democracy the popular creed. We must try to build up a free Burma in accordance with such a creed."[125] The finest available means for building up such creed, as it were, is the army: the role of the Army in Burma is crucial.[126] A few passages earlier, Suu Kyi invokes her father yet again, as the chief architect of the Burmese Army, which "should be such a force having the honour and respect of the people."[127] Here, Su Kyi's call for bestowing honor and respect are premised on the same principle of ennobling the violence of the armed forces as the mythic violence of nation-building, one that is epitomized in the massacre of the Karen minorities under Aung San's command in 1942.[128]

Yet it is neither the consent nor the free choice of the people, but "honour and respect" for a brand of nostalgic militarism that remains at the heart of Suu Kyi's revisionism of Western democratic models and ideals. Predictably, her advocacy for a refusal of "'materialist," "economically driven," or "developmental" state models[129] could be attributed to the Buddhist virtues of political salvation, as recounted to her by a ninety-year-old Buddhist monk from her father's hometown: "you will be attacked and relieved for honest politics. Lay down your interest in *dukkha* [suffering] and you will gain *sukha* [bliss]."[130] In essence, Suu Kyi's vision of re-sovereignizing Burma through values that embody her own mixed heritage – East and West, military and democracy, freedom and flight – is derivative of authoritarian and anticolonial state apparatuses, and not of the desires and aspirations of the ethnic minorities. This leads to the imposition of an exclusive sovereignty based on affective privilege, and the abstract ideals of body, soul, sympathy, worth, and values that are infused into state policies and institutions in the language of security and safety, in which there is little room for tolerance of dissent, let alone insurgency or conflict.[131]

Much like Suu Kyi's *Freedom from Fear* a decade before, *From the Land of Green Ghosts* is inspired by the winds of political change as well as the suppressed calls for democracy following the nationwide protests against the Burmese regime on August 8, 1988. Although, like Suu Kyi herself, the author of Thwe's autobiography, too, has a fraternal connection – owing much to Thwe's benefactor John Casey, a Cambridge professor,

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who helped him escape Burma and register for an English degree at Caius College – it is a far cry from the filial genealogy and inherited political habitus of Suu Kyi. Written for a global English audience, but from a communal and collective narrative perspective that is characteristic of postcolonial life histories, Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts* refrains from every attempt at self-positioning or individual image-building. In so doing, it repudiates "a unitary Cartesian self, rooted in bourgeois origins," and advocates an identity that is "self decentred and fragmented in time."[132] This decentered and fragmented self is evident in Thwe's contrived use of sequestered nouns throughout the book – rather than the names or ranks of individuals – that are presented as chapter titles: "Death of a Footballer," "Death of an Animist," "Death of a Priest," and "Hunters and the Hunted."

In an equally acerbic manner, Thwe introduces himself not in first-person singular, but first-person plural: "we were Padaung, we were Catholics and we seemed to live in a world of our own, with our ceremonies and traditions. The sense of security showed me that we lived in a paradise."[133] Here, Thwe's immersion in the communal collective is enabled not only by his frequent use of first-person plural but, more importantly, by an insurrectional narrative mode that tampers with other autobiographical forms: testimonial's witness narration and memoir's nostalgia. For instance, while distancing himself from the perceived foreign or immigrant threat, which, in Suu Kyi's account, was orchestrated by British colonialism, Thwe writes:

> My grandparents would tell me of a golden age, the age of the rule by the British in Burma. I had no real idea of what the British were or what their rule had been – just the feeling that their departure was regretted. We were prosperous under the British, but when they went they took the prosperity with them.[134]

Of course, we cannot simply take such blatant endorsement of the colonizer's good will as given, but we also cannot deny its narrative valance and presence either, one that not only countervails the sort of anticolonialism that is necessary for Suu Kyi to build the heroic image of her father, but goes on to question the very moment of nation-making as well as its narrative-making. In what could be described as an *emulation* of Suu Kyi's own emulative self-fashioning through her father, Thwe goes on to incite his grandmother's disconcerting remark that the "Burmans and Japanese bring nothing to us but war and destruction,"[135] putting the latter on the same pedestal as the colonizer.

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In their penchant for subversion and subalter-nation, both Thwe's sources and self-construction unfold through an ethical bind to the collective. The political solitude, as it were, allows the isolated individual to immediately connect their predicament to the collective, while renouncing the self-image, self-imposition, and all other attempts at realizing the self against the collective. Every major move in Thwe's life trajectory courses through a series of discoveries and encounters with another ethnic group, such as the Karen teacher who initiated him into the secular system, the Shan farmers who taught them (the Padaung) wet-land cultivation (they were slash and burn farmers prior to that), the Kachin rebels who saved his comrades from the Burmans, and the "wild Kayahs" in Karen territories who saved them from hunger.[136] Such communal bonding through the re-*membering* of *other* communities in(to) the non-national realm of the Padaung effectively foregrounds subalter-nation as an insurrectional narrative mode that, as Edward Said describes in the context of the Lebanese civil war, "exists largely as a form recording its own impossibility, shading off or breaking into autobiography . . . reportage, pastiche, or apparently authorless discourse."[137] In Thwe's case, his constant wavering between a first-person singular and a plural address, between seeing and showing, and witnessing and wandering, and his vision for a subalter-nation pose an insurrectional challenge to the irremissibility of self-fashioning, self-positioning, and the monolithic construction of Burmese sovereignty. Recounting his visit to Mandalay for the first time, Thwe writes: "I felt like a messenger to the world of the dead, because to the Padaung, as to many of the hill peoples, Central Burma is an alien land, the abode of evil spirits, green ghosts and the like – not to mention the Burmans themselves, whom we regarded almost without exception as liars, cheaters and Machiavellian schemers."[138]

In an erstwhile first encounter, Thwe describes his own coming of age in the remote jungle village of Phekon and his innocent discovery, through his Karen Baptist teacher, of Ne Win, whom he describes as: "the beneficent, far-seeing ruler of Burma. In the classroom, we also bowed every day to the portrait of the General, so I began to feel he must be some sort of God or religious figure."[139] This remark registers not merely as a confession of Thwe's baleful ignorance of his own citizenship or civic status, or of the figurehead of his nation-state, but, more importantly, as an ontic insurrection enabled by the epistemic violence that fosters such ignorance – from the historical treatment of the so-called frontier tribes as "fringe subjects" to the outright denial of their very existence – which opens up space for performative nationalism and insurgent secessionism.

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If pedagogic nationalism constructs "epochal time" to signify the "*a priori* historical presence" of a foundational community, Bhabha's "emphasis on the temporal dimension in the inscription of these political entities – that are also potent symbolic and affective sources of cultural identity – serves to displace the historicism that has dominated discussions of the nation as a cultural force."[140] If pedagogic nationalism is "the *langue* of the law," Bhabha affirms, performative nationalism is "the *parole* of the people,"[141] one that constantly interrupts, resists, reconstitutes, and even re-*restitutes* the former. And as Edward Said notes in the context of Palestine, conditions of statelessness, that is, fractures within the national and social imagination, generate narratives of "rejection, drift, errance, uncertainty."[142]

Rejecting Suu Kyi's claim concerning the "voluntary" inclusion of ethnic minorities in the Union of Burma, in an almost identical chapter to Suu Kyi's "Inheritance" where Thwe remarks on his own tribal inheritance as follows:

> The independence constitution of Burma stipulated that after ten years the minority states that existed at the time of independence – the Shan and Karenni States – would have the legal right to secede from the Union of Burma. (States that were created at or after independence – the Kachin, Karen, Mon, Chin, and Arakan States did not have the right. But many of them – especially those which had not been ruled directly from Rangoon during the British period – desired autonomy, if not full independence.)[143]

Thwe's depiction of the minorities' sovereign and secessionist ambitions goes to the crux of Suu Kyi's derivative anticolonialism, and its attendant nationalist pedagogy forged through Buddhist bonds: "Burmese nationalism began to gather strength again in the 1920s . . . as a movement to keep the Buddhist religion pure in the face of foreign influence."[144] Such purity, Suu Kyi affirms, is the kernel "of mutual understanding and tolerance" with which "*the other people* could also learn to live in harmony."[145] In challenging this presumed assimilability of "the other people" into the Union of Burma, Thwe turns his rejection of Suu Kyi's sovereignty into a full-fledged subversion:

> Catholicism had given a new identity to the Padaung, one that inevitably had political overtones. We looked up to the Pope as our leader, rather than to General Ne Win. Our religion at last placed us on terms of equality with the other peoples of Burma, and gave us a culture equal to that of Buddhism.[146]

The performative subversion produced by Catholicism not only undercuts the nationalist pedagogy of Buddhism, but, in so doing, reveals the insurrectional underpinnings of a sovereignty that is inevitably subaltern:

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> For us teenage, hill-tribe Catholics, becoming a saint meant doing beautiful and heroic deeds that would be recorded in books of hagiography. Especially heroic would be the conversion of the heathen, which merged, in my mind, with standing up for our own tribe against the dominant Burmans.[147]

By way of pressing his narrative performance of standing up for his tribe against the dominant Burmans into insurgent action, Thwe revisits the insurgent origins of the very state formation of the sovereign Union of Burma:

> When the Japanese Imperial Army invaded Burma in 1942 with the help of Burmese nationalists, and welcomed by much of the Burmese population, most of the hill peoples (with some exceptions, such as a section of the Shans) fought on the side of the British. The minority people had always regarded the British as their protectors, and the loyalty of the Padaung, the Karenni and Karens was intense. When the "Chindits" of General Orde Wingate – essentially British guerrilla troops sent from India to harass the Japanese occupiers – began their operations, the Nagas, the Kachins, and the Karens gave them invaluable help, acting as guides and fighting for them.[148]

This passage is worth dwelling on at length not only for its historical significance but for its insurgent anticolonialism that subverts Suu Kyi's portrayal of Aung San's bona fide anticolonialism. In a rare moment of emulative self-fashioning, Thwe invokes his "grandfather and his brothers and friends," who had "fought alongside the British using home-made guns and weapons"[149] to overthrow the very enemy that Aung San had brought home in the first place. It thus comes as no surprise that, in the footsteps of his grandfather, Thwe goes on to pit Christianity against Buddhism, vindicating his desire to join the Karenni insurgents: "I would present myself with all my gifts to the Church, my people and my country. I wanted to become a saint and martyr."[150]

Pursued by the Tatmadaw for his political involvement in the 1988 student demonstrations, Thwe arrives at the rebel camps of the Karenni about whom he had only been given a "sinister picture" as bandits and kidnappers as a child.[151] Though initially reluctant to associate himself with the insurgents, to his surprise, Thwe's discovery of "the poverty stricken," if not an almost abandoned state of minorities no more than twenty miles away from his village, makes him question whether he too has given in to the state propaganda.[152] Along with his fellow students on the run, Thwe joins the Karenni insurgency in the capacity of a student leader, speaker, teacher, and negotiator, which he describes as a collective moment of "being instantly transformed into fighters for the future of the country,

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hardened veterans of the jungle, ready to face the enemy whom only a day before we were fleeing in terror for our lives."[153]

Although Thwe terms the Burmese military as "the enemy," he is careful to avoid the pitfalls of exclusive sovereignty. Instead, Thwe's endorsement of insurgent politics embodies what Hunold and Dryzek call "inclusive sovereignty"[154] in which states invite membership from a broad spectrum, especially from the fringe sections of society: "[They] would no longer always be regarded qua members of particular nation-states. Rather, they would remain sovereign but would compose a more variable and fluid community made up of all those who happen to belong, or who are likely to belong, to the relevant community-at-risk."[155] Sure enough, Thwe's burning desire to topple the Burmese regime is driven by secessionist dreams not only for the Padaung but for other such "communities-at-risk" who, after all, shared Burmese as their "common language," although "they were extremely reluctant to use it (and the Kayah absolutely refused, because of their resentment for the Burmans)."[156]

In a poignant depiction of the inclusive sovereignty of Karenni rebels, one that principally undermines Suu Kyi's vision of exclusive sovereignty, Thwe recounts the vision of a Karenni insurgency as ultimately conciliatory. The violence was necessary, as the Karenni leader reasons, because the enemy's nationalism was "blind." And only when met with that blindness can the enemy understand why the Karennis are fighting the regime, and if, in the long run, a "common cause" with them could be found.[157]

When asked by Thwe whether he still dreams of an independent Karenni state, the leader continues:

> Yes and no. Yes, because I love my people and would dearly wish to see a Karenni state in which the Karenni can run their own affairs without the bullying and corruption from Rangoon. No, because I can see that what we have been waging all these years is not just an ethnic struggle – although we thought it was. We admire what the Burmans have done in the past few months. It has begun to show us that a federal system might be possible after all. We are tired of killing each other.[158]

Although Thwe presents such sovereign ambitions as those of the Karennis and not his own, his complicity with insurgent secessionism is made all the more evident in his testimonial account of the violence inflicted upon the stateless subjects of the subalter-nation: the frontier tribes of Burma. In that sense, like the Karennis, Thwe endorses secessionism not as an exclusive sovereign model but as an inclusive model that forges bonds between and among the minority tribes, in which insurgent violence

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becomes a necessary tool for the ideological defense of their respective claims over national identity territory and sovereignty.

In doing so, Thwe's counternarrative not only helps accentuate the fractures and fault lines in the genre of national autobiography, but also marks the limits of translating nationalist discourses into sovereign ambitions: whereas Suu Kyi portrays Aung San's subversion of colonial authority as a struggle for an independent nation, Thwe portrays the minority's subversion of the Burmese state as a struggle for sovereign autonomy. At this juncture, it may serve us well to capture the moment of Thwe's own foray into Burmese politics:

> My entry into politics was by no means as dramatic as that of Aung San Suu Kyi with her speech at the Shwedagon, which it preceded by a few days. It started with my making a speech at Phekon, standing on a bullock cart on market day in front of a group of peasants and people from the town.. . . Surrounded by a crowd of Padaung, Shan, Pao, Indha, Karens and Karenni – all there for the market day – and speaking in Burmese![159]

While the incommensurable fate of this para-biographical moment is symbolic of the cultural polarity, indigenous diversity, and ethnic insurgencies that have been endemic to the very making of Burma, it also draws our attention to the immense potential of subaltern autobiographies in demarcating the historical, geocultural, and affective coordinates of subalter-nation.

The texts discussed in this chapter represent the disjunctive realities of Burma under its equally disruptive political system, which has given rise to generic contusions and infusions through autobiographical fiction, social realism, and life writing that articulate "contemporary life from a left-wing point of view,"[160] with a penchant for the struggles in the intimate life spheres of the subalterns and the marginalized. The fragmented form of the texts, and the splintered violence represented therein, is further characterized by a rift from the recognized forms of realism to be distinguished from the avant-garde, fabulist, or modernist traditions with a central protagonist. Instead, like Tango's quest to resuscitate the sovereign power of the people of Burma, Than Chit's betrayal to salvage the moral bankruptcy of Burma, or Aung San Suu Kyi's personal plea to give her father's army a second chance just like Louisa's decision to forge an alliance with her arch-rival, it is the individuals who morph themselves into insurgent forces, as in Franz Kafka's anonymous protagonists, and lay bare the narrative to such possibilities that anyone in the social field could subsume

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the role of the hero/heroine. If the individual quest itself becomes a social predicament, then intimate violence, too, exudes into an insurgent force.

From the insurgent nationalism in *Miss Burma* to the opportunist alliances in *Road to Rangoon* and *Irrawaddy Tango* to avenge intimate injustices, and to the affective and inclusive sovereignty in *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, this chapter has uncovered the heuristic functions of violence in holding desperate political agents, actants, and aspirants of the Burmese nation together *and* keeping them separate at the same time. Like the disjointed legs of the violators and the violated, the terrorists or the victims of terrorism as evinced in the story of the Burmese teenage soldier cited in the opening of this chapter serve as symbolic testimony to intimacy of conflicts, enmity, solidarity, and violence in the postcolonial world. Such intimate rupture is the mise-en-scène of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* in which a man is tied to two jeeps and pulled apart, evoking an arresting imagery of violence that is congenital to the two communities and the(ir) respective nations – India and Pakistan – which are not only disjointed at, but are essentially conjoined by, the same severed groin. If the severed legs themselves edify the vernacular violence in the Global South, the world literature that registers the structural violence is the groin from which these severed legs – from Burma to Sri Lanka, and to India and Pakistan – are torn asunder.

## Notes

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2 Mitali Perkins, *Bamboo People* (Watertown: Charlesbridge Publishing, 2010), 260.
3 Moira Fradinger, *Binding Violence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 198.
4 Shruti Kapila, *Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 7.
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10 Ibid., 81.
11 Ibid., 92.

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12 Ibid., 225.
13 Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear* (London: Penguin, 1995), 194–195; emphasis mine.
14 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. R. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 86.
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23 Ibid., 384.
24 Ibid.
25 Fradinger, *Binding Violence*, 247.
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29 Ibid., 394.
30 Ibid.
31 Rachel Pain, "Intimate War," *Political Geography* 44 (2015): 64–73, 67.
32 Pascal Koo Thwe, *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), 158–159.
33 Ibid., 175–176.
34 Ibid., 158–159.
35 Ibid., 241–242, emphasis mine.
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38 Jacky Bouju and Mirijam de Bruijn, "Introduction," in *Ordinary Violence and Social Change in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 9–10.

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42 Ibid., 154.
43 Ibid., 227–228.
44 Ibid., 229.
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46 Sjoberg, "The Terror," 386.
47 Ibid., 389.
48 Cruikshanks, *The Road*, 178–179.
49 Ibid., 182.
50 Ibid., 356–358.
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53 Ibid., 364.
54 Craig, *Miss Burma*, 344.
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70 Craig, *Miss Burma*, 317–318.
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72 Ibid., 348.
73 Pain, "Intimate War," 67.

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