

Technology in the borderlands

Rachel Sharples

Displaced Karen in the borderlands are taking advantage of new technology not only to maintain connections with their homeland but also to inform the international community of human rights violations.

A key connection between the borderlands and homeland is their shared subjection to atrocities arising from military conflict. Displacement has provided opportunities and space to advocate against human rights violations – and this has been facilitated in particular by the presence of international networks and new technology in the borderlands. These have

provided previously unimaginable opportunities to access the international community, including UN mechanisms, sympathetic governments and funding sources. By accessing international networks the Karen are able to appeal to a wider audience while at the same time maintaining a close geographical and emotional attachment to their people and culture. At the same time they have learnt a number of skills – including the ability to negotiate complex global structures and to communicate cross-culturally – which will serve them in an increasingly globalised community.

New technologies such as blogs, websites and multimedia have allowed Karen activists to reach more diverse audiences with targeted messages. In turn, increased knowledge of Karen injustices, whether it is a sympathetic audience or an audience that can equate it with their own experiences, has created networks of solidarity.

Rachel Sharples (sharples.rachel@gmail.com) is a PhD student at RMIT, Melbourne. She is studying how displacement has impacted Karen constructs of identity and culture along the Thai-Burma border.