refugees, does have particular importance in forced migration as another means of simultaneously preserving continuity with the pre-exile past and adjusting to the loss of some of life’s rhythm. Indeed for Karenni refugees, being busy, be it in making things such as textiles or baskets, teaching or cooking, is a key component of mechanisms for coping with displacement.

Secondly, material forms such as photographs can stand for past personal and communal experience and create connections with that past. Many people possess photograph albums, for example, which include images not only of friends and activities in the camp but also of persons and places significant in life before displacement. The value of such artefacts is evident in both their continued existence in the refugee camp and in the ways in which they are kept and frequently engaged with in private or with visitors as a springboard for remembering and re-telling the past.

Thirdly, as well as being an important vehicle for memory and link to the past, photographs and other personal objects, as with building houses in a familiar style and weaving traditional textiles, also enable Karenni refugees partially at least to colonise or possess a new place within which they otherwise feel inadequately at home.

A better understanding of these cultural and material processes would contribute to more effective and sympathetic assistance for refugees.

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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.

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