

Border Precarity: War, Violence, and Post-Coup Refugee Life in Indo- Myanmar Borderlands

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Abstract

In this paper, I introduce and use the concept of the border precarity to examine the Indo-Myanmar borderlands as a way to understand the perpetual state of violence. It draws upon an attempt to understand the violent conditions of the border, not as an event, but as a lived reality which is intergenerational. Violence as such is an enduring phenomenon and remains the norm, and in the context of the military coup in 2021, the Indo-Myanmar borderlands are re-emerging as key sites of violence. Based on an ethnographic fieldwork of refugees fleeing the military coup in the northeastern state of Manipur and Mizoram in India, the paper notes how the lives of ethnic communities in the borderland region are immersed with violence. Ethnographic narratives indicate how the experience of violence is intergenerational and how this experience informs and shapes social relations, ethnic perceptions and identities, political aspirations, and what it means to live an unsettled and uncertain life. Border precarity in this sense aims to capture the long exposure and experience of violence, while also attending to the way in which the lives of ethnic communities are embedded in the history of border-making, colonial and post-colonial state/non-state territorialization projects. Violence produces multiple precarity— precarity of place, precarity of belonging and precarity of life, implicated within violent regimes of exclusion and targeting of the refugees. As violence remade borders, it deepens the already precarious condition of people inhabiting the borders.