

Everyday Life as Epistemic Ground: Research, Risk, and Moral Authority in Today's Chin State

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Abstract

This paper examines how knowledge about Chin State is produced in the midst of protracted civil war. Developed within TheHILLS Myanmar's Chin State Academic Research Network (CSARN), it situates research practice within ongoing violence, displacement, and humanitarian crisis rather than treating these as background conditions. Drawing in part of on Thrice Under Fire and scholarship on everyday life and feminist theory, the paper argues that in conflict settings everyday life is not simply the context of research but part of its epistemic foundation. The analysis reflects on research conducted by Chin and collaborating scholars working at varying distances from the conflict. Some conduct interviews from border regions or exile; others operate from further away yet remain morally and politically entangled through family ties and community expectations; others still operate from even further away with more distant connections. In fragmented conflict environments, researchers often occupy overlapping roles as scholars, kin, and political subjects. Insider status generates access and trust, but it generates also some tensions around loyalty, factional alignment, and potential conflicts of interest. These dynamics shape what can be asked, recorded, interpreted, or what needs to be left unsaid. The argument is further developed through interviews with researchers occupying different positional, geographic, and institutional locations in relation to Chin State. Insider and outsider categories emerge as unstable, while proximity to violence does not neatly determine authority or credibility. Decisions about withholding information can be as significant as decisions to publish. The principle often expressed as "nothing about us without us" is treated here as an important methodological question that is key for research priorities, interpretation, circulation, and accountability.