

**Looking into the Black Zones:
A Study of Life and Hope in Burma**

Sean McGann

Rita Reed, Committee Chair

Abstract

Looking into the Black Zones: A Study of Life and Hope in Burma, examines the historical and personal effects of decades of civil war in Burma.

Since the end of World War II, the assassination of Aung San, and the collapse of the promise of the Panglong Conferences, few of Burma's dozens of ethnic groups have ever shared a common definition of modern Burma. Rather, the tides of occupation set the stage for deep mistrust, resentment, and open violence between the central lowland Bamar, and the ethnic minorities of the frontier areas.

The article is a result of a dozen trips to Burma over four years, and a month spent living in Peing Long and Mae La refugee camps, and the Oo Thu Ta valley. Karen and Shan subjects added personal context to the ongoing conflict between the Tatmadaw and the minority resistance groups with a series of twenty-five in-depth interviews and ten photo-elicitation interviews.

Both methods yielded rich and personal content. In many ways the interviews spoke directly to daily life in rural Burma, with its prevailing lack of education or exposure to life beyond an incredibly local perspective, atrocities, hopes, frustrations, fears, and motivations of people living under a military dictatorship bent on maintaining a unified Burma.