**Dancing in the Shadows: Gesture, Movement and Silence as Resistance Discourse**

**in the Thai-Burma Border-Zone.**

**by Tani Sebro**

We bathe together after dancing in the brilliant sunlight of the open temple courtyard. Bathing is an essential ritual to be performed at least twice a day during the torrid heat of the monsoon season in Upland Southeast Asia. After bathing with the dancers, I lay down on the cool tiles of the schoolhouse floor. The girls giggle and laugh in expectation of the looming festival activities and the evening's performances, before we finally rest our heads to sojourn for an hour, while the sweltering sun sets over the Chiang Mai mountains. When we awake, the room is abuzz with activity. Costumes are laid out and tried on, girls and boys are applying make-up and combing their hair neatly.

It is the eve of Khao Pansaa[[1]](#footnote-1) at a Tai Yai *wat* (temple) in the Chiang Mai province of Northern Thailand. Khao Pansaa marks the beginning of the Theravada Buddhist lent or the monk's rainy season monastic retreat. Tomorrow, the monks will withdraw for 90 days to a temple monastery for deep meditation, and will not be making the morning walk for alms as is usually done throughout the rest of the year. The Tai Yai temple in Chiang Mai celebrates the eve with music, dance, theater, food, tattooing and the selling of Tai Yai goods. Monks now use this time to deepen their studies of *dham* (the Dharma, or the teachings) and refrain from too much outdoor activity, but tonight we are in the liminal stage of the rite before the passage and anything is possible.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and dance training amongst immigrant Tai Yai, also known as Shan, peoples in Northern Thailand, this paper seeks to attend to the various ways in which Tai Yais expressively and performatively articulate resistance to the capturing forces of colonial and state enterprises. Often seen as passive victims or receivers of violence by a number of international relief organizations and non-profit complexes, Tai Yai peoples are nevertheless exceedingly politically and socially active in the Thai-Burma border-zone. Tai Yais who are living clandestinely in Northern Thailand organize effective assemblages that work to uncover rape, violence, coercion, forced relocation and discrimination in the Shan State in Burma. This paper attends to my work as an ethnographer and as a dancer with Tai Yai performance groups, political resistance movements and non-profit organizations in Northern Thailand. I argue that Tai Yai discursive networks and forms of aesthetic expression are highly innovative and effective modes of embodied resistance praxis in the Thai-Burma border-zone.

Discourse is not just language, but expression - just as resistance is not just resentment, but a space of cultural production. I outline three forms of possible resistance expressivity: gesture, movement and silence. I look at gesture as a way of becoming political in the body - a way of moving toward and performing the body politic. Movement is the acting out of political consciousness through the body - where the ambivalent performativity of roles upsets the ordering of governmentality. Silence is the language of the dispossessed, the muzzled rabble whose ideas and language challenge hegemony. Silence is the space where movement takes primacy in politics, where political gesturing becomes possible in the shadows of the deafening discourses of the state. Silence is not consent; it is the smooth space from whence new worlds are made possible through bodies in synchronous movement.

What William McNeill (2009) calls "muscular bonding," describes the process of embodying the nation through synchronous movement. For McNeill, the drills and dances of nations and armies serve, as the repeated making of an *esprit de corps*, whereby the resonance created by rhythmic movement becomes the habitus of the collective. We see this phenomenon across cultures and throughout much of human history: particularly in the military, where it is learned early that moving in tact made for a more resilient and effective fighting machine. Where language falls short due to its boundedness, its finite significations, movement is the expressivity of the body politic. The body inhabits smooth space, whereas language is striation, the body is expansive and flighty, whereas language creates edges and parameters. For McNeill, though language is a medium of creativity and meaning making, language is also a destructive vehicle: "Words, in a sense, destroy what they purport to describe because they limit and define (...)" (McNeill 2009:2). Marching, moving, singing and dancing, produce alternate affects, what Deleuze and Guattari call "a block of sensations," or "a compound of percepts and affects" (1996:164). For clandestine and exiled bodies, language and discourse belongs to the realm of exclusion in defining identity and in determining geographic belonging.

The Tai Yai peoples are a nation in exile, living in the interstitial borderlands of the Thai-Burma border zone. In the shadow of a belligerent Burmese state that has occupied the traditional Shan State in Northeastern Burma, and in Thailand, where many Tai Yai peoples have fled in order to seek reprieve from violence and poverty. Few peoples have experienced the kinds of suffering the peoples residing in the territory that makes up what the British Raj designated as "Burma" after the violent invasion of their lands in the wake of the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824. A kingdom overthrown at the hands of avaricious teak traders, eager to make masters of themselves in this backwater of the world. What followed was nearly two centuries of oppressive colonial rule, successive military dictatorships, ethnic rebellions, and deadly wars. The suffering persist now in Burma's many "shadow economies," amongst laborers in mines and factories, military porters, child soldiers, and amongst the millions of migrant laborers who have fled to neighboring Thailand.

# In *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, Partha Chatterjee (2006), echoing Benedict Anderson (1983), reflects on the making and maintenance of nations as temporal zones within which the nation exists in "homogenous empty time." A discussion of the nation and its becomings cannot be understood beyond a consideration of the will of the nation to accumulate capital in what it deems "modern time":

# It is the same simultaneity experienced in homogeneous empty time that allows us to speak of the reality of such categories of political economy as prices, wages, markets, and so on. Empty homogeneous time is the time of capital. Within its domain, capital allows for no resistance to its free movement. When it encounters an impediment, it thinks it has encountered another time—something out of pre-capital, something that belongs to the pre-modern (Chatterjee 2006:5).

# The enactment of Tai Yai dance, song, and culture, as it is practiced by illegal immigrants in sacred temple spaces, presents a nonviolent alterity to the homogenizing forces of temporal governmentality. The clandestine body, deemed illegal by the state, and superfluous by capital, creates space for aesthetic expression only by maintaining heterogeneous time. The state machines of capture deem this anachronism as being out of time and out of place, but the Tai Yai peoples dance on while in waiting for their opportunity to claim a time during which they are sovereign unto themselves.

**Gesture**

In Erin Manning's (2007) *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty,* she attends to the political worlds made possible through dance, movement and gesture.

The world of choreological politics may be understood through what she calls 'the politics of touch' - "a notion of politics that is produced as a means without an end, a potentiality rather than an actuality, [through which] we can begin to defy the constriction of time and space straightjacketed by the nation-state" (Manning 2007:6). Dance is gestural politics reaching toward new becomings - becomings beyond the extensions of national time. Tai Yai dance is a dance of repeating gestures echoing the history of their becoming as a people. Their continued gesturing is not the practice of a people out of time hoping to cling to their traditions in the face of modernity - it is the gesturing towards a future becoming made possible through the body.

Where language falls short in creating the conditions of possibility for new becomings, dance is the resounding silence that gestures on in the shadows. Dance and movement belongs to the realm of the extra-textual, a space where we may "imagine a politics that exceeds a state-centered governmentality [which] necessitates a vocabulary that resists and subverts the language of the state" (Manning 2007:7). For Manning, Tango is the transnational dance of passions and affect, it "is the politics of the unwritten, yet the palimpsest on which everything political aspires already to have been written. It is the voice of the immigrant displaced through movement. It is the movement of the stranger, echoing in the distant resonance of a music that has any times crossed the world" (Manning 2007:3).

As Benedict Anderson (1983) so famously has made us aware, it is the advent of the print-press, the textual dimension of public life that enables the becomings of a public, and in turn various manifestations of nationalisms. Dance represents a form of non-textual nationalism, what I would like to call expressive nationalism - one that does not attempt to capture, or exclude, but that simply expresses. Tango may become a form of Argentinian nationalism, but it does not capture or exclude bodies from its performance the way language does. Its extra-textuality leaves it open to abstraction, reinterpretation and play. This allows for a rigid, more formalized Finnish Tango, versus an improvisational and passionate Argentine Tango (Manning 2007).

Tai Yai dance in the border-zone represents an ephemeral organic nationalism that makes possible group cohesion without ethnocentric aspirations. Dance is the nonviolent language of the subaltern - a language of joy and pure expression beyond the textcentric formulations of the nation-state. Gyatri Spivak (1988) so famously challenges Deleuzian, Foucauldian and Subaltern Studies intellectuals with the question of "can the Subaltern speak?" No, she cautions, not within the current paradigm of state-centric theory, where power and desires are the engines of actors and the means through which we re-present the subaltern body. But can she dance? Where words fail, perhaps movement begins. Words attempt to re-present, whereas movement expresses. Can we form a notion of the body politic as bodies in movement, a body that is not simply an extension of the mind, but the habitus of history presenced in the flesh?

Gesturings that escape state-level capture belong more closely to dance than language, marching or even song. Dance finds its becoming in the "body without organs" - the non-linear and non-hierarchically structured corporality of an expressive form:

I then examine the counterpart to the organism, the anorganic or nonorganismically ordered body, the "Body without Organs" (BwO). A body whose organs have escaped the constraints of the organism that previously integrated their functions and are now free to experiment with novel orderings. These experiments will be perhaps "reterritorialized" to produce another organism-one that functions properly in a hierarchical politics or they may produce an immanently ordered body that functions in a new, self-organized, and democratic social system. But such experimentation is not guaranteed success: fascism is an ever-present danger to capitalist bodies politic on all three compositional scales: personal, group, and civic (Protevi 2009:89).

The body without organs is the relationship one has to one's own body as well as other bodies, in which there is no longer a 'self', but rather what Deleuze calls "a life," where "there are no longer any forms or developments of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects. There is no structure, any more than there is genesis" (2005:27). To escape the rigidity of social ordering, role experimentation with one's body, its movements, its relationality to the world makes possible new becomings - or lines of flight. For Protevi (2009), these orderings may occur in personal, group or civic scales, yet their compositional and temporal whole across scales make up the bodies politic.

Dance across temporal and compositional scales sets as its goal affective becomings. For Foucault there is power in becoming, and where there is power there is resistance. Resistance is understood, in one sense, as the critical objection to ways of being governed and controlled, but it also evokes the ability to persevere and overcome. Resistance is intimately linked to power - we are moved by the intensities of power and we resist power relations that attempt to make us docile. I prefer to see resistance as not that oppositional force to power relations, nor a place where agency simply becomes possible, but more closely to what Deleuze calls a "line of flight." In dance, lines of flight are historical becomings made corporal in the temporal space of the body. The body affects and is the affector of lines flight. Dance, movement and silence are the gesturings made visible during the continuous makings of historical lines of flight.

**Movement**

While visiting a Tai Yai wat (temple) in Chiang Mai, I met the Venerable Len Pa, a monk in his late twenties, whose life has been marred by the trials of forced migration and injustice.[[2]](#footnote-2) At the age of sixteen, his parents and siblings were all killed by the Burmese military. Len Pa was living in the Shan State of Burma - a disputed territory that the Shan rebel armies have fought to protect from the control of the Burmese military. The military routinely invades the state, taking land away from farmers for opium cultivation or burning villages where they think anti-government dissent is brewing. Len Pa's family was involved in anti-government activities and they were shown no mercy.

Without family and fearful for his fate if he chose to remain in Burma, the sixteen-year-old Len Pa decided to take the long journey to the Thai border. He walked for two months, eating leaves and forest creatures in the mountainous jungles upland Southeast Asia. The first time he arrived in Thailand he was caught by the Thai police and sent back to the border. But Len Pa persisted and tried again. The second time he entered Thailand, he was able to cross the border unnoticed. But life "on the other side" proved difficult as well. Len Pa tried his luck at finding any job he could get in Thailand, but could find nothing consistent enough to make sure he had shelter and enough food to eat. Finally, exhausted, demoralized and hungry, Len Pa turned to the monkhood for solace and most of all, to regain a sense of dignity. As a monk the Venerable Len Pa receives alms of food from laypeople, he is able to play traditional Shan music for dancers and martial artists, and he is learning to read and write. But he does not feel that the path of asceticism was meant for him - he readily admits that his dream was always to have a family and a job - any job.

When frequenting the Tai Yai *wat* The Venerable Len Pa is always clad in his traditional saffron robe, which covers his trunk and right shoulder revealing a dense network of *sak yant* on his arms and back - traditional Theravada Buddhist tattoos designed to ward off evil spirits and remind the ascetic of the *dham* he is meant to embody on his journey toward *nibanna* (enlightenment). But on the eve of Khao Pansaa, The Venerable Len Pa is not clad in his traditional saffron robe, rather, I find him dressed in fine pink and yellow silks, with elaborate makeup and headdress. The monk, being an avid lover of theatre and dance, is a main feature in the night's performances. He dances, sings and plays Tai Yai percussion instruments, much to the delight of onlookers.

As puzzled as I was in the witnessing of a monk, whose precepts require him to live a life of non-attachment and pleasure-renunciation, I was also inspired by his role adventurism. The night of aesthetic play and performance created a space for the Venerable Len Pa to embody his love for the arts. There was no mention of this being inappropriate or even strange. It was as if all in attendance understood that in the liminal space this monk exists, aesthetic performativity seemed the most natural gesture of becoming.

As William Connolly (2011) posits, effective uses of 'role adventurism' are indispensable tools in the becomings of those who live their lives on the margins of hegemonic resonance machines:

The trick today is to infuse a bit of the warrior ethic into the performance of several of these roles, not in the spirit of Napoleon, Putin, and Bush, of Gandhi, Thoreau, Nietzsche, and Martin Luther King Jr., with the inspiration and strategic sense of each adjusted to the new circumstances of being. The task is to inhabit several roles in more militant, visible, creative, and inspirational ways, as we come to terms with their cumulative effects on the world (2011:144).

To unsettle lines of flight that attempt to pass the subaltern and marginalized by, there must be a shift in responses to the roles set forth by established governmental institutions. Further, through individual role adventurism, group orientations may be re-directed and new ways of engaging with the world may become possible. Finally, Connolly hopes that this will "inspire initiatives that draw energy from activity on these first two fronts to escalate both internal and external pressures upon corporations, states, universities, churches and temples, investment firms, the media, the Internet, and international organizations" (*Ibid*).

But we must also be reminded that identity, play and role experimentation are filled with risks and the stakes are often high. Role experimentation risks violence and the deterritorialization of identity, as happened during the 2007 Saffron Revolution in Burma. Due to sharp increases in the price of oil and the sudden downturn in the economy, the Burmese *sangha* (monkhood) organized nonviolent protests in the streets of Yangoon and Mandalay. The monks took it upon themselves to be at the helm of the protests as their bodies are considered sacred and any violence done to them would mean a great demerit to the aggressor. Yet the saffron-clad monks were eventually brutally persecuted, some tortured, jailed and even killed. The Burmese military justified their actions by claiming that these protesting monks were not "real" practitioners, but had broken their precepts by becoming politicized and defying the state.

Plasticity is as much a possibility as it is a limit. Role experimentation takes on entirely new meanings in spaces where violence, depravation and injustice imminently loom. Connolly sees it as a possible alternative for Westerners to challenge a neo-conservative capitalist resonance machine, but the Tai Yai clandestine immigrant or the protesting Burmese monk has considerably more at stake than a shift to a liberal non-capitalist alternative - rather, he is creating lines of flight to preserve his human dignity. This speaks to what Lyotard calls a *differend* "a dispute in which the complaint of one side cannot be made sense of, cannot be recognized, by the other" (2009:44) When the *differend* is too large and the demands of one side are rendered unintelligible, the result can be, as in the case of the Saffron revolution, harrowing violence.

Tai Yai migrants in Thailand, have moved to escape the *differend* that conditions their reality in the Shan State of Burma. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Turner borrows Arnold van Gennep’s (1909) expression the “liminal phase” to mark the transitional stage of being in-between the stages of “state” and “transition” – a social space occupied during *rites de passage* (Turner 1969:94). The refugee state, that state of being displaced without belonging, likens the stages of rites of passage, in that “ all rites of passage or “transition” are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying “threshold” in Latin), and aggregation.” (Turner 1969:94-95). Refugees are marked by this initial separation from their state, village and family-life, their “cultureality” is thrust into a state of legal *limen* where their status is wholly ambiguous and constantly changing depending on their movement and external pressures. Most Burmese refugees are held at this stage “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial” (Turner 1969:95). The fewest reach the stage of reaggregation – the passage rarely returns you to where you want to be, but instead delivers you into new and unknown spaces.

It is within the liminal phase that many revolutions, revolts and dissent is voiced. But not all counter-movements are violent or very loud at all. We often forget that there is affect in the shadows. Tai Yai peoples gather in the safe space of the Buddhist *wat* to learn their language, practice their traditional dance, song, music and martial arts. Beyond this, they also gather to discuss politics and develop strategies for surviving beyond a capitalist economy through subsistence farming and craft-making. Beyond the habitus of non-capitalist modes of being are strategies of resistance discourse that now open up new possibilities for voicing dissent.

The Internet, with its vociferous capacity for mass dissemination has now become the medium of choice for many diasporic movements (Schein 2002, McLagan 2002 and Ginsburg 1991). Movements, such as the Burmese diaspora that are in need of organizing forces to convey urgent messages and that find an easily accessible and relatively anonymous medium through online blogs, list-serves and Burmese news outlets. Faye Ginsburg (1991:92) has argued that “when other forms are not effective, indigenous media offers a possible means – social, cultural, and political – for reproducing and transforming cultural identity among people who have experienced massive political, geographic, and economic disruption.” The production of discourse through modern media outlets, such as the Internet, among exiled diasporic groups fleeing from those massive forms of disruption provides a potent platform from which to advocate policy change, maintain group coherence and voice dissent (Zaw Oo 2006).

The exit option speaks to the nomadism that has become the marker of Tai Yai identity. Holland (2011) sees the possibilities of nomad citizenship as that line of flight that breaks with the boundedness of state mechanisms of capture:

By most definitions, citizenship applies to an exclusive group of people identified by their belonging to a clearly demarcated, well-defined, and well-defended state territory. Nomad citizenship is designed to break with that definition and its territorialization of the concept of citizenship: nomadism, by most definitions, broadly applies to groups that are precisely not identified with state territory; Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of nomadism, as we will see, is broader still. But the point of combining nomadism with citizenship in this way is to smash the State’s territorializing monopoly on belonging and redistribute it globally, in alternative or minor forms of sociality both within and beyond the boundaries of the State (2011:xv).

But nomadism as role adventurism is a very different reality than forced nomadism. Though nomadism presents a viable alternative to being captured by state-level homogenizing forces, for the Tai Yai clandestine migrant, sedentarism is a luxury they too often cannot afford. So, perhaps we must still hold on to some sense of belonging - which is why Holland does not give up his notion of citizenship - and it is within this space of belonging we find possibilities for virtue and performance. The task set fort for the nomad citizen is to not allow the state, or capital, to lay claim to the space, but to leave it as an open field, upon which positive expression becomes possible.

In Ranajit Guha's (1999) *Elementary Aspect of Peasant Insurgencies,* he takes up the dialectic between subaltern insurgency and colonial domination. It is important for Guha to show that the Subcontinent was not passively subsumed under empire, but that within the colonial process there was also resistance, insurrection, mimickry (read: mockery) and insubordination. In his treatise relies almost exclusively on colonial documents to understand the consciousness of the subaltern, as the colonial administrators stand in dialectical opposition to the insurgents and therefore the colonial discourse is wholly preoccupied with the "rebel and his activities" (1999:15). The focus on the subaltern person is an intellectual move to "provincialize Europe," to use Chakrabarty's term, in order to bring to light what Guha calls "the small voices of history."

Guha presents a definitively Anti-Hegelian notion of history, where he shows that the historical potential of the Indian peasant, was erased by nation-state concern for security, administration and the general governance of bodies for the pursuit of material exploitation of the land and maintaining the docility of subaltern bodies in relation to colonial administrators. By using the word insurgence, Guha gives back a state of consciousness to the Indian peasant revolutionary - as a rational people, critical of their own exploitation, and willing to fight in a tactical - not merely reactionary way against their own oppression. He rejects the idea that the uprisings were spontaneous. Though. the peasant movements were rendered almost invisible to the colonial administrators as being organized and designed and it was not until nationalist uprisings on par with Ghandi, that resistance movements were rendered intelligible.

In the same sense, Tai Yais who gather in the temple space are also organizing politically. During my time there, many meeting were held after dance practice where the insurgency movement along the Thai-Burma border was discussed. The leap from cultural practitioner to border rebel, was no leap at, but rather always in the consciousness of the Tai Yai. Yet their gathering in the temple space is not understood as political by the ever-vigilant Thai state that seeks to deport foreign bodies. This has to do with what Gramsci has identified as the conflation of organization on one hand, and politics on the other, as being one and the same. For a movement to be understood as political, it must be organized within the normative frame of European enlightenment notions of the nation-state programme: 1. conscious leadership, 2. a well-defined aim, and a 3. programme or means of achieving this aim. Without these elements, your efforts will be seen as pre-political.

Interestingly, Guha (1999) finds that sacred days in Colonial India also corresponded with insurgent movements, where in Hinduism the coming of Kali Yuga calls for the inversion of all social roles, certain temple rituals called for an inversion of social statuses. From this position the slave may find himself a master - it is within this liminal space that he may truly see the extent to which he is oppressed and choose to rise up against his over-ordinates. Whereas rituals traditionally were used to empty rebellion of their contents, during colonial times they were used to reinforce anti-hegemonic sentiment. Guha argues that "groups held in a position of subordination develop small strategies of resistance that grow" (1999:12). From the position of a group in the process of becoming, crowds may come into being because of "redundancy" - the repetition of movement and expression of sentiment. From our discussion of gesturing towards, and becoming a movement, we may now turn to silence as a particular mode of expressive dissent.

**Silence**

In 2007, Theravada Buddhist monks from all over Myanmar, clad in saffron robes, silently walked through the streets of Yangon and Mandalay. They made no public demand, the only slogans that were shouted was the repeated uttering: "Our Cause, Our Cause." Some walked with their alms bowls turned upside down, to show to the military generals that they would not accept their donation and thereby preventing them form effectively making merit. Their silence spoke volumes and sparked a violent crackdown of all protests in Burma. It so shook the core of the military establishment that within a matter of years, Burma saw democratic elections, the freeing of political prisoners and an opening up of the Burmese economy to foreign investment. Silence is never consent - negative space is space filled with possibilities.

As Slavoj Zizek (1993) points out in *Tarrying with the Negative* "It is difficult to imagine a more salient index of the "open" character of a historical situation "in its becoming" [...], of that intermediate phase when the former Master-Signifier, although it has already lost the hegemonical power, has not yet been replaced with a new one" (1). "Our Cause, Our Cause" is the becoming of an abstract machine - effective precisely because of its vagueness. Ernesto Laclau (2007:18) reminds us that in some situations, vagueness is a precondition to constructing relevant political meanings. He posits:

(1) that vagueness and indeterminacy are not shortcomings of a discourse about social reality, but, in some circumstances, inscribed in social reality as such; (2) that rhetoric is not epiphenomenal vis-a-vis a self contained conceptual structure, for no conceptual structure finds its internal cohesion without appealing to rhetorical devices (Laclau 2007:67)

For Laclau one does not need to eliminate difference to create vague "chains of equivalence" or totalities, which are formed when a particular demand transcends its particularity. Laclau wants a politics that thrives on difference without seeing difference as an obstacle to politics. A theory of silence is the creation of a methodology of emancipation without having to resort to violence. Emancipation is possible without liquidations if we replace solidarity and totality with chains of equivalence. As Zizek also notes, "Theory involves the power to abstract from our starting point in order to reconstruct it subsequently on the basis of its presuppositions, its transcendental " conditions of possibility" - theory as such, by definition, requires the suspension of the Master-Signifier" (Zizek 1993:2). However, the silence of the monks is not really a tarrying with the negative, as silence *is* signification, expressivity and has profound politico-affective resonances. The saffron-clad silent monks are rather moving signifiers - expressing dissent through their bodies rather than through language - which allows for blocks of sensations that tarry with the affirmative.

Protevi (2009) theorizes the subjective and affective dimensions of the body politic to understand how historical currents can in some instances culminate into events, or phenomena he refers to as 'triggers and thresholds': "Triggering is not mechanical, but dynamic - that is, intensive and context-dependent: in different contexts, the " same" trigger may or may not push a body to the threshold of behavior activation, depending on the recent dynamic history of the body (2009:36-37). As such, bodies politics can be studied as affective and psychological responses to internal and external forces, flows and networks.

Protevi (2009) effectively sheds light upon the affective dimensions of group coherence - both negatively and positively - to find how in the manipulation of the ideological superstructure, individual ethics and judgment may be suspended in favor of a larger political affect:

Intensive processes are triggered by differences between a system and its environment such that the resultant matter/energy now moves systems toward thresholds where their behavior patterns might change. Such a change of behavior patterns - not merely a change to a different behavior within an established pattern - is what Deleuze calls a "deterritorialization" a "line or flight" or a "becoming" (2009:11).

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis contained the conditions of possibility to organize the flows of bodies, objects and minds, which are the sites of activity from whence capitalism gains its strength. Capitalism works because it is abstract - by its very diffuse abstract nature it gains the conditions of possibility needed to overcode preexisting flows. So, capitalism gains its potentiality because it contains decoded flows and can be taken up by a variety of social systems. Marx, however does not see capitalism as an abstraction. For Marx, capitalism has a clear material base from whence the abstract machines of the superstructure flow. Using the case of what has been framed as the "Global Financial Crisis" and its effects in Burma, we see the ability of capitalism to deterritorialize capital flows and labor in the Thai-Burma border-zone. I wish to posit the possibility of conceptualizing Capitalism as an abstract machine, rather than a structure, to get beyond the dialectical modeling of the world in order to find points of resonance with non-Capitalist modes of production (Connolly, 2008).

William Connolly (2008) takes up Hegel's (1995) prescriptive study *The Philosophy of Right*, where the demand for a civil society within a capitalist system becomes "a modern civilizational advance that promotes and demands a high degree of self-reliance, creative enterprise, and self-responsibility among its (male) participants. Its impersonal capacities of self-regulation, exemplifying one version of what will later (...) be called an abstract machine, lift it above every previous mode of being in human history" (2008:124). And it is by this logic that the "The impoverished are now the product of a system that blames them for their impoverishment rather than treating it as the curse of fate" (*Ibid*). Burma has now been taken into this fold of capitalist modes of capturing, whereby their destitution can be seen as self-inflicted because they have resisted capture by capitalist flows. The 'rabble' that Hegel understood within the context of 19th century Europe " has become angry minorities distributed within and between world regions" (Connolly 2008:128).

It is from the position of anger and dispossession that resistance practices to capitalism emerge. It is important to note that while capitalism is a totalizing institution, it is not a total system. As Connolly points out:

To insist that every practice, once capitalism expands its reach, is entirely absorbed into its orbit is to translate the idea of a world-capitalist system into that of a totality. Such an image exaggerates the absorptive power of one system, and discourages exploration of ways to stretch and challenge global capitalism in creative ways. (...) That is, to translate a worldcapitalist system into a world totality is to misread what is outside it, to miss those things imperfectly incorporated into it, and to present an apolitical orientation to it (2008:130)

As production becomes decentralized and deterritorialized, it is the liminal spaces where the new proletariat now exists where we must foster class-consciousness. For the Burmese peoples who now live in the liminal space of non-belonging during a time of liminal crisis, there are voices of resistance clamoring to be heard. These are the voices of peoples displaced from their land, dispossessed and demoralized, who like the Venerable Len Pa are seeking out non-capitalist, non-state centric alternatives to live life with dignity.

**Conclusion: A Politics of Expression**

I have so far delineated multiple strategies of becoming, or lines of flight, for the Tai Yai migrant and Burmese nomad citizen. The metaphor of dance is used to show that through gesture, movement and silence volumes are signified. Dance is a potent practice because often it is relegated to the sidelines as belonging to the realm of culture and not politics. But dance contains within it potent bodies politics, as gesturing, movement and silence, are the habitus of bodies seeking to restructure the orderings of hegemony. New thresholds and patterns of behavior are the historical becomings of what Deleuze calls the "event," or the counteractualizations that repattern systems (Protevi 2009:13). I have outlined a micropolitics of dance and movement - within which, the hard work you do to organize blocks of becoming - make new kinds of sovereigns possible. Politics is not language, discourse or even power. It is expression all the way down.

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1. Khao Pansaa came about as peasants in ancient India grew impatient with wandering monks and ascetics, who would trample their freshly sowed rice fields during their morning alms rounds and meditation walks. Walking, being a destructive activity, was replaced with sitting meditation in silent monastic retreat during the rainy months. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This research is based on two months of pre-dissertation ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand with a Foreign Languages and Area Studies Fellowship. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)