

Viral Ports, Virtual Currents

Interconnections between Media, the Arts and Everyday in Southeast Asia and its Diasporas
A 2011-2012 Andrew W. Mellon Interdisciplinary Workshop in the Humanities
presents



Naw Lwe Hser
a.k.a. **Louisa Benson Craig**
1941–2010

(Photo: Karen Museum)

Born in Rangoon, Burma, to a Karen mother and a Sephardic Jewish father, Louisa Benson was a refugee for much of her childhood. After winning two Miss Burma titles and starring in several films, she married Brigadier General Lin Htin, commander of the Karen Army's Fifth Brigade.

Since World War II, the Karen, a Southeast Asian "minority" race, has been engaged in the world's longest ongoing war: struggling to obtain equal rights in Burma and to preserve their sovereignty and culture. Fighting continues today.

When Lin Htin was assassinated during "peace talks" with the Burmese military regime in 1965, Naw Louisa assumed leadership of his troops and fought in the Karen resistance in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In 1967, Benson married American Glenn Craig and migrated to the United States. She completed her graduate studies in International Affairs at Columbia University.

While living in California and raising three children, Louisa Benson Craig was active in various Karen and pro-democracy organizations, a co-founder of the Burma Forum, and a board member with the US Campaign for Burma and Alternatives for Burmese Children.

After Naw Louisa's passing last year, the US Campaign for Burma stated: "Her decades of service to the Free Burma movement and plight of the Karen people has brought much needed attention, hope and inspiration to those of us who will continue the struggle for a free and democratic Burma."

BURMA AMERICA

Professor and Author Charmaine Craig Reads from her New Novel

On November 18, author Charmaine Craig will read from her second novel, nearing completion, inspired by the life of her mother Louisa Benson Craig, a former Miss Burma, leader of an insurgent army brigade, and human rights activist.

Currently a Visiting Assistant Professor in the UCR Creative Writing Department, Craig studied literature at Harvard College and received her MFA from the University of California, Irvine. Formerly an actor, she has served as a visiting assistant professor in fiction at Pomona College and UC Irvine. Her first novel *The Good Men: A Novel of Heresy* has been called, "A lush, textured story about sex and abstinence, humanity and sainthood, men and women, celibacy and heresy that resonates as much in the twenty-first century as the fourteenth" (E. Goodman, *The Boston Globe*).



CHARMAINE CRAIG

(Photo: Marion Ettlinger)

Friday, November 18, 12:10 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.
INTS 1113 (CHASS Interdisciplinary Bldg)

LOUISA BENSON CRAIG PLAYS KEY ROLE IN HISTORIC HUMAN RIGHTS CASE

In a 2005 ground-breaking advance for human rights and for the corporate accountability movement, the U.S. oil company Unocal (now owned by Chevron) agreed to compensate Burmese villagers who sued the El Segundo-based firm for complicity in forced labor, rape and murder. The abuses were committed in southern Burma in the mid-1990's, by soldiers providing security for the construction of the Yadana natural gas pipeline, built by a consortium that included subsidiaries of Unocal, Total (France), and PTTEP (Thailand).

The landmark cases, *Doe v. Unocal* and *Roe v. Unocal*, involved two groups of Burmese plaintiffs who filed lawsuits in federal and California state courts. Fourteen unidentified villagers alleged that Unocal shared responsibility for alleged slavery, murder, and rape carried out by the Myanmar military junta. Louisa Benson Craig, as a Karen/Burmese activist and resident of Pasadena, California, served as fifteenth plaintiff. She represented the people of California and acted as the public face of the Burmese plaintiffs in the historic suit marking the first time a U.S. corporation was held liable for complicity in human rights abuses committed abroad. The legal team representing the plaintiffs explained: "The fifteen individuals who brought these cases suffered horribly at the hands of the Burmese military, with the complicity of Unocal. They risked their lives for the last eight years seeking justice through these suits. These villagers, ethnic minorities from a remote region, living under a brutal dictatorship, took on a major US multinational oil company in court - and won....Corporations can no longer fool themselves into thinking they can get away with human rights violations. This case will reverberate in corporate boardrooms around the world and will have a deterrent effect on the worst forms of corporate behavior."

Benson Craig said about the settlement: "I am gratified for two reasons. First, there is now awareness that corporations need to be accountable for their partners' actions as well as their own. Second, many people have lost their lives on this project, but those that still remain can now begin to get their lives back together."

