

**No End in Sight: A Study of Conflict Drivers
in Myanmar's Kachin State**

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Introduction

Civil war has been a defining feature of ethnic relations in Myanmar since the country's independence in 1948. Although dates for the start of the conflict in Kachin State vary, the war is generally agreed to have begun in 1961— the year the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and its military wing the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) was established by Kachin students (Anderson & Sadan, 2016). A ceasefire, signed in 1994, paused hostilities between the KIA and the Myanmar State for 17 years. However, fighting reignited in 2011 and continues to the present day.

The drivers of the Kachin conflict have been examined across the literature, with some academics focusing on the economic factors that drive ethnic grievances (Brenner, 2015; Kiik, 2016a, 2016b; Walton, 2013; Woods, 2011, 2016), while others have shown how the cultural chauvinism of successive Burman-dominated governments has impacted ethnic conflict (Houtman, 1999; Smith, 1999). However, there is now a growing body of work that examines the centrality of issues like language and education in motivating the ethnic rebellion in Kachin State (Lall & South, 2014, 2018; South & Lall, 2016).

Language in local education is undoubtedly of great consequence to the Kachin, as many of them live in rural areas and have limited or no proficiency in Burmese. The culturally repressive policies of Burmanisation and Myanmarification caused deep animosity amongst ethnic peoples under military-rule (Houtman, 1999; Smith, 1999). However, this thesis argues that in the current renewed Kachin conflict, other issues are more crucial in fuelling the conflict. Martin Smith proposes in his 2007 paper *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*, that the dynamics of ethnic conflict are cyclical in nature, with continuing violence being fuelled by continued military rule, ongoing military offensives, widespread military atrocities and a lack of guaranteed ethnic rights in Myanmar's constitution. This thesis proposes that Myanmar, particularly

in Kachin State, has entered a sixth cycle of ethnic conflict, and that the current ethnic conflict in Kachin state is fundamentally fuelled by these four criteria.

In order to support the thesis' hypothesis, it uses the following structure: firstly, the author situates the Kachin in their contemporary socio-economic context; secondly, a survey of the academic literature on ethnic conflict and its drivers in Kachin State, laying a basis for this thesis' line of argumentation. The following section will provide an introspection on language and educational policy in Myanmar's history. This section will show how issues of language have historically caused ethnic antagonism and have been used for political ends. The fourth section will offer a focused historiography of the conflict between the State and ethnic Kachin rebels. And the final chapter of this thesis will draw on the academic literature and field interviews conducted with Kachin leaders, to propose that the Kachin conflict represents a sixth cycle of ethnic conflict in the Southeast Asian nation. The politicians interviewed for this thesis, Dr. Manam Tu Ja and Maran Ja Seng Hkawn, both moved from KIO/A leadership roles into politics, giving them a deep understanding of what motivates conflict in Kachin State. This final chapter is divided into four sub-sections: representing the the four underlying central factors driving conflict; namely continuing military control/power; ongoing military offensives; widespread military atrocities; and ethnic rights and the 2008 constitution.

The Kachin

Kachin peoples in Myanmar are estimated to number roughly 750,000, which constitutes approximately 1.5% of the country's population (Jacquet, 2014). Being predominantly christian, the Kachin Baptist Church (KBC) has some 400,000 members, making it the largest denomination amongst the 90-95% of Kachin that are Christian (Mang, 2016). However, like many peoples that

are indigenous to borderlands, the Kachin do not solely inhabit Myanmar, as Kachin peoples can be found in both Yunnan, China and Arunchal Pradesh, India (Sadan, 2013). However, the ethnonym 'Kachin' is used solely to describe the Kachin living in Myanmar. The term Kachin was only adopted during the 19th century, and is an umbrella term for tribal groups that self-affiliate or have close connections with the Jinghpaw clan. Thus, the term 'Kachin' usually refers to the ethnic sub-groups of the Jinghpaw clan, as well as Lanwngwaw, Rawang, Lachid, Zaiwa and Lisu tribal groups (Jacquet, 2014). The use of 'Kachin' as a signifier common identity has - for the most part - been internalised by the smaller nations. Even though minority groups within the broader Kachin identity group may affiliate with the larger umbrella term of Kachin for political expediency, the identity signifier 'Kachin' is widely accepted throughout the population (Thawngmung, 2011).

Like many of Myanmar's ethnic minority groups, the majority of Kachin live in dire poverty, with 28% of Kachin living below the poverty line (Logan, 2018). Food poverty is a significant problem for a large proportion of Kachin people, an estimated 9 out of 10 people living in Kachin State lack sufficient food for four months of the year (Aung et al., 2016). Education in Myanmar is generally far below the standards of its regional neighbours, however, in the rural ethnic areas education is even more limited than in Myanmar's centre. Government schools have essentially ceased to function outside of the major cities and towns across Kachin state (Lall & South, 2014). Access to healthcare in rural areas is almost entirely absent, while the expense of primary healthcare limits accessibility in urban areas. Infant and maternal mortality rates are far higher in rural communities that lack adequate healthcare, with malaria, diarrhoea, and post-natal infections presenting serious threats to life (Aung et al., 2016). Over 100,000 internally displaced peoples remain stranded in camps across Kachin and Northern Shan State, without access to basic services such as primary education, healthcare and clean water. In areas that are outside of government control the KIO/A have taken up the mantle of service providers, offering basic

education - based upon an alternative curriculum, taught in Jinghpaw - and healthcare to people living in its administered areas (South & Lall, 2014; South, 2018).

Myanmar's economy is still largely agricultural, a fact that is especially true for the rural highland areas inhabited by ethnic minority groups. While there are a number of large-scale infrastructure projects and abundant natural resources in Kachin State, the majority of the population remain excluded from the benefits of economic activity, remaining reliant on subsistence farming and small-scale agriculture (Jacquet, 2014). While Kachin State has huge potential for the construction of hydropower plants, providing lucrative business opportunities to Myanmar's oligarchy, the environmental impacts disproportionately effect rural ethnic communities and offer none of the gains (Kattelus et al., 2016). This disproportionate burden of resource exploitation is not limited to hydropower, with logging and jade mining also having negative impact on the soil that Kachin farmers rely upon for survival.

Drivers of ethnic conflict in Kachin State

Academic debate regarding the drivers of conflict has generally focused on the 'grievance and greed' framework, with ethnic conflicts generally being taken to be best explained through theories that emphasise forms of 'grievance' (Laoutides & Ware, 2016). In terms of the conflict between the Kachin and the state, the role that ethnicity plays in fuelling the conflict is emphasised, if not taken for granted (Kramer, 2015; Smith, 2007; South, 2008; Than, 2005). While historical grievances have taken a primary role in explaining the Kachin conflict, most studies have been prompt to note that the drivers of specific conflicts are varied and complex. Issues of economics have always been a part of ethnic conflict in Myanmar, with a number of studies highlighting the role that economic exploitation and economic inequality have played in exacerbating the conflict

(Woods, 2011; Brenner, 2015). Issues of economic exploitation have often been seen as arguments that support theories of 'greed' as conflict drivers (Laoutides & Ware, 2016). Yet, in many cases, of which the Kachin conflict is one, a more complex intermingling of motives seem to fuel conflict, with issues of ethnic identity playing a large role in the popular narrative of the conflict amongst the general population.

In order to survey the literature on ethnic conflict, a brief synopsis of the scholarly material written on ethnicity is required. The term ethnicity has numerous political and social connotations and has been characterised in the literature as 'vague' (Eller, 1997, p.552) and 'ambiguous' (Malešević, 2004, p.160). Although the word may entail a degree of ambiguity, a classic definition of ethnicity is "the condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group", which is to say it is an "objective condition" (Glazer & Moynihan, 1974, p.1). A contemporary definition of ethnicity has added to this by noting a "self-perpetuating quality" to ethnicity, one which is inherited from generation to generation (Cashmore, 2004, p.142). However, definitions that are broader in scope are intrinsically connected to the theory or theories from which they stem. The majority of theories on ethnicity fall into three schools of thought, namely primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist. Primordialist theories have been generally disregarded by the academy, but classically regard ethnicity as primordial, essential in nature and permanent (Geertz, 1963). The instrumentalist approach stresses the fluidity of ethnicity, which can be manipulated for socio-political gains (Blimes, 2006). Finally, the constructivist approach regards ethnicity as a continual process that is "negotiated and constructed in everyday living" (Isajiw, 1993, p.4). A constructivist approach has been used to show how Kachin ethnic identity is constructed and reconstructed through social interactions across space and time (Sadan, 2013).

Explanations of ethnic conflict have similarly been moulded by theoretical perspective and field of study. Even though some scholars have challenged the legitimacy of ethnic conflict as an academic field (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998; Gilley, 2004), ethnic conflict is ever-present in the

scholarly literature. The primordialist perspective typically regards the permanent nature of ethnicity to drive conflict, as historical grievances are manifested as ‘ancient hatreds’ (Blimes, 2006, p. 537). Conversely, instrumentalists argue that ethnic conflict is driven by socio-economic and political contexts. Lake and Rothschild note, “by itself, ethnicity is not a cause of violent conflict”, only when coupled with historical social inequities does ethnicity appear, “as one of the major fault lines along which societies fracture” (Lake & Rothschild, 1998, p.7). Gurr and Moore propose that historically repressive state policies and collective ‘grievance’ lead to mobilisation along ethnic lines, a potential precursor of ethnic conflict (1997). State suppression of language rights, leading to - actual or perceived - linguistic decline or loss has the potential to foster ethnic tension and, potentially, conflict (Bostock, 1997). Post-colonial perspectives have highlighted the impact of colonial histories of exploitation on uneven development, which has in turn the potential to foster ethnic conflict (Blanton, Mason & Athow, 2001).

A number of conflict drivers have to be used to characterise patterns of ethnic conflict in Myanmar. Indeed, historical grievances and state repression are noted as a key issue in the ‘cycles of conflict’ identified by Martin Smith. These cycles of violence have perpetuated into the present due to rampant human rights abuses and frequent campaigns launched by the *Tatmadaw* (Myanmar army) against a number of armed groups, the continuation of the military’s stranglehold of politics, and a lack of representation of ethnic political and social rights in the 2008 constitution (2007). Military government policies spanning from the 1960s until the democratisation period sought to Burmanise or Myanamaify ethnic populations, fuelling ethnic tension and violence (Smith, 1999; Houtman, 1999). While the economic inequality between ethnicities that has been enforced by continuing Burman-privileging state policies has fuelled ethnic mistrust (Walton, 2016). Other studies have stressed the role of economic cooptation of ethnic elites in radicalising a new generation of ethnic rebels in Kachin (Brenner, 2015). Myanmar’s military state sought to expand its state-building objectives throughout its borderlands through the allotment of resource

concessions, a key conflict point between the KIO and the State (Kiik, 2016a, 2016b; Woods, 2011, 2016).

Studies of educational and language policy's impact on ethnic conflict remain few, however, a growing body of work has emerged (Lall & South, 2014, 2018; Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012; South & Lall, 2016). Salem-Gervais and Metro's study of the nation-building process in Myanmar through history curricula highlights the assimilation processes of Burmanisation and Myanmaification. The authors describe how historical narratives attempt to folklorise ethnic histories, through which the state attempts to, "render minorities unthreatening to the dominance of majority culture, while preventing the accusation of cultural hegemony" (2012, p.46). A study by Lall and South compares the extra-state education systems developed by different ethnic armed groups (EAGs), highlighting the benefits of curriculum taught in ethnic mother-tongue and Burmese in aiding university admission (2014). A study of the KIO education system, by the same authors, described the development of a more anti-Burmese curriculum since the breakdown of the ceasefire. In this study the authors posit, "language and education policy and practice are deeply implicated in ethnic conflicts in Myanmar" (South & Lall, 2016, p.145). Lall and South have additionally restated the centrality of language and education issues to ethnic conflict, and argued that opportunities to address educational reform are being missed in the peace process (2018).

Language Policy and Education in Myanmar: A History

The role of language in education in Myanmar has been, since independence from the British, broadly characterised by the suppression of ethnic minority rights and language use and the Burman cultural hegemony imposed by the policies implemented by successive central governmental regimes. Using four rough periods - U Nu's post-independence parliamentary era governments (1948-1962), the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) led by Ne Win

(1962-1988), the military junta of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and later State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) (1988-2007), and the political reform era (2008-2015) - this section shall highlight the history of language policy in Myanmar and its effect on education systems. However, to be able to elaborate on policy towards language use and its impact on education in Myanmar, it is first necessary to briefly establish the administrative order that predated the establishment of the independent state, namely the British Colonial Administration in Burma.

British Colonial Rule (1824-1942)

Burma's colonial capital, Rangoon, was officially annexed into the British empire in 1824, following a British sea-borne invasion that commenced the First Anglo-Burman War (1824-6). Over the course of the nineteenth century the British Indian Army would fight another 2 wars, the Second Anglo-Burman War of 1852 and Third Anglo-Burman War of November 1885, eventually integrating the territory that constitutes the modern state of Myanmar as a province of British India in 1886. By the 1890s the British had established a functioning military administration in Central and Southern Myanmar (Taylor, 2007). Although the British had managed to pacify the coastal and lowland areas, there remained a perception that the Burmans were 'untrustworthy' or 'rebellious', a perception that prompted colonial administrators to favour ethnic minority groups in positions of power, "especially some of the Kayin (Karen) population, who were the beneficiaries of the Christian missionary educational institutions which flourished in southern Myanmar under the auspices of the British" (Taylor, 2007, p.74). Christian missionaries not only opened schools and educational institutions, but also formulated written texts for languages used by ethnic groups such as the Kachin, Chin and Lahu (Hlaing, 2008). While ethnic minorities found status in the colonial administration in the Burmese lowlands, the British adopted a system of 'indirect rule' in the

province's highlands. The British allowed the traditional leaders of ethnic groups populating Burma's frontier areas to hold political and administrative power over their domains and, in return, these *sawbwas* (Shan) and *duwas* (Kachin) would pledge fealty to British authorities (Taylor, 2007).

Education policy in Burma came under the auspices of the Indian Education Service, with the British deeming education to be primarily a secular undertaking. This view of education deprivileged the role of the *Sangha*, the Buddhist monkhood, in education provision, who had administered literary education for males since potentially the eleventh century, or earlier (Cheesman, 2003). Once the bedrock of learning under Burmese dynasties, the role of Buddhism in education fell afoul of the supposed British policy of 'religious neutrality' (Taylor, 2007, p.79). Secular education soon became the sole means for the advancement of indigenous peoples to advance into administrative roles, to enter the legal services, or to succeed in commerce (Cheesman, 2003; Taylor, 2007). Indeed, this undermining of the sangha's role in education and the relative privileging of christian missionary schooling in areas that had previously remained outside the fold of Buddhist education, namely the ethnic minority areas, caused great tension between the Burman majority, the British and ethnic minorities. Minority groups began to form nationalist ideals based on opposition to the Burman majority, a process that was often funnelled through Christian organisations.

This separation of Burma's indigenous peoples by ethnicity was underpinned in British colonial era curriculums and textbooks, through which the aforementioned antagonistic reading of historical centre-periphery social relations and Britain's paternalistic positioning as civilisation bringer were normalised. A 1927 geography textbook from colonial Burma uses such overt paternalistic phrasing to be uncomfortable to the modern reader:

Burma has become a member of the great family of Nations, the British Empire.

Burma shares in the peace, protection and prosperity the mother country brings her

children — natural or adopted. Burma is one of the adopted children. Without protection, there might not be peace; without peace, prosperity suffers. Burma needs these; Britain, the mother country, brings them (Rowlands, 1927, p.3 qtd. in Salem-Gervais and Metro, 2012, p.31).

Similarly history textbooks similarly promoted the British conquest of Burma as an endeavour to emancipate formerly oppressed ethnic groups from the oppression of Burman kings:

The English conquest came not to destroy but to fulfill. Racial character cannot develop so long as government is unstable. [...] Thrice they achieved a measure of unity [Anawratha, Bayinnaung, Alaungpaya]. It was seldom true unity, for whenever it was more than nominal it was maintained by means so terrible that they destroyed the end; and it seldom lasted for the bond was purely dynastic and broke thrice (Harvey, 1926, p.185 qtd. in Salem-Gervais and Metro, 2012, p.32).

The above excerpts serve to illustrate the nature of British colonial rule, that being the practice of divide and rule, while simultaneously supporting Britain's claims to legitimate governance. These methods promoted ethnic division through nationalised secular education and further heightened growing animosity between Burma's indigenous peoples.

Language policy in education in Burma under the colonial administration allowed for the use of Burmese in sangha schools, however, as the only path to administrative positions was through one of the Anglo-vernacular secular schools founded by the British, Burmese-medium education and literacy dramatically declined throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Cheesman, 2003). The issue of language in education was dramatically politicised in the 1920s as the University Act introduced tougher enrolment criteria for Rangoon University, which included a

high proficiency in written English. As the vast majority of Burmese students were unable to meet these newly imposed criteria, nationalists regarded the move as precluding Burmese youth from advancement professionally, economically and socially. This spurred nationalists to found national colleges that promoted the learning and use of Burmese, as well as nationalist organisations promoting Burmese education. The most noteworthy of these organisations was the *Do Bama Asiayone* (DBA), which grew in importance throughout the 1940s. The DBA based its nationalist ideology in Burmese and Buddhism, yet claimed to represent all peoples indigenous to Burma, a fact that fostered animosity amongst ethnic minorities (Hlaing, 2008).

The Japanese War and Decolonisation (1942-1948)

The advent of war in Burma led to the majority of schools ceasing to operate. As the British retreated to form a government in exile in Simla, India, leaving the Japanese to re-establish schooling in its own image (Cheesman, 2003). Burman nationalists were determined not to accept education that was not solely Burmese medium, boycotting Japanese run institutions and setting up Burmese medium schools outside of the Japanese-run education system. However, these schools were chronically understaffed, underfunded and undersupplied and these schools failed towards the end of the conflict (Cheesman, 2003). Although the Japanese education platform had for the first time placed much greater emphasis on Burmese language instruction in schools, Burman nationalists did not accept the replacing of one colonial education system with that of another coloniser.

After the defeat of the Japanese by both the indigenous independence armies and British forces, the British backed government in exile in Simla returned to continue the administration of Burma in October of 1945 (Lwin, 2000). However, by 1946 the British were resigned to the fact that Burmese independence was inevitable and began to set out plans for the creation of an

independent Burmese state (Walton, 2008). The transition of Burma from British colony to independent state marked a new chapter for the nations indigenous peoples, yet also highlighted the importance of language issues to the nationalist causes of the Burmans and ethnic minority peoples. The Second Panglong Conference of 1947 organised by the British and Burman nationalist leaders to establish a constitution for the newly independent Burma. In attendance at the conference were representatives of Shan, Kachin and Chin ethnic groups, while four Karen delegates remained as 'observers' not officially participating in negotiations (Walton, 2008). The Mon and Arakanese were notable absentees from the Panglong meetings as they were not considered frontier area ethnic groups, but were rather included in the Ministerial Burma administrative area (Walton, 2008).

Two notable issues in the proceedings involving language arose, namely the placing of Burmese as the national language and the criteria for ethnic statehood within the union of Burma. The first of these issues was accepted by the participating ethnic delegates as a common lingua franca was seen as a necessity for an independent state and there was the larger issue of statehood at stake, although many leaders felt English to be a more neutral choice (Hlaing, 2008). As one of the principal reasons for the Panglong Conference was to establish which ethnic groups would gain greater administrative freedom under the union, criteria for statehood needed to be established. One of these criterion was that the ethnic groups demanding statehood had to "possess, among other things, a language totally different from Burmese" (Hlaing, 2008, p.154).

U Nu post-independence Parliamentary Era (1948-1962)

Following independence in 1948, the Anti-fascist People's Freedom League's (AFPFL) socialist government set out to formulate a national education policy as part of a broader set of social welfare programmes. Under the state's new education policy, national education was to be centralised under the guidance of the Ministry of Education, with funding for all state-run

institutions coming directly from the ministry (Cheesman, 2003). The AFPFL seemingly attempted to foster a greater degree of understanding between Burma's indigenous ethnic groups, with newly printed history textbooks promoting ideas of ethnic unity through its historical narrative (Salem-Gervais and Metro, 2012). Additionally, according to Hlaing, U Nu - the Union's Prime Minister - "publicly declared that national unity would only emerge if the Government instituted a system that accommodated the cultural difference amongst ethnic groups" (2008, p.155). However, the government still promoted Buddhist missionary work and the teaching of Burmese in ethnic minority areas, with U Nu believing reconciliation with ethnic minority groups to be easier if they shared a religion and language with the Burman majority (Hlaing, 2008). In addition to the promotion of Buddhism and Burmese in ethnic minority areas, the newly instated educational policy paid little attention to the medium of education for non-Burmese mother tongue students (Lwin, 2000). Nevertheless, schools at a pre-university level were not prohibited from teaching in ethnic languages if the majority of students were of a specific ethnicity, which meant that mother-tongue education continued throughout the parliamentary era (Hlaing, 2008). Even though U Nu's government allowed ethnic mother-tongue education to continue as part of the national education system up until university level, the promotion of Burmese and Buddhism remained a source of contention, being viewed by many elites to be an intrusion of a Burman chauvinistic state.

The expansion of Burmese medium education in ethnic areas potentially had more negative impact on U Nu's government's attempts to appease ethnic elites as the increased proficiency in Burmese allowed ethnic leaders to communicate amongst each other, while also allowing them more easily to keep abreast with government rhetoric. According to Hlaing, "Most minority leaders in those days understood English but many of them were not comfortable discussing political matters in English. So Shan, Kachin, Mon, Karen and Chin leaders communicated in Burmese" (2008, p.159). The increased level of literacy in Burmese amongst ethnic minorities allowed for a deeper understanding of the central government's Burman

chauvinistic rhetoric. In pandering to Burman communities, political parties regularly used nationalist discourses that had emerged during the fight to end colonialism, those developed by the Do Bama Asiyone that emphasised Burman culture and the status of Burmese. Community leaders that had received education in Burmese during the parliamentary era highlighted the chauvinistic statements of politicians and were able to use them to promote their own anti-Burman brands of nationalism. During the parliamentary era, the central government's education policy allowed for the spread of Burmese as the union's national language, yet contrary to the belief of the U Nu government, this increased closeness deepened the growing divide between the government and ethnic elites (Hlaing, 2008). Without addressing the underlying dissatisfaction of the ethnic elites, increased knowledge of Burmese simply allowed ethnic leaders to understand the chauvinistic rhetoric of government officials.

By the late 1950s, rapid social and political destabilisation caused by insurgency - the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), Chinese nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) forces' incursions along the northern border with China, and ethnic rebels had taken up arms against the state - , massive corruption, and general political mismanagement had left U Nu's government on the brink of collapse. In lieu of a political solution, General Ne Win was asked to set up a caretaker government that would hold power until 1960. Ne Win's government initially seemed successful at tackling corruption, increasing the state's control over local militias and addressing bureaucratic inefficiency. However, after the elections of 1960 the civilian government formed again by Prime Minister U Nu proved unable to address the problems that had caused political disintegration just 2 years earlier (Englehart, 2005). Finally, in March 1962 Ne Win led a military coup seizing power, bringing Burma's parliamentary era to a close.

The BSPP Era Led by Ne Win (1962-1988)

In the wake of the military takeover in March 1962, the Tatmadaw formed a Revolutionary Council (RC) made up of Ne Win's personal military acolytes. The RC soon set about eliminating potential threats to its power, arresting U Nu in addition to other political leaders and dissolving the country's parliament (Holmes, 1967). The RC had complete control over the political landscape by April and set about transforming Burma into a one-party state through the establishment of the only legal political party, the BSPP, in June of 1962 (Holmes, 1967; Devi, 2014). With opposition to the RC tamed, the junta set about implementing a radical new political and social ideology, namely "the Burmese Way to Socialism". The ideology paved the way for a process of 'Burmanization' that would nationalise all industry, banking, retail, natural resource production and private schooling (Devi, 2014). This was done not only because Ne Win felt Burma had lost sight of Aung San's post-independence promises of a course to socialism, but also due to the extreme "xenophobia among the highly nationalistic members of the Burmese Revolutionary Council government who want[ed] to eliminate the vestiges of the old dominant foreign cultural" (Holmes, 1967).

The government's newly coined ideology was far broader than simply economic nationalisation policy, being viewed by most ethnic leaders as simply embodying the social and cultural chauvinism of Burman nationalists. The new constitution implemented by Ne Win's government in 1974 created new ethnic states in the union, totalling seven - Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan - the creation of these states was an attempt by the junta to systematise administration (Smith, 1999). The constitution established a quasi-civilian administration led by the BSPP with Ne Win as its president, nominally civilian the BSPP leadership were almost exclusively military men (Farrelly, 2013). The constitution also guaranteed rights to citizenship without discrimination based upon "race, religion, status or sex" (Smith, 2002,

p. 9). Yet these constitutional guarantees paid only lip-service to equality of treatment, as Martin Smith notes, “many minorities believed that the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ was simply a cloak for ‘Burmanization’ in a new political guise” (2002, p.9). The first of the measures to impact ethnic minority groups was the closure of independent and religious-based schools that had offered the most substantive form of educational services in many minority areas since the colonial era. In addition foreign missionaries and educators were expelled from the country. The regime implemented a Burmese language curriculum (Devi, 2014), which essentially wiped-out the teaching of minority languages past grade four (Smith, 2002). The publication of newspapers and journals in languages other than Burmese was greatly restricted and, inevitably, highly censored. In addition, access to senior roles in administration and the armed forces were increasingly restricted for non-Burmans, which meant to participate in governance minorities had to suppress their ethnic identities (Smith, 2002). The effect was the exclusion of the majority of ethnic minority elites from participating within the BSPP structure, promulgating further distrust and animosity between Burmans and ethnic minorities.

The major piece of legislation regarding education policy in during the BSPP era was the Basic Education Law, 1966, which further consolidated the central government’s control over and supervision of the country’s schools. The law mandated the teaching of ethnic minority languages up to the second grade in minority areas, centralised the curriculum and textbook publication. As a result the government published textbooks for minority languages up until the 1980s, although Kachin course books were discontinued by the 1970s. If students wanted to continue studying ethnic languages, lessons could be taught in public schools after normal hours of instruction (Hlaing, 2008). Although the Law made provision for the teaching of minority languages, the situational contexts in which schooling was provided in ethnic areas meant that, in actuality, the majority of public schools in minority areas suspended minority language teaching. Many schools were unable to find qualified teaching staff, as the government’s education budget did not include

funds for minority language teacher training (Hlaing, 2008). While the government effectively caused the degradation of language teaching in minority areas by restricting classes to early childhood and defunding teacher training, the government also directly suspended classes when they were perceived to be link to rebels (Hlaing, 2008). The government's suspicion of ethnic minority groups created an atmosphere in which ethnic minority desires for mother-tongue education were treated as subversive to the union.

The vast majority of the academic literature regarding the military state's educational and social policy has deemed the process of Burmanization to have been an overt attempt by the state to assimilate ethnic groups into a national identity based on Burman language and culture (Houtman, 1999; Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012; Smith, 1999; Lall & South, 2018). Yet, Hlaing counters this notion by asserting that, "the Socialist government did not have a clear plan to 'Burmanize' the entire population ... The Government's major problem was its officials' failure to represent the interests of both the majority Burmans and the ethnic minorities" (2008, p.167). Despite the debate over the intention of educational policy, the outcome of the policy during Ne Win's tenure is not up for debate. In the words of Hlaing himself, "For ethnic nationalists, the central and local government organs were part of the same authoritarian state, regardless of the true reason behind the cessation of minority language classes, the ethnic nationalists strongly believed that the Government was responsible for the public schools' suspension of minority languages classes. furthermore, they also resented the Government for not rendering any assistance to them" (Hlaing, 2008, p.166). Burmanization, whether intended as policy to forcefully assimilate ethnic minorities or not, was viewed by ethnic nationalist leaders as merely continuing acts of oppression by the Burman-dominated government against ethnic peoples, acts that reinforced ethnic confrontation and conflict with the state.

The Military Junta of the SLORC/SPDC (1988-2008)

As the 1980s drew to a close, Ne Win's vice-like grip on power began to falter. Mounting foreign-debt obligations, the threat of international bankruptcy, and increasing student protests, forced Ne Win to step down in July of 1988. Ne Win's resignation did not stop the escalating protests as mainly students took to the streets calling for democratic change in Burma. The junta, however, remained willing to dissipate protests with overwhelming force, with thousands dying through the late summer months in protests around the country (Farrelly, 2013). In September of 1988, Ne Win loyalists formed the SLORC government and went about extinguishing protests and suppressing political dissent. The government opened the country to international investment and finance and made superficial changes to the previous government's Burmanization policies, aiming to publicise the country as a functioning multi-ethnic union. The 1989 international renaming of the country to Myanmar was one such change, as Myanmar was the "historic ethnic Burman name for Burma" (Smith, 1999). The junta acquiesced to popular demands and held an election in May of 1990, with the National League for Democracy (NLD) claiming a landslide victory of 82% of seats. However, as Members of Parliament elect attempted to convene an inaugural parliament the military reneged on the democratisation process, clamping down and arresting 80 politicians (Smith, 2002). Following the crackdown, activists fled to areas controlled by the National Democratic Forces (NDF) an alliance of ethnic minority armed groups, setting up a government in exile, headed by NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi (Smith, 2002). The junta aggressively suppressed popular protests demanding democracy throughout the 1990s and 2000s, in order to focus its resources on containing pro-democracy groups the military began to push for cease-fire agreements with ethnic armed groups, which, by the mid-1990s, it managed to achieve with seventeen ethnic armies (Smith, 2007).

Education remained tightly under the control of the junta during the SLORC/SPDC era with the entire curriculum emphasising the military's role in national unity and political stability, while also stressing the 'honour' of the Tatmadaw (Fink, 2001). The National Education Committee was especially focused on rewriting the historical narratives established by the country's previous iteration of military governance, as the inconvenient reality of independence hero Aung San's daughter leading the democratisation movement forced the government to de-emphasise Aung San and to highlight the military's role in supporting national unity (Fink, 2001; Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012). The SLORC/SPDC government aimed to reconceptualise the union as perpetual and ancient, in which only folkloric differences existed between peoples. Folklorisation was used as a strategy to undermine claims of ethnic difference and to "render minorities unthreatening to the dominance of majority culture, while preventing accusations of cultural hegemony" (Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012, p. 46). This process marked a change from the Burmanization policies of the Ne Win era and has been described using the term 'Myanmaification' (Houtman, 1999). During the SLORC/SPDC era the government kept its tight control over education, yet adapted its regimes of propaganda to fit the contemporary narrative of its nation-building endeavour.

While education policy during the SLORC/SPDC era deviated from that of Ne Win's BSPP era and was utilised by the junta to establish a new historical narrative for a newly named country, educational language policy remained similarly stringent under the military government. For the first 10 years of the regime language policy remained the same, however, the 1998 National Educational Promotion Program suspended all minority language classes below university level. Even at university level, government enforced closures of universities and strict monitoring of student groups led to a dramatic decline in ethnic language classes (Hlaing, 2008). The government technically allowed the teaching of minority languages outside of school hours, as the previous regime had, however, as was the case during the BSPP era, ethnic language classes were viewed with suspicion and were regularly suspended. The lack of government funded language classes and

the continuing promotion of Burmese through education negatively impacted literacy in ethnic minority languages (Hlaing, 2008). The worsening state of ethnic minority language education in Myanmar was highly antagonistic for ethnic elites, who saw the government's policies as actively suppressing ethnic minority culture and language, policies that aimed to 'Myanmaify' through 'Burmanization'.

The Political Reform Era (2008-)

As early as 1992 the SLORC government had announced the forming of a National Convention (NC) tasked with drawing up a new constitution that would support a multi-party democratic system of governance. 702 delegates were selected to represent a variety of social groupings, counting military personnel, political party members and ethnic minority representatives amongst their number. However, by 1995 the NLD had withdrawn from the convention and was adjourned by the SLORC government in 1996 (Smith, 2002). In 2004, the National Convention was reconvened without the presence of the NLD, yet with greater ethnic minority participation, including ceasefire groups such as the KIO. The NC meetings continued until July 2007, when the NC drafted a constitution "virtually identical to that proposed by SLORC in 1993" (Jones, 2014a, p. 791). The junta announced a constitutional referendum in 2008, which proceeded in the wake of the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis (Farrelly, 2013). The referendum was broadly condemned in the West and by national opposition groups, however, consequently elections were held in 2010 - in spite of the continuing NLD boycott - with the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) winning a majority of seats through extensive voting manipulation. Myanmar's transition to a system resembling a multi-party democracy was further advanced in 2015, when the NLD contested elections for the first time since their landslide victory in 1990, again winning a landslide victory

with 77.9% of seats in the Lower House and 80% of seats in the Upper House (Thawngmung, 2016).

Education has been highlighted by successive democratic governments as a key area for reform, being seen as the fourth most important area during the USDP years in office (Lall, 2016). In Thein Sein's inaugural speech as Prime Minister in 2011, the USDP leader set out a 10 point agenda to tackle Myanmar's decrepit education system. This agenda included the implementation of free and compulsory primary education, capacity building for teachers, budget allocation increases and the inclusion of local and international NGOs and IGOs (Lall, 2016). A notable element of the government's reform agenda was the limited decentralisation of educational matters that was advocated for in the 2008 constitution, however, the extent to which decentralisation will be implemented is still unclear. A National Education Bill passed into law in 2014 by the USDP controlled parliament - later ratified with amendments in 2015 - caused uproar amongst students and civil society organisations alike. Of particular concern to the protesters were issues relating to the teaching of ethnic minority languages and cultures at university level, as well as the freedom of universities from political oversight (Lall, 2016). The reform trajectory started by the USDP government has largely been continued by Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD government, surprising academics and journalists alike. Daw Suu's government's National Education Sector Plan is largely drawn from a draft education plan formulated by the USDP before the 2015 election (Lall & South, 2018). Although educational reform has begun to be addressed, it will take a number of years before the affects of the reforms put in place can be analysed.

Language policy in education has begun to be addressed by Myanmar's law makers. As a result of the educational reforms enacted between 2014 and 2016, ethnic minority languages have found their way back into state-run classrooms, with ethnic languages being "allowed as 'classroom language' to help explain concepts when necessary" (Lall & South, 2018, p.485). However, there has been limited debate on the adoption of ethnic language medium education in minority areas,

while multi or bilingual education has received no attention from the government. Even if reforms on ethnic language medium education were to be implemented in the short-term future, the capacity of the state to provide teachers capable of teaching in ethnic languages is limited (Lall & South, 2018). According to UNICEF figures 70% of state school teachers are unable to speak local languages, a situation that would require a substantial amount of time and funding to remedy (Joliffe & Speers, 2016). While ethnic languages are no longer prohibited from state-run institutions, ethnic language issues in education are far from being solved.

Ethnic Conflict in Kachin State: A History

Civil war has, to a large extent, been the defining characteristic of inter-ethnic relations in Myanmar since the country's independence from Britain in 1948. Myanmar is home to some of the longest running ethnic armed struggles in the world, dating back to the country's independence. Ethnic insurgency in its contemporary form in Kachin State is generally regarded to have begun in 1961 with the creation of the KIA and KIO, in February and October respectively. However, the roots of the conflict, as alluded to in the previous chapter, extend deeper into Myanmar's historical past. Although the nature of Burman-Kachin relations in the pre-colonial era is largely speculative (Smith, 1999), wars between ethnic groups were common throughout Burma's history (Walton, 2013). However, the lowland kings rarely exerted control over the highlands and Kachin tribes had a large degree of independence as long as taxes could be collected. Attempts by the Burman kings to exercise greater power in the Kachin Hills was met with what John Cady described as, 'strenuous resistance' (Cady, 1958, p.42).

Despite this history of fluctuating cooperation and confrontation, ethnic tensions were exacerbated by colonial rule, which many academics attribute to the British's colonial metastrategy

of 'divide and rule' (Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012). Difference in treatment between ethnic groupings by British colonial administrators was prominent in British Indian army recruitment, with ethnic groups, particularly the Kachin and Karen, being viewed by the British as possessing a heightened capacity to effectively fight. This conception was promoted by Christian missionaries in the highland areas, who advanced the notion that the highland ethnic groups were akin to the so-called 'martial races' of India. The predominance of ethnic peoples in the armed forces was at its peak in the 1930s, with Karen, Kachin and Chins making up 83% of indigenous troops, even though these ethnic groups made up just 13% of the population (Callhan, 2005). As Taylor notes, "Myanmar was colonized not only at the height of the power of the British empire but also at the height of racist conceptualizations of the moral meaning of ethnic diversity" and British policy pointedly acted to differentiate between ethnicities (2007, p.76). This was coupled with a conceptual model of pre-colonial Myanmar as a site of ethnic antagonism and perpetual warfare, through this conception the British coloniser became the saviour of the ethnic minorities from the oppression of the Burmese lowland kings. The outcome of British policy was an "an impression that there was more that divided the people than united them" (Taylor, 2007, p.78).

The particular saliency of ethnicity in conflict in Myanmar became apparent during the Japanese invasion and occupation of Burma, as the Burman-dominated Burma Independence Army (BIA) joined the Japanese in ousting the British from the colony, while many ethnic minority soldiers remained loyal to the crown and fought with the British. Beginning around the later half of 1939, a number of the thakins from the DBA, Aung San and Ne Win being the most prominent, began to consort with the Japanese, seeking to gain their support for a Burman uprising (Callahan, 2005). The DBA found in the Japanese a willing partner in their plot to overthrow British rule and began to send leaders to receive training in Japan. The BIA was inaugurated on the 28th December 1941, and followed Japanese soldiers into their homeland following their invasion (Smith, 1999). The thakins of the DBA had been wary of ethnic minorities for years prior to the onset of war, a

situation that turned to open hostility upon the BIA's reentry into Burma. A great many atrocities against ethnic minorities - particularly the Karen - were committed by BIA troops who razed 400 Karen villages and killed 1,800 villagers in one township alone (Smith, 1999). These atrocities only fuelled the willingness of ethnic minorities to join British and American anti-Japanese irregular forces in the northern highlands (Taylor, 2007). The renowned Anthropologist of the Kachin, Edmund Leach, was heavily involved in recruiting and leading volunteer guerrillas in the Kachin Hills (Anderson & Sadan, 2016). Although the BIA turned on their erstwhile allies later in the war and joined the British in expelling the Japanese, the enmity established since the colonial era between the Kachins and Burmans created a gulf in trust between them. This lack of trust and intolerance came to define Kachin-Burman relations and laid the path to the coming civil war.

After the signing of the Panglong Agreement in 1947, there existed a fleeting moment in which hope for equality and federalism established a modicum of trust between ethnic minority elites and Burman nationalists. However, as Walton notes, "whatever spirit of unity might have existed at Panglong was already in tatters at independence" (2013, p.897). Indeed, the pattern of violence that has come to define centre-periphery social relations was in full swing by the time the Union had marked its first birthday. Already in 1948 Rangoon was under threat of capture from ethnic insurgencies and the CPB. The majority of Kachin troops in the Tatmadaw stayed loyal to the central government, however, Naw Seng led Kachin troops in rebellion of the state under the banner of the Pawng Yawng National Defence Force (Smith, 2016). This brief Kachin insurgency was the first manifestation of Kachin militant opposition to the government in Rangoon, laying the groundwork for future insurgencies.

Despite the short insurrection led by Naw Seng, Anderson and Sadan, have forwarded the period spanning 1944 until 1961 as the 'first ceasefire' in the Kachin conflict, as the volunteer forces organised by the British during the first world war refrained from violence on the basis of promises of political reform and devolution of power (2016). However, underground fermentation

amongst the Kachin elites began in earnest around 1951. A decade of political hostility towards political autonomy for Kachin State reestablished the mistrust that had festered under colonial rule and, by 1961, a “small group of Kachin underground militants committed fully to the foundation of the Kachin Independence Army” (Anderson & Sadan, 2016, p.52). The formation of the group marked either the end of the ‘first ceasefire’ or the beginning of the conflict, however, it is generally agreed that the Kachin that formed the KIA/KIO did so out of complete frustration with the central government’s lack of engagement on political and economic issues, leaving them - in their mindset - with no recourse other than to take up arms.

Ne Win’s increased military incursions into ethnic areas and brutal suppression of ethnic insurgencies throughout the BSPP era was a hallmark of the general’s attempts to create a union through pacification and assimilation. The increased militarisation of the conflict led to devastating human and economic tolls for the Kachin. Without taking combat deaths into account, over 33,000 civilians were killed between 1962 and 1986, while the State’s economy was crippled by the decades of civil war (Smith, 2016). The conflict would continue with sporadic bursts of intensive fighting until the mid-1990s, when the SLORC government re-aligned its policy regarding ethnic insurgency as the NLD emerged as a major threat to continued military rule. The sustained human and economic costs had been significant for the KIO leadership and, by the 1990s, had become difficult to sustain. Coupled with the new-found eagerness of the Tatmadaw to seek out ceasefire deals, in 1994, the government and the KIO signed a ceasefire agreement, bringing respite to both the civilians of Kachin and the KIA’s military cadre after 32 years of continuous conflict (Nilsen, 2013). By signing the ceasefire, the KIO gave up control over its primary means of resource extraction, the Hpakant Jade mine, in return it was able to administer the territory in Kachin that it exerted control over (Woods, 2011). This relatively sudden change in circumstances for the KIO caused a dramatic shift in its organisational practices, as it became primarily concerned with sustaining its military capabilities and services through any means necessary. With the loss of its

prized jade mine, the KIO turned to natural resource exploitation for its survival, in particular logging. Exploited resources were then largely traded with Chinese entrepreneurs and moved across the border, leading to the formation of strong business ties between KIO officials and their businessmen neighbours (Woods, 2011).

As the the KIO struggled to extract resources from the territory under its administration, the military government broadened and intensified its own strategy for establishing control over the Kachin region, a process that Kevin Woods has described as “Ceasefire Capitalism” (2011). The ceasefire agreements allowed the military government to grant concessions for economic activity in land that it had previously had limited dominion over, allowing the Tatmadaw to turn the market into a weapon to combat insurgency. In the words of Kevin Woods the new dynamics of ceasefire politics allowed the regime to cultivate, “ceasefire capitalism as a postwar state territorializing strategy by approaching global finance and commodity markets, (trans-) national business people, and ethnic political elites” (Woods, 2011, p. 766-7). While a number ethnic elites capitalised through lucrative resource concessions, the majority of ordinary Kachin were forced out of resource extraction and farming in areas that the government allocated to business elites (Woods, 2011). However, on the whole, the lack of sustained violence led to significantly better circumstances for the majority of people living in Kachin State (Nilsen, 2013). The military-state managed to slowly strangle the KIO’s ability to obtain taxes and resource rents and, by the mid-2000s, the KIO/A was fielding significantly less troops and service projects were greatly diminished (Woods, 2011). While using ceasefire capitalism as a territorial securitising strategy, the Tatmadaw simultaneously massively increased its presence in most ethnic areas, particularly in Kachin State, with the army adding 15 battalions between 1994 and 2006 (Fink, 2008). The ceasefire years saw the government expand its sphere of influence in Kachin State, both through concessions and the continued build-up of military might.

The KIO had been keen throughout the ceasefire years to enter into political negotiations with the junta, however, the military regime was not prepared to engage in political dealmaking before the National Convention (NC) had implemented Myanmar's new constitution. The government invited the KIO to take part in the NC, which it agreed to, providing a proposal consisting of 19 amendments for the prospective constitution. However, the NC chairman ignored the KIO demands, leading to the group having no influence over the final drafting of the constitution. While the constitution was approved through the dubious 2008 referendum, the KIO declared that it did not represent their political wishes (Nilsen, 2013). Although KIO dissatisfaction with the constitution covered a number of political, social and economic domains, the inclusion of the mandated transformation of all ceasefire armed groups into a Border Guard Force (BGF) controlled by the Tatmadaw was particularly anathema to the KIO. Following the introduction of the constitution, the KIO leadership attempted to organise a political party, however, the request was blocked as under the 2008 constitution political groups cannot be affiliated with groups warring against the state (ICG, 2013). With political options limited for the KIO, the group refused to adhere to the government's April 2010 deadline for the formation of the BGF, a move that prompted the government - led by newly elected president Thein Sein - to spin a narrative that positioned the KIO as insurgents (Lahpai, 2014).

Hostilities reignited in Kachin state in June of 2011, with the military breaking the ceasefire and attacking a Kachin outpost located near two Chinese operated hydropower plants, Taping Number One and Taping Number Two (Lahpai, 2014). Months of sustained fighting followed the renewed engagement, despite repeated calls by Thein Sein for the Tatmadaw to relent with offensive actions against the KIA, revealing the President's impotence in the face of the military (Aung, 2016; Farrelly, 2014). The conflict continued to escalate through 2012 and last well into 2013, with the military increasing its use of intensive artillery shelling of roads that linked Myitkyina to KIO/A territory (Nilsen, 2013). However, by May of 2013 international pressure -

predominantly emanating from Beijing - pushed the government into declaring unilateral ceasefire (Kipgen, 2015). Although a permanent ceasefire could not be implemented, the hope of continued dialogue between the KIA and the state lasted through the end of 2013 (Sadan, 2015). However, in April of 2014 the Tatmadaw broke the temporary ceasefire, attacking KIA positions along timber smuggling routes. By the end of 2014, the humanitarian cost of the conflict had spiralled out of control -gaining media attention globally -, with over 100,000 internally displaced peoples (IDPs) strewn across Kachin and northern Shan States (Kramer, 2015). In order to apply further pressure to the KIO/A, the government refused to allow humanitarian aid to reach IDPs in rebel-controlled areas due to “security reasons”, a tactic that Seng Maw Lahpai attributes to a ‘revitalized’ version of the Tatmadaw’s infamous ‘four cuts’ strategy (Lahpai, 2014).

Despite the worsening humanitarian crisis in Kachin State and the dwindling resources of the KIA, the stalemate between the military and the KIA has persisted, with little promise of an end to the enduring violence in Kachin State. Periodic violence has continued throughout Kachin and Northern Shan states, as the army has continued offensive operations against KIA combatants, keeping the majority of the 100,000 IDPs from returning to their villages. Clashes between the army and the KIA continued until start of 2018, yet the beginning of the year marked an increase in intensity in army operations against the KIA not seen since 2014. In fact, according to reports in the media the KIA have claimed 2018 to have seen the most intense fighting since the 1960s (Lewis & Moon, 2018). The continuing escalation of fighting in has led to a further 6,000 people to flee combat-zones, deepening the Kachin IDP crisis (UNHCR, 2018). Accusations of military abuses and atrocities have piled up during the long years of war in Kachin state, and are seen as being a standard strategy used by the military to subdue ethnic populations. Forced labour, rape and summary executions of civilians have been used as deliberate weapons of repression, a strategy that Lahpai describes using the term ‘state terrorism’ (Lahpai, 2014). In such circumstances, in which a

chronic lack of trust abides between the KIA and the government, the peace process has been largely ineffective and conflict remains the norm.

Myanmar's Cycles of Conflict: A sixth Cycle

In his 2007 work, *A State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*, Martin Smith charts the anatomy of ethnic conflict since Myanmar's independence. By contextualising civil war in the country through historical analysis, Smith is able to describe the cyclical nature of Myanmar's ethnic conflict. The author pinpoints five 'cycles of conflict' that have, by the changing nature of both war and the individual armed groups themselves, perpetuated conflict throughout the country. The first of these cycles that spanned the parliamentary era of Burmese politics (1948-1958), saw ethnic armed groups (EAGs) establish a culture of rebellion. As EAGs did not have support from abroad, like the KMT and CPB forces, they were forced to prioritise "self sufficiency and self-defense" as daily objectives, embedding "insurgency as a way of life" (p.28). The second cycle covered Ne Win's coup d'etat and escalation of conflicts with ethnic groups (1958-1967), with the general viewing ethnic issues as military problems rather than political affairs. This period culminated in the implementation of the Tatmadaw's "draconian 'Four Cuts' campaign, designed to cut all links in food, funds, intelligence, and recruits between insurgent groups and the civilian population", as well as the establishment of free fire zones that dramatically increased the intensity and viciousness of ethnic conflicts (p.33).

The third cycle (1968-1975) saw the intensification of all conflict, however, two particular fronts opened up, namely between the Tatmadaw and the CPB and EAGs supported by Thailand that formed a "buffer state". The Fourth cycle (1976-1988) saw the pinnacle of EAG power in Myanmar, coupled with the failure of the "Burmese Way to Socialism" and Myanmar's economic

collapse. Fuelled by the lucrative cross-border trade in drugs and other black market goods, insurgent groups managed to claim control over sizeable territorial enclaves and field large armies. During this period the KIO had to share claims of legitimate representation with the CPB, with the China-backed communists building roads and providing services within Kachin borderlands. The final cycle (1988-2006) described by Smith lasted through the SLORC/SPDC and was characterised by the government's push to sign ceasefire agreements with EAGs in order to focus on the threats posed to the regime by the NLD. The end of this cycle saw the junta push for the establishment of its constitution to transition Myanmar into a 'disciplined democracy' (p. 46).

Although the majority of EAGs have ceased to base their political claims in secession from the Union, but rather have moved towards demands of political autonomy within the Union, Myanmar's civil war is ongoing. Smith argues that this is due to the perpetual continuation of the underlying characteristics that have come to define conflict in Myanmar - military control of politics, ongoing offensive operations against a number of EAGs, widespread atrocities against civilians and the suppression of ethnic political rights under the 2008 constitution (Smith, 2007). Indeed, this framework for conflict in Myanmar extends into the present and has created - at the very minimum in the case of the Kachin - a sixth cycle of conflict that has extended from the 2008 passing of the constitution until the present.

Continuing Military Power

Myanmar's transition to civilian government was a change that was heralded around the world as a turning point in the country's political trajectory. The roadmap towards so-called disciplined democracy put into motion by Khin Nyunt in 2003 was borne out and the country held its first elections in 2010, electing the USDP into government, in turn the Presidential Electoral College appointed former general Thein Sein as president (Croissant & Kamerling, 2013). Although

the 2010 elections were widely denounced as being far from free, subsequent elections that the NLD won were not blighted by so much electoral misconduct. Yet, even with Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD in power, the military still have a stranglehold over Myanmar politics.

The Tatmadaw continue to have indirect control over all aspects of power in Myanmar's political sphere, as it is delineated in the 2008 constitution. The constitution stipulates that the Military has "full institutional autonomy and can reassume political control at any point" (Croissant & Kamerling, 2013, p.120). Article 74 of the constitution also guarantees the military 25 percent of the seats at both upper and lower houses of central and regional governments, allowing the army an effective veto over all constitutional amendments, as Article 436 stipulates all amendments require a majority of more than 75% (Croissant & Kamerling, 2013). Even though the constitution guarantees the separation of powers, the military has control over the appointing of the Union President, as it is the Presidential Electoral College that formally appoints the incumbent President. The Presidential Electoral College is squarely in the hands of the head of the armed forces, as they are responsible for the appointing of the colleges regional representatives. Additionally, impeachment proceedings can be started with just 25 percent of the parliament, the same percentage as the military's mandated allotment (Croissant & Kamerling, 2013). The military has also guaranteed its right to call a state of emergency at any point, which would allow the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) to assume control over all branches of government. As the NDSC consists of former junta leaders, the declaration of a state of emergency would essentially constitute a coup d'état (Nyein, 2009).

The 2008 constitution additionally stipulates that three of Myanmar's ministries are the sole responsibility of the armed forces, namely Home Affairs, Defence and Border Affairs (Nyein, 2009). In order to appoint heads of these ministries, the Union President must select a serving member of the armed forces from a list provided by the head of the armed forces (Egreteau, 2014). The effective military control of these three ministries has left a substantial portion of Myanmar's

governmental responsibilities in the hands of the Tatmadaw, with control over all security matters, internal and external residing with the head of the armed forces.

Although since Myanmar's transition to semi-democracy the military has been cautious to engage in obstructionist political activity, the military members of parliament have consistently objected to bills that have aimed to curtail the military's economic interests or the sovereignty of the military (Egreteau, 2015). Despite the military's disinclination to block the development of parliamentary politics, it is still by a long way the strongest and most cohesive institution in Myanmar. This institutional cohesion has historically concentrated power amongst the military's top generals, an institutional structure that remains contemporarily true (Croissant & Lorenz, 2018). Thus, democratic reforms remain limited by continued military power and the ability of a democratic government led by the NLD to exert control over the Tatmadaw remains minimal (Jones, 2014a; Croissant & Lorenz, 2018).

The government's lack of ability to control the military is an issue that resonates with Kachin leaders, being seen as an impediment to peace in the region. Although appraisals of the NLD government's intentions in controlling the military vary, Kachin elites doubt the Aung San Suu Kyi's ability to reign in the generals. In an interview conducted in Myitkyina, Reverend Dr. Samson Hkalam - Chairman of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) - stated, "we are very discouraged about the Aung San Suu Kyi government because they cannot control the military" (2018). The Reverend also intimated that Suu Kyi had capitulated to the military, saying, "She [Aung San Suu Kyi] is afraid that if there is no military behind her, she will lose. They [the NLD] used to stand for justice and human rights, but when they became the government they acted the same as the military" (Hkalam, 2018). Although less suspicious of the NLD's desire to control the military, Kachin political figures also doubt the ability of the NLD government to control the Tatmadaw. Kachin State Democracy Party Chairman Dr. Manam Tu Ja, likened the NLD and

Tatmadaw to two parallel governments, saying, “It is a conflict of colour, green versus red. They are going parallel, like two governments” (2018).

Ongoing Military offensives

As noted earlier military action is ongoing in Myanmar, with conflict still raging in Kachin State, Rakhine State and Shan State (Callahan, 2018). The military has pursued a selective approach in regards to military engagement with EAGs, attacking KIA positions in 2011 ostensibly for not signing the BGF agreement, even though other EAGs reaffirmed ceasefires while refusing to sign the agreement (Moe, 2011). The ceasefires between the Tatmadaw and Wa and Mongla armed groups have been held since 2011, even though these groups refused to sign the National Ceasefire Agreement along with the Northern Alliance, of which the KIA is a member (Callahan, 2018). This selective military aggression can be seen to be part of the military’s attempt to employ a strategy of divide and rule, a strategy the military has historically used in dealing with ethnic issues (South, 2008). Indeed, the ‘divide and rule’ strategy employed by the Tatmadaw in peace negotiations has remained fairly rigid since the SPDC/SLORC era (South, 2004), with the military seeking to deal individually with EAGs rather than with alliances such as the Northern alliance.

The army’s strategy in fighting ethnic groups has drawn further comparison to the junta era, with the current war in Kachin eschewing in a revitalisation of the military’s ‘four cuts’ policy adapted for Myanmar’s era of democratisation (Lahpai, 2014). The four underlying principles of this revitalised strategy employ outward calls for unilateral ceasefire by the government; blocking humanitarian relief for the 100,000 Kachin IDPs dislocated from their communities due to violence; a sustained campaign of ‘Nazi-like’ propaganda in state-media and affiliated news streams; and offensive military action and human rights abuses (Lahpai, 2014, p. 293-294). This government campaign was on full show during an ASEAN meeting in Bali in 2011, at which President Thein

Sein both called for a halt to offensive military operations and issued threats to the KIA. The former leader declared that the Tatmadaw could annihilate the KIA in a matter of hours, if it so wished (Lahpai, 2014).

Kachin leaders are clear in attributing the blame for continuing violence between the KIA and the Tatmadaw, criticising the military's divisive strategies and continuing offensives. Dr. Tu Ja criticised the military's strategy, noting, "The military is using the talk talk, fight fight strategy. On the one hand they hold peace talks, on the other hand they launch offensives against ethnic groups" (2018). He additionally mentioned that the Tatmadaw's strategy constituted a fundamental roadblock to peace and that any cessation in fighting would require the army to stop its offensive manoeuvres. Similarly, Reverend Dr. Samson Hkalam noted that the large increases in army battalions stationed in the state only fuelled the conflict. The KBC chairman stated, "For example, in the Kachin area if you want to see peace, then all military troops must withdraw. During the seven years since [the breakdown in the ceasefire] they have many new military posts in the Kachin area. If all new military posts withdraw, then we will see peace" (2018). In similar fashion, Miss Ja Seng Hkawn said, "How can we pressure the Myanmar military leaders they are the problem ... the Panglong conference is ongoing but still they send troops" (2018).

Widespread Military Atrocities

Atrocities committed by the Tatmadaw in ethnic areas have been many, frequent and adopted by the military as a means of systematically suppressing ethnic populations. The military's actions in Arakan State against the Rohingya has dominated headlines around the world, bringing renewed focus to the plight of ethnic peoples in Myanmar. Tatmadaw war crimes against the Rohingya have been labelled 'ethnic cleansing' by the UN, with some denouncing them as 'genocide' (Barany, 2018). The military's history of abusing human rights of local ethnic

populations, a practice that has fuelled recruitment for EAGs and further embittered local populations. A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report from the 1970s lambasted Ne Win's regime's "ruthless and poorly focused" operations against the KIA, exemplified by the razing of entire villages, forced mass migration, mass rape, and summary executions (Lahpai, 2014). While rape was used as a weapon of war against ethnic women, forced labour was used as a weapon against ethnic male populations who were coerced into portering for military battalions (Smith, 2007). These egregious violations of human rights have become common place in the Tatmadaw's campaigns in Kachin State, and, according to Lahpai, constitute 'state terrorism' (2014, p.287). This issue is particularly salient in fuelling KIA popularity and recruitment in the present day and remains central in motivating insurgency.

Statistics detailing the prevalence of rights abuses are notoriously difficult to ascertain, relying almost completely on the United Nations and NGOs, with institutional human rights documentation virtually non-existent. Additionally, reporting of human rights violations by civilians is often hampered by the fear of repercussions from the military, with family members and victims being detained for speaking out (Pwint, 2018). A United Nations report noted that rights violations have 'constituted the norm' since the breakdown of the ceasefire in 2011 (UNHRC, 2018). However, between 2011 and 2014 at least 64 women and girls were raped by army soldiers and over 40 men were detained and forced to porter for local battalions (Lahpai, 2014). These atrocities are fuelled by an institutional culture of ethnic chauvinism developed in the military and lack of substantive repercussions for perpetrators.

Although incidents of human rights abuse are endemic to the fighting in Kachin State, the most brutal have become deeply entrenched in the narratives of ethnic suppression in recent years. In 2011, two young women were kidnapped by a military patrol operating to the south of Myitkyina and forced accompany the soldiers for a number of weeks, being raped by officers on a nightly basis (Lahpai, 2014). The brutality of the soldiers' actions were to repeat themselves in 2015, when two

volunteer KBC teachers Maran Lu Ra (20) and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin (20) were kidnapped from Khaungkha village in Northern Shan State, brutally raped and subsequently murdered by a local battalion (Nyein & Weng, 2015).

This sentiment was reiterated by Dr. Reverend Hkalam during our interview, with two notable aspects of Tatmadaw atrocities standing out. The first of these were the killings of the two KBC teachers in Northern Shan State, while the second centred on the continual use of artillery and aerial bombardments by the military during the lead-up to Christmas:

Even in December, Christmas time, they attack the Kachin. We have many IDPs from that time. Over the 23rd, 24th and 25th they fire artillery and helicopter gunships. So we have lost hope. We want them to respect this day, but they target us on this day for six years already...Its symbolic, they make us fear (Hkalam, 2018).

The use of symbolic attacks during Christmas is seen as an articulation of the military's Burman and Buddhist chauvinism. Indeed, these attacks are used as a form of mental attrition, used to slowly strangle the KIA's resistance. Yet, at the same time these attacks fuel Kachin outrage against the government and the Tatmadaw.

Ethnic Rights and the 2008 Constitution

The 2008 constitution, designed by the military to ensure the army leadership's continuing centrality in the political process in Myanmar as well as its institutional autonomy was approved by an implausible by an implausible 93.8%, with a turnout of 98% during a referendum in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis (Jones, 2014b). The constitution ensured the military would stay a unitary force and demanded that the country's ethnic armed groups turn into so-called BGFs and

outlined Myanmar's limited decentralisation, through which 14 partially elected assemblies would be established (Holliday et al., 2015). However, the lack of substantive progress in regards to devolution and the refusal of EAGs to be integrated into an army that has long been accused of Burman chauvinism have driven distrust and conflict in Kachin state.

While it could be argued that the establishment of regional assemblies in Myanmar is a step in the right direction, the decentralisation process has been severely hampered by the constitution and the power of regional assemblies has similarly been limited at best. The ability of regional assemblies to exert any functional control over policy has been limited by their structure and lack of engagement with genuine policy issues. In Kachin State, the structure of the regional assembly is such that any ethnic group with more than 50,000 inhabitants must be represented at ministerial level, this has led to a level of factionalism in the state's cabinet. According to Holliday et al., the result is, "something akin to a divide-and-rule strategy" (Holliday et al., 2015). Additionally, state's are frequently unable to engaging with issues that remain important the their constituents, with the Kachin State assembly playing "no substantial role" in addressing the ongoing violence (Holliday et al., 2015). Indeed, the lack of conference in state level governance is no surprise when their lack of funding and policy remit is taken into account.

The NLD won a landslide victory in the 2015 elections in Kachin State, riding promises of amending the constitution to improve the provision of ethnic political rights. However, to date the government has refused to engage in discussions relating to the implementation of State constitutions, unless all armed groups "reject any possibility of secession" (Callahan, 2018, p.255). In an interview with Ms Ja Seng Hkawn she noted how angry the Kachin were at the NLD's failure to live up to their promises, with many Kachin 'scalding' the democracy party through Facebook (2018). Ja Seng Hkawn was adamant in pointing out that "right now our main problem is the 2008 constitution", however, she noted, "within Myanmar we have less hope to change the 2008 constitution".

While EAGs, including the KIA, have long given up their demands to secede from the Union (Smith, 2007), a longstanding demand has been the implementation of state-level constitutions that guarantee the rights of ethnic peoples under a truly federal system of government (Callahan, 2018). Agreeing to this compromise should have been achievable, however, state constitutions remain a pipe dream, showing the deep lack of trust between EAGs and the government. Indeed, as Dr Tu Ja phrased it, “Our policy is for federalism, including the KIO. The KIO want a federal union ... without self-determination and a state constitution, we cannot have federalism” (2018). Though, he continued to explain that the first step in alleviating the conflict had to involve the government devolving power, saying, “More ethnic rights, more peace. Peace means to achieve political rights. Without achieving political rights, we cannot achieve peace. Political rights means to fulfil the desire of ethnic peoples” (2018).

The devolution of power to regional governments additionally does not cover the key aspects of power sharing that EAGs have demanded. While ethnic area assemblies now have a degree of responsibility for a number of policy areas, the constitution prohibits the devolution of power over most educational affairs, resource extraction and allocation, and, most importantly, security (Joliffe, 2015). The KIA rejected the government’s demands to re-mobilise as a BGF force, within which Tatmadaw officers would be embedded. The majority of EAGs support a hard federalism that would create different armed forces representative of their state, with the central government controlling foreign affairs (Taylor, 2017). A federal army may be a rather bold ambition, however, the fact that the Tatmadaw’s officer corps are predominantly of Burman ethnicity is a major obstacle to peace initiatives. In order to begin to address this issue, at the very least, “Myanmar’s armed forces not only should be ethnically representative but be seen and understood to be so” (Taylor, 2017, p.8). The issue of control over security matters has become a focal point in the peace process, with the many ethnic armed groups viewing a federal armed forces as the only political solution to the dilemma of having multiple armed groups in many states.

Conclusion

Conflict continues to rage in Kachin State, and the possibility of a peace deal looking as distant as ever. Fighting in the rural areas has displaced more than a 100,000 Kachin, who remain stuck in IDP camps, dislocated from their homes and livelihoods. The continuing Kachin conflict has shown how civil war in Myanmar has moved through a number of cycles, with the contemporary cycle — maintaining the underlying dynamics of conflict in Myanmar — the military's continued hold on power, their ongoing offensives against the Kachin, rampant human rights abuses, and the lack of improvement in ethnic political rights written into the 2008 constitution. These four key components have driven the violence since the 2011 breakdown of the ceasefire that had held for the previous 17 years. The suppression of ethnic language rights in both education and the citizens' interaction has undoubtedly fostered distrust and animosity amongst the Kachin. However, in its current stage, the military's continuing assault on KIA positions and the atrocities committed by soldiers in Kachin State are the key causes fuelling conflict in the region. Without an end to the military's engagement in Kachin State, there will be no lasting peace.

Other 'grievance' factors that have had an impact on the conflict, such as the overexploitation of natural resources and the inequality of opportunity in education, are also of deep importance to the Kachin. Yet these issues remain secondary to the Kachin elite. Politicians and ethnic leaders are more concerned with gaining a broader set of political rights, which would only be possible once amendments are made to the 2008 constitution. Federalism has become synonymous with ethnic political rights for the Kachin elite, with the Kachin political parties and the influential Kachin Baptist Convention pushing for this singular aim. Indeed, the call for federalism is not only one that has been championed by Kachin politicians, but one that is supported

by the KIO/A. However, the current process of devolution of power to regional assemblies remains limited in scope and falls far short of Kachin desires for semi-autonomy.

In their 2018 article, *Dynamics of Language and Education Policy in Myanmar*, Lall and South write, “despite clear linkages between the ethnic conflict and education reform, the two processes are not formally linked in the peace process” (p.486). In the case of the Kachin, language issues are taking a secondary position, behind the cessation of violence and broad constitutional reform. This was made pointedly clear by MP Ja Seng Hkawn, who stated, “Mother-tongue [education] is not the problem, only federal[isation] is the problem” (2018).

To date, the military has unilaterally broken two ceasefires, in 2011 and again in 2013. And a new ceasefire looks unlikely in the wake of continued bombardment of KIA positions throughout 2018. Although it may seem an obvious step, in order for the peace process to move forward the military must disengage from its offensive operations. Additionally, without legitimate accountability for human rights violations that are perpetrated in ethnic areas, the grievances of ethnic peoples will not be addressed and EAGs will continue to use atrocities to bolster recruitment. However, continuing military political control has also hampered the ability of the NLD to reign in the army’s operations and excesses in Kachin State, leaving little hope amongst Kachin that an end to war is in sight.

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