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The Kachin of Myanmar
An Approach to a Complex Political and Social History

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Abstract
Although Kachin resistance against the Burmese/Myanmar state has continued since the 1960s, in 1948 the Kachin were enthusiastic supporters of the Panglung Agreement and the Union of Burma. The article traces the development and treatment of the Kachin areas since British colonisation and shows how the foundations of the current situation were laid in the early decades of the twentieth century. British perceptions of the hill peoples as primitive, backward and in need of protection and guidance carried over into independent Burma and may account for many of the problems and misunderstandings experienced today. They may be compared to the "house elves" in the books about the wizard Harry Potter: lesser mortals destined to serve loyally, but not to be independent or determine their own fate. The Kachin continuously strive to counter this perception.

Keywords
Myanmar, Kachin, ethnic minorities, history, violent conflict, identity.

Prologue

Some time ago, the author was asked to do a study on a rather remote hill tribe. The tribe lives in a mountainous area straddling three countries, and its members similarly straddle the official borders of all three. They speak a language unique to themselves that has several often mutually unintelligible dialects specific to a certain valley or village. They have a reputation

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for rebelliousness, having fought long and hard against having a part of their area forcibly attached to a country in the region, thereby destroying their long-standing autonomy.

The tribe are – did anyone guess? – the Tyroleans and the area is South Tyrol, nowadays an autonomous province of Italy (Alcock 1970).

Why quote this European example in a paper dealing with the Kachin of North Myanmar? Precisely to demonstrate how differing perceptions of similar phenomena can distort judgements. The Kachin, like the Tyroleans, straddle three different countries: North Myanmar, Northeast India and Southwest China. Even their populations are of a similar size: around one million. The Kachin's official language is Jinghpaw, but they have a number of dialects, some mutually unintelligible. Again like the Tyroleans, they have fought long against the state of Myanmar for autonomy and sometimes found a retreat across the borders in India and China. There, however, the similarity seems to end. South Tyrol is nowadays one of the richest provinces of Italy, a well-developed agricultural region and popular tourist destination. Today it is seen as a bridge between Italy, Austria and Switzerland (see Benedikter 2012; Peterlini 2005, 2008). The Kachin were for long periods perceived as on the periphery of civilisation, poor and "barbaric", at most loosely affiliated to any of the states in the region.

Introduction

One should not push comparisons too far, and certainly both the composition and the situation of the Kachin cannot be equated one to one with that of the Tyroleans. But the point here is to question certain assumptions about "hill tribes" or "minorities" in general in South and Southeast Asia, which seem to be carved in stone. These assumptions seem strange when applied to situations nearer to home, so to speak. Conversely, the "hill tribes" suddenly appear familiar when observed through the lens of "European regional groups".

It becomes quickly – and maybe surprisingly – obvious that, while structurally (violent) conflicts are quite similar, individual manifestations and combinations of factors can and do lead to very different outcomes. The deep structures include processes and procedures of access and inclusion based on definitions of affiliation and belonging or ascribed identity, the connections of language and power and the reasons for denial of access and participation (Fairclough 1989; Helbardt et al. 2013). In other words: whereas their deep structures correspond, on the surface these conflicts look

quite dissimilar. Yet, these surface differences are crucial as they can and do lead to markedly different results (Wolff 2003).

In North Myanmar a new round of violence since 2011 shows few signs of abating (ICG 2013). The reasons for violence are found not so much in some "deep historical legacy or logic", but precisely in events, processes and mutual (mis)interpretations during British colonisation and after independence (see e.g. Sai Kham Mong 2005). This does not mean that conflicts over interests and affiliation did not occur earlier, but the British made it a punishable crime to fight for one's interests and autonomy. In fact the Ashokan model of Buddhist kingship relegated the people on the periphery or the "wild border" to an area to be controlled and if possible converted (Tambiah 1976; see also Gravers 1999). But this border was seldom penetrated, and its status remained vague. Perceptions of the population there were rarely in line with current understanding of "ethnicity" or "minority".

British colonial understanding defined the hill people, who later were called "Kachin", in new ways, which the latter made use of to confirm and/or maintain their status in the face of changes. This process involved a change of view of interests and of the means to secure them. The British policy regarding "minorities" and the question of a divide-and-rule approach has been ably discussed by Roland Bless (1990). However, he concentrates on what could be called "non-indigenous" minorities, viz. the Indians and to a lesser extent the indigenous groups like Karen or Shan. The Kachin are discussed rather cursorily (Bless 1990: 49–50; 290ff; 311), not least because they hardly figured in political and constitutional negotiations until 1946. British policies towards minorities were by no means uniform and differed considerably across time and space. This applied especially to the so-called hill tribes, which were alternately called "backward", "wild", "uncivilised", "politically immature" or "endangered".

In colonial times the Kachin Hills, like similar areas in India, were administered separately. After independence, political ties were ruptured. This did not mean, however, that social, economic and family contacts ceased (Sadan 2013: 184–85; Sai Kham Mong 2005: 134ff.). Independence and secessionist movements in Northern Myanmar thus had their impact on Northeast India as well.[1] It would, therefore, be of doubtful use to restrict the discussion to any one often arbitrarily delimited country, as Willem van Schendel and James Scott have forcefully argued (van Schendel 2002; Scott

[1] A poignant example of the interest events in Myanmar arouse in Northeast India is the reprint of the FACE Report of 1947 in Manipur in 1998 to highlight the concerns and rights of hill peoples (see Neihsial 1998).

2009), but rather to look across the borders to the Singhpo in India and the Jinghpo in China (as the Kachin are called there) as well.

Van Schendel defines "Zomia"[2] as based among other things on geographical conditions and sees the region as an integrated whole (van Schendel 2002: 653–54). But whether that makes the groups living in this area into "non-state" groups, as Scott (2009: 137–140) argues, is another question. If they retreat from the claims of larger states and develop the "art of not being governed" that does not necessarily mean that they lack state-like structures of governance of their own or exist in total isolation, nor does it mean that they do not aspire to becoming states in their own right.

It might be more useful to develop an idea of Mandy Sadan (2013) and see these areas as, if not a centre, at least a bridge area linking instead of separating countries (a similar argument is developed by Thant Myint-U 2011). Sadan (2013: 184–85) contests the "non-state" status of the Kachin. The fact that they straddle three borders gives the term "periphery" another meaning, inasmuch as the periphery always knows more about the centre than the centre knows about the periphery and can act as a bridging region. By necessity, the Kachin had to deal with the outside world at the political and economic levels and enter into negotiations with the hegemonic powers of the day, often balancing them against each other, a fact which Scott does not really discuss. Hill peoples were always tied into state systems, albeit in various ways which could range from symbolic submission to active resistance when the state became too dominant. Only with a new type of expansion under the British, which involved active penetration and administration and fixed borders could the question of "autonomy" be raised, and (mis)understood in manifold ways.[3]

This article will look at the development of the Kachin from a "hill tribe" to an ethnic minority, or ethnic nationality as they are currently called, and consider the historical events which led to the current situation. Only by knowing the historical background can the series of periodic and apparently "anti-cyclical" irruptions of violence against the "state" be understood and seen as a way of coping with change and with the unfulfilled expectations and broken promises that date from the turbulent times after World War II. At the same time, only by following the historical and political developments is the development of a "Kachin identity", in contrast to a narrower "clan" identity, and their current struggle against the Myanmar state and

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2 An artificial term for the hill region connecting India, China and Myanmar, derived from the term "Mizo", probably meaning "human".

3 For a comprehensive discussion on the political concept of autonomy see Benedikter 2012.

government intelligible. To this end, a few definitions of what ethnicity and ethnic identity should or could mean in this context are appropriate here.

Ethnicity and identity – some short considerations

Definitions of ethnicity and ethnic identity have been and continue to be fiercely debated. It seems that the more states attempt to approach a Herderian ideal of nationhood, the further they move away from it because ethnic identity lodges in ever smaller and more indeterminate groups. Whereas ethnicity certainly is always socially and sometimes individually constructed, this does not mean that it is arbitrary or fictitious. It needs, as Sandra Wallman (1978, 1986) pointed out long ago, something to base itself on. What this is, may, however, vary considerably across time and space. Karl Deutsch (1966, 1979) and Anthony Smith (1987) saw ethnicity as a choice, but a choice within limits: ethnic groups define themselves and are being defined by markers (not necessarily identical ones) whose salience and relevance may differ. In other words, ethnicity is as much emphasis of chosen markers as anything else, an emphasis that then bears on self-perception and identity as the core of being (see Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1995, 2007).

Historical background

The Kachin are first mentioned relatively late and only incidentally in Burmese and Chinese sources around the 14th and 15th centuries. In the latter, the Kachin appear as a superstitious people without history or religion who live on chillies and potatoes (Wyatt-Smith 1930). In Burmese historical records they are mentioned from about the 15th century and later as mercenaries for Kings Bayinnaung and Alaungpaya (FACE Report 1948: 8). These records speak of fairly loosely arranged conditions of vassalage to the Burmese kings (cf. Smith 1999: 38–39). A conclusive affirmation of this relationship is documented only under King Mindon in the 19th century (Sadan 2013: 124–127).[4]

Their own myths and legends locate their origin somewhere north of Burma in Yunnan or Tibet from where they migrated around 500 A.D. and finally settled around the Mali Hkwa and the Hukawng valley around 900 A.D. (Kawlu Ma Naung 1942: 5). They still locate the country of their

[4] See also FACE Report 1948: 9, where it is mentioned that the Kansi Duwa got his appointment order from Mindon (1853–78) and was also appointed military commander in Hkamti Long. See also Armstrong 1997: 122.

ancestors across the hills to the North, where they return when they die. The Kachin put their own history in writing only in the middle of the 20th century (Kawlu Ma Naung 1942: 5). In the late 19th century, research by Christian missionaries gave the Kachin a sense of their uniqueness in the sense that they became aware of having a culture and history that differed from those of the groups around them (Gilhodes 1922; Carrapiett 1929).

The origin of the name is obscure. The Kachin themselves never used this name until the colonial period, and even today they still add their clan name when identifying as Kachin. The term seems to have been an outside definition for a conglomerate of loosely aligned groups. Among them, the most prominent were and are the Jinghpaw, who were therefore often equated with the Kachin (Sadan 2013: 31–33, 104–05; Leyden 1943a). The name Kachin (Kahkyen, Khachin, etc.) appears in the documents fairly soon after English penetration began in the early 19th century (Fytche 1867). It may originate from the Burmese, meaning people from the hills with an implicit understanding of primitivism and barbarism.[5]

In the process, a number of lineage groups were bracketed together under the Kachin ethnicity (Sadan 2013: 134–35). It was a twofold development: Jinghpaw groups and lineages had trade and family contacts across developing borders and the "periphery" to India (Singhpo) and China (Jingpo), and in the borderlands of Burma incorporated a number of other groups into the newly developing entity of "Kachin" when this identity became politically opportune (Sadan 2013: 117, 174–75; Smith 1999: 35). Internal and external definitions and perceptions slowly aligned with each other and led to new alliances and divisions within fixed borders (Sadan 2013: 46ff., 304, 363). Sadan highlights the varied strategies of related groups to assert their rights and significance in the numbers game: The Buddhist Singhpo in India still have family contacts with Christian Kachin in Myanmar, but they nowadays identify strongly as Buddhist and as a small, clearly defined Scheduled Tribe (ST) (ibid.: 184–85, 298–99, 412–14). Only as such will they be able to get the privileges reserved for this group, because the ST category implicitly and explicitly is reserved for groups considered small and vulnerable who receive privileges if they remain in this state. In Myanmar, the numbers game works exactly the other way round: the more people that can be included in the category Kachin, the more influential and powerful the group will be as an acknowledged indigenous minority (ibid.: 116–17, 143, 153–55, 339). In China, Jinghpo are acknowledged as an ethnic minority among

[5] In the Burma Handbook 1944: 19 it is speculated that the term Jinghpaw may be Tibetan for "cannibals", and that for the Chinese "Kachin" means "wild men". Ruth Armstrong mentions that the Kachin, therefore, prefer the term Jinghpaw, which (Armstrong 1997: 3).

others in the border region, but with a clearly dominant position. According to Sadan, they feel they are Chinese nationals now (ibid.: 185).

In Myanmar, the Jinghpaw had parallel lineage groups across divisions to other groups or tribes, both of an equal and hierarchical relationship and, thus, could incorporate new groups fairly easily into their fold, a fact affirmed by a corresponding and developing ritual (Manao) (Sadan 2013: 54, 134–36, 341, 421–430ff, esp. 425). This is an ongoing process, since in times of strife and conflict groups would flee across borders and be incorporated into the fold as Kachin, like the Lisu from Yunnan during the Cultural Revolution (ibid.: 192–93, 354, 450). What is important is the fact that political and territorial borders were eventually acknowledged as both inevitable and legitimate, while a consciousness of "transnational ethnicity" remained.

The British perception of Kachin history remained vague. Leach's detailed study (Leach 1970) of the Kachin social system is one of the few comprehensive works and remains definitive.[6] It shows the differences between the social formations and organisational principles of *gumlao* and *gumsa* as basically fluctuations between closer (*gumsa*) or more distant (*gumlao*) associations with the Shan model, while the content of these formations remained stable and differed mainly in British eyes. *Gumlao* was considered the more egalitarian ("democratic") model, in which authority was based on consensus and election and was for that reason denounced by the British as rebellious and revolutionary, whereas *gumsa* was perceived as more hierarchical, accepting the hereditary authority of the chief. Leach's approach was anthropological, and he did not take into account political and social changes over time and space, but viewed Kachin society as static, one reason why Sadan considers this study ahistorical (Sadan 2013: 15–16).

In Assam, the Kachin were perceived as obstacles to the newly developing economic opportunities and, instead of being granted economic participation and access, were excluded from economic progress (Nugent 1982: 508–527), which led to the first Singpho rebellion in the tea areas of Assam and NEFA in 1843. In the turbulent times of British expansion, the Kachin groups endeavoured to have their customary and traditional rights of land and trade confirmed by the side in the ascendance (Sadan 2013: 77–79). Sadan here clearly contradicts Scott's view of the "non-state": the Singhpo in Assam were quite willing to engage with and integrate into the colonial economy, but were prevented from doing so by the colonial power itself. The situation was complicated further by the clash between British and local

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6 While the Shan were the – positive and negative – civilised model for the Kachin, they were never accepted as tributary overlords.

conceptions of authority and allegiance: the British elected to misunderstand or misinterpret the patron-client and land system of the Jinghpaw as "slavery" and endeavoured to abolish it to make the Kachin "civilised" and into tax payers (Sadan 2013: 59–60, 80–81; Barnard 1927)[7] rather than vassals or tributaries. This, and the destruction of the traditional trade rights and employment of the Kachin, led to violent resistance during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Raitt 1915b; Kachin Raids 1919).

The Northern parts of Burma (Frontier Areas Administration) were formally annexed by Britain only in 1927/28 and the Kachin areas proper in 1929 (Treaty Diary 1897). A report on the routes through Kachinland from that year still refers to the area as Burma Independent District Northeast (Raitt 1915a). Until then the triangle was deemed to be "unadministered" (Barnard 1927; Expedition 1883), which meant that the British did not directly interfere in internal administration, but at most collected taxes – if they could –, otherwise leaving the areas alone (Smith 1999: 42f; FACE Report 1948).[8] Until 1894, the Burma-Yunnan border was not even marked, and a map from 1899 showed the Kachin areas as neither Burmese nor British-controlled.[9] Resistance continued until 1926, though the hills were considered "pacified" after 1915 (Raitt 1915a). The reasons for these rebellions are called "obscure", an obscurity that clears a bit when we learn that the Kachins had killed government servants who intruded into the area demanding taxes, and as punishment their villages and their harvest were burnt down and their buffaloes killed (Abbey 1916; Sadan 2013: 7).

Into the existing volatility of the border regions and their contested status between China and Burma, the British inserted their own insecurities. In the constitution of 1937, when Burma was separated from India, the reforms only applied to "Ministerial Burma". The border and hill areas were defined as "excluded areas" under the direct control of the governor and without the political institutions granted to the rest of the country:

> Certain special subjects are administered by the Governor without any advice from his Ministers. These special subjects include defence and the excluded areas, comprising the Federated Shan States and the Karen Hills on the East, the Kachin Hills on the North-East and North, and the Chin Hills on the North-West (Intelligence Reports 1937: 5; Smith 1999: 43).

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7 On one Kachin expedition in 1893, Hsenwi (letter from 12 September 1893) mentions that the Kachin do not like to be forced to pay taxes. Why taxes were levied remains obscure. Rice 1916.

8 Until 1895 the Kachin resisted British penetration. Then the British managed to establish fragile indirect control. See U Hla Thein 2005a: 194–220 and Crosthwaite 1968: 281; the reasons for not administering the Shan areas applied with equal force to the Kachin areas.

9 The border remained unmarked until WWII and beyond because neither power was able to completely exert control there. Cf. Cass 1943; Kawlu Ma Naung 1942: 33; Creasey 1940.

World War II and looming independence

Kachin assistance for the allies in the defence of India and China during WWII is well documented (Intelligence Reports 1942). Five thousand Kachin levies were recruited, largely, but not only, for Orde Wingate's Force 136 (Chindits) secret operations (Memo 1945b).[10] They were instrumental in the defence of Fort Hertz (Putao) by securing the air routes and in sabotaging Japanese operations (Memo 1945b).

The question of the future of the hill tracts as well as that of the Kachin and Kachin levies was debated from at least 1943/44 (McKenzie 1944). A report on the liberated areas states that, bravely as these people fought, after the end of hostilities chaos reigned since no proper civil administration existed. To combat that, exclusively Kachin Pyadas, a sort of village constable, were appointed as a first step in 1944 (Intelligence Report 1944).

This was also intended to check the Chinese advance up to Myitkyina and Sumprabum and their administrative and recruiting efforts (Wallace 1943).[11] Much as the Allied Forces needed Chinese assistance, they did not want the Kachin to ally with them (Bowerman 1946; McDougal 1942), more so since many British officers were well aware that Kachin support was based less on a political cause or on loyalty to the British, than on defence of their home and people and against ill-treatment by the Japanese and Burmans (Simla 1944; Myitkyina 1947a). Hill people were the "rock against which Jap invasion broke" (Dorman-Smith 1946b: 88).[12]

> The Kachins along the frontier on the Chinese side are strongly pro-British and dislike the Chinese and their admin intensely. [...] Once British admin functions again, there is likely to be very marked and strenuous opposition to any Chinese attempts to take over Kachin territory in Burma (Cass 1943).[13]

The British felt confident that the Kachin distrusted both the Burmese and the Chinese, the implication being that they only trusted the British (Burma 1948: 26).

At the end of WWII most Kachin areas remained under the Frontier Areas Administration (FAA), which was considered a provisional option (Stevenson 1946a). Generally it was thought as settled that the Kachin would have to join Burma at some point: "[…] the hill peoples had, willy-nilly, to

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10 For a good account of the dubiousness of these operations, see Masters 1961 and Fellowes-Gordon 1957 and 1972.

11 Reportedly, they even planned to open schools teaching Chinese, Jinghpaw and English, based on claims of the alleged administration of the Kachin lands with a population of their own "race" for the past 5,000 years: Leyden 1943c.

12 Dorman-Smith remarks that Hill Defence was more or less privately organised.

13 The same source claims that the Kachins prefer to remain with Burma.

throw in their lot with the Burmans (Pearn: 45)." The British had no intention to leave the considerable economic resources of the area to the Chinese. Continued access to them, the British assumed, would be easier with a Burma in the Commonwealth: "It was to the highest degree desirable that after the war Burma should remain within the Empire (Murray 1947)."

Though the area had lost its strategic significance, it was liable to possible irredentist demands by China, which should be countered by integrating the area fully into Burma. Kuomintang (KMT)[14] remained an irritating presence in the area until the 1960s (Smith 1999: 153; Sai Kham Mong 2005: 123) and led to fears of a Chinese incursion in the Northeast after 1949 (Bowker 1949c: 46). The problem was what this Burma would look like, and in what form the hill areas would be incorporated. When it became clear after 1945 that Burma insisted on full independence, the British had second thoughts, but full Kachin independence was never an option for them (Dorman-Smith 1942: 183). Even the self-styled advocates of the hill tribes, like the former Governor of Burma, Reginald B. Dorman-Smith, realised that if the hill tracts were incorporated into Burma, England would at one stroke be rid of a considerable financial responsibility, because the hills would depend on Burma for finance. In that case they would be forced to join Burma, since they would not be able to exist independently. A number of local civil servants voiced objections against the incorporation of the hills into Burma regardless (Wilkie 1946a). Dorman-Smith[15] warned against creating an impression that England was deserting its allies and emphasised its obligations to them:

> [...] it is extremely difficult to see how His Majesty's government can move one step towards meeting the wishes of the Burmese without breaking faith with the Hill Peoples to whom we are so deeply indebted (Dorman-Smith 1947c: 7; Dorman-Smith 1947a: 147).

Other civil servants voiced similar warnings (Sadan 2013: 302).

Panglung and the (mis)perceptions of political aspirations

In this climate of opinion the conclusions of the meeting in Panglung came as a nasty shock to the British (Laithwaite 1947b), because when the Kachin were actually asked their preferences, they voted for incorporation into

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14 The Kuomintang troops were Chinese forces under the command of Mao Tse-tung's rival, General Chiang Kai-shek, later president of Taiwan.

15 Governor Reginald Dorman-Smith was one of the former iron-eaters of the Burma campaign, a great supporter of the hill tribes, who intensely disliked Aung San (whom he would have liked to court-martial in 1945) and, incidentally, Mountbatten.

Burma. The Burmans and representatives of the hill tracts met in Panglung, a town in the Shan states, on 28 March 1946. Since it was considered useful, it was repeated in February 1947 with an extended agenda and the participation of the Burmese independence fighter General Aung San to discuss the future status of the frontier areas.[16] The hill areas took part jointly as the Supreme Council of United Hill Peoples (SCOUHP) (FACE 1947).[17] The British considered it merely a continuation of the earlier gathering and thus misjudged its significance (Walsh Atkins 1947a). It ended with the now widely known and cited Panglung Agreement, which promised the frontier regions wide-ranging internal autonomy and special rights within a united Burma (Stevenson 1946a). It envisaged an autonomous Kachin state, though what was meant by autonomy was not defined, certainly not in the rigorous way this was done for South Tyrol and/or in ways that Benedikter has described in his wide-ranging study on the definitions, preconditions and functioning of autonomy systems (Benedikter 2012). Panglung was seen by most as a provisional agreement to be further refined and open to renegotiation (FACE 1947; Wilkie 1946a).[18]

Panglung was hailed by all participants as a great success against British aspirations to dominate the minorities in the guise of paternalism. Aung San addressed the minorities directly and his assurances carried the day (Clague 1947; Ogmore 1947; New Times of Burma 1947).[19] In an appreciation of Panglung, the Kachin elders said that, "the safeguarding of their hereditary rights, customs and religions are the most important factors" (Stevenson 1946b).[20]

For the British, Panglung was a shock not because it presaged the eventual unification of the frontier with Burma – already expressed in the Aung San-Attlee Agreement of January 1947 –, but because it took the timetable out of their hands: they had confidently expected the hills to vote against incorporation. They would then have been able to persuade them to join and could have exerted pressure on Ministerial Burma about the conditions. Now the situation was reversed. In 1946 some officers had planned,

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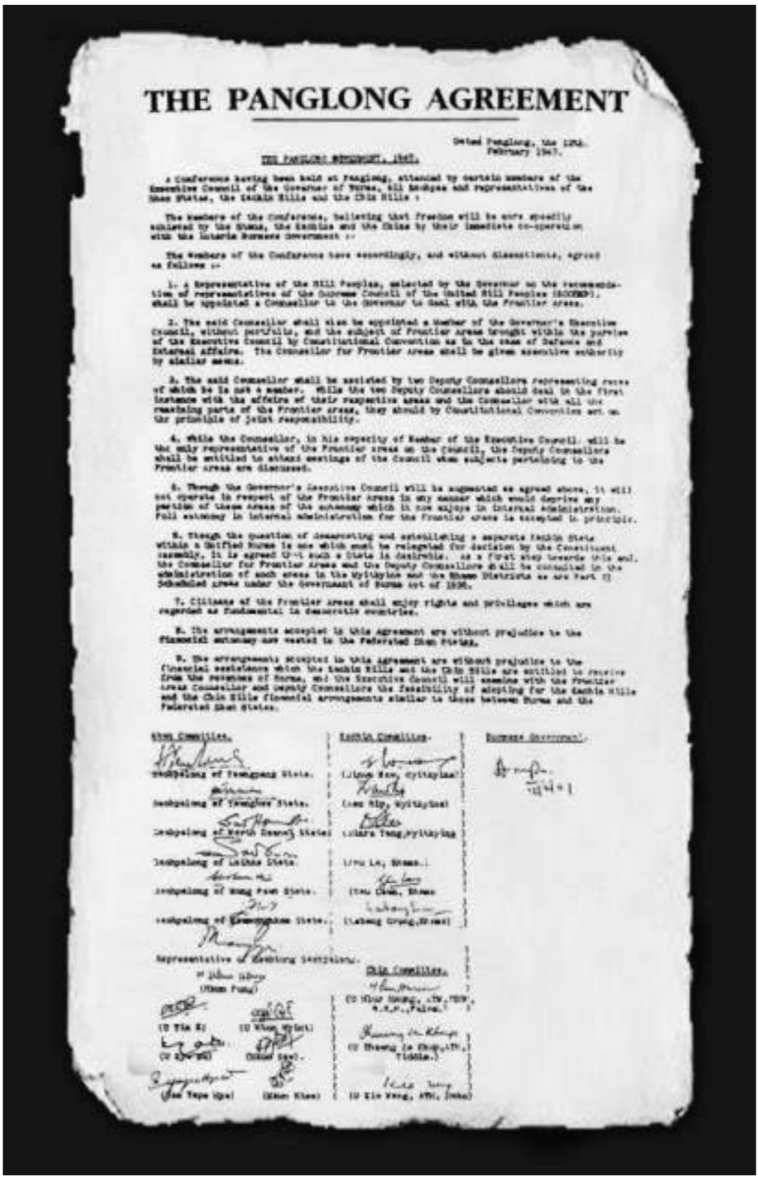
16 For the text of the agreement see e.g. U Hla Thein 2005b: 227–229.

17 The signatories of the report were Rees-Williams, U Nu, Sao San Htun, Tin Tut, Sima Hsinwa Nawng, Khin Maung Gale, Vum Ko Hau and Myint Thein; Saw Sankey signed in Maymyo. The Karen opted out.

18 A shadow council of the hills had already been discussed on 20 August 1945.

19 Laithwaite 1947a, quotes Aung San with the remark that the Director FA talked to the participants like babies.

20 The memo was signed by Zau La, Zau, Lawn, Kumreng Gam, Zau Aung, Hkun Hseng and Naw Seng.



THE PANGLONG AGREEMENT

Dated Panglong, the 12th February 1947.

THE PANGLONG AGREEMENT, 1947.

A Conference having been held at Panglong, attended by certain members of the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma, All Bridges and Representatives of the Shan States, the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills :

The members of the Conference, believing that freedom will be more speedily achieved by the Burma, the Kachins and the Chins by their immediate co-operation with the Interim Burmese Government :-

The members of the Conference have accordingly, and without dissentience, agreed as follows :-

1. A Representative of the Hill Peoples, selected by the Governor on the recommendation of representatives of the Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples (SCOHP), shall be appointed a Counsellor to the Governor to deal with the Frontier Areas.

2. The said Counsellor shall also be appointed a Member of the Governor's Executive Council, without portfolio, and the subject of Frontier Areas brought within the purview of the Executive Council by Constitutional Convention as in the case of Defence and External Affairs. The Counsellor for Frontier Areas shall be given executive authority by similar means.

3. The said Counsellor shall be assisted by two Deputy Counsellors representing races of which he is not a member. While the two Deputy Counsellors should deal in the first instance with the affairs of their respective areas and the Counsellor with all the remaining parts of the Frontier areas, they should by Constitutional Convention act on the principle of joint responsibility.

4. While the Counsellor, in his capacity of Member of the Executive Council, will be the only representative of the Frontier Areas on the Council, the Deputy Counsellors shall be entitled to attend meetings of the Council when subjects pertaining to the Frontier areas are discussed.

5. Though the Governor's Executive Council will be augmented as agreed above, it will not operate in respect of the Frontier Areas in any manner which would deprive any portion of these areas of the autonomy which it now enjoys in Internal Administration. Full autonomy in Internal Administration for the Frontier areas is accepted in principle.

6. Though the question of demarcating and establishing a separate Kachin State within a United Burma is one which must be relegated for decision by the Constituent Assembly, it is agreed that such a State is desirable, as a first step towards this end, the Counsellor for Frontier Areas and the Deputy Counsellors shall be consulted in the administration of such areas in the Myitkyina and the Bhamo Districts as are Part II Scheduled Areas under the Government of Burma Act of 1935.

7. Citizens of the Frontier Areas shall enjoy rights and privileges which are regarded as fundamental in democratic countries.

8. The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial autonomy now vested in the Federated Shan States.

9. The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial assistance which the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills are entitled to receive from the revenues of Burma, and the Executive Council will examine with the Frontier Areas Counsellor and Deputy Counsellors the feasibility of adopting for the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills financial arrangements similar to those between Burma and the Federated Shan States.

Shan Committee. | Kachin Committee. | Burmese Government.

Chin Committee.

Source: author's private photograph

for the first time, to ask the hill tribes about their political aspirations, because an exceptionally clever civil servant, R.S. Wilkie, a former District Officer strongly in favour of keeping British control over the frontier areas, had had a truly revolutionary idea: "The only method of ascertaining the wishes of the people is to go and ask them (Wilkie 1946b)."

In the wake of the Aung San-Attlee Agreement a Frontier Areas Commission of Enquiry (FACE) under the chairmanship of David Rees-Williams was announced to ascertain how the hill peoples could be incorporated into Burma (Prime Minister 1947). The committee started work only after Panglung with a somewhat changed brief. It now tried to pick up the pieces and address the issues left out or left vague, such as the extent and competences of the envisaged separate province Kachinland (Smith 1999: 79). The final report was written by R.S. Wilkie and published in 1948. The report incorporated historical background and the results of the 1946 report. British conclusions in both cases were similar and somewhat surreal: the Kachin preferred to remain under British rule or keep their autonomy because of their assumed "historical hostility" to Burma, which the war had allegedly exacerbated (Investigations 1946). Autonomy was preferred because at the time of British annexation Burmese supremacy was strictly nominal.

The 1946 report recommended including Myitkyina, the capital of the Kachin region, Bhamo, also in the Kachin area, and the adjacent railway corridor, which until then belonged to Ministerial Burma, in the FAA, even though the areas would then lose the voting and self-governing rights they had had since the political and administrative reforms of 1937, which applied only to Ministerial Burma. The FACE Report upheld this view (FACE Report 1948: 12).[21]

For the Kachin these enquiries were a first opportunity to express their point of view and they made good use of it. The Kachin elders interviewed were both articulate and very aware of the significance of the exercise. Their statements make interesting, albeit sometimes confusing, reading, since Kachin from the hills and the plains as well as those from Myitkyina and Bhamo did not always agree in their attitudes towards the British, their aspirations for the future and their views of their compatriots. The Kachins from the valley held the view: "Being a Hill Tribe, most of the Kachins are un-educated and backward (Elders 1946)."

The elders substantiated their claims with historical precedence and the consistency of their political demands, citing two memos: one submitted by them in 1925, i.e. before most of the Kachin areas had been incorporated.

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[21] The 1935 Constitution created Part I and Part II areas, where part II areas were the towns that eventually should join Ministerial Burma.

This memo rejected the extension of Home Rule into the frontier areas in favour of direct British control (Wilkie 1946b; Smith 1999: 46). The second memo dates from 1945 (Shan Lone et al. 1945) and is quite wide-ranging. It discusses the economic and political situation in the Kachin areas since the 19th century: the prevention of mobility through British advances, quarrels over and loss of scarce paddy lands (cf. Leach 1970), the frequent changing of borders to the detriment of the Kachin and problems over the rights to jungles and jungle products, which the Kachin considered their property and for which they expected adequate payment in cash or kind. It noted that if the Kachin did not retain control, the forests would soon be degraded and cut down (a truly prophetic statement) (Shan Lone et al. 1945; Wilkie 1943).

Against this background, the elders stated their political demands, which provide a picture not really congruent with British evaluations. First and foremost they wanted to stay together as a group, internal differences notwithstanding. Oppression during the war had opened their eyes for their "racial individuality", and they wanted to hold on to their name, culture and religion as well as their land and their laws. This statement is a good example of how the questioning or endangering of hitherto unquestioned assumptions and ways of life evoke a consciousness of "identity" and "ethnicity" in the sense of Anderson's exile experience (Anderson 1987; Anderson 1992). There follows a noteworthy, frequently quoted remark: Nobody had ever defeated the Kachin except the British, and they had done it "with kindness and friendship" (Shan Lone et al. 1945; Stevenson 1946b: 10), whereas "the Burmese treat us like cattle" (Wilkie 1946b: 83; Smith 1999: 73). The Kachin demanded an objective evaluation of their needs and that the British keep their financial promises. The memo even invokes the Atlantic Charter to substantiate and legitimate the demand for an autonomous Kachinland. Yet, at the same time the borders of Kachinland should be guarded by a Kachin Battalion as part of the yet to-be-created Burma rifles, thereby treating Kachinland as part of Burma.[22] Differences of opinion surfaced mainly between the pro-British Kachin soldiers and another faction around the Kachin leader at Panglung and member of the AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League), Sama Duwa Sinwa Naung. For many Kachin the choice was between reconciling oneself to being a more or less self-governing part of Burma or impoverished independence.[23] Some elders from the northern areas were more radical: if a separate or autonomous Kachin state including

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22 The memo was signed among others by Shan Lone, Major Zau June, Kumje Tawng Wa and Khun Nawng (Shan Lone 1945). For Zau June see below.

23 The information was gathered during meetings held in February 1946 (see Monthly Report 1947).

Bhamo and Myitkyina were not granted (Kachin Elders 1947), they would even prefer to remain with China (Wilkie 1946b: 92). The Kachin had by this time internalised an originally alien etic definition because it was politically opportune. This etic category was now applied not only to Burma, but continued to straddle the borders.

Source: by courtesy of Pansodan Gallery, Yangon, May 2015

The Kachin were less concerned with the form of political administration and government than with the protection and guarantee of their traditional rights, resources and non-interference by whoever took control. In 1947 they were well aware that when British rule ended they would be left in the lurch, so it was imperative to secure their rights and borders in time. Control and influence of various powers could be overlapping and had to be negotiated. But only a few British officers had even a vague idea how this system of fluid borders and overlapping loyalty and tribute systems worked.

This ignorance may account for the unflattering British view of Kachin moral character, political acumen and awareness. Sama Duwa Sinwa Naung

was termed illiterate, in thrall to the Burmans and not acknowledged by the Kachin themselves,[24] though his father had been the leader of one of the last revolts against British rule in 1910 (Bowker 1949a). However, Sinwa was a highly regarded and respected elder who led the negotiations in Panglung with considerable skill (Sadan 2013: 279–80; cf. Times of Burma 1947).

"Martial races" and loyal vassals: the British legacy

Popular legend counts the Kachin among the "martial races". The term denoted subject groups considered more suitable for military service than others. In India these were Muslims and Sikhs and hill people like the Gurkhas in Nepal and the Chin, Kachin and Karen in Burma. Conversely, other groups, were "non-martial" and designated as "effeminate" and "weak", or, in the case of warrior castes in South India, as "criminal" castes or tribes.[25] How arbitrary these designations were is demonstrated by the Burmans, who were considered "non-martial", although they had controlled vast areas of mainland Southeast Asia for centuries.

The assumed fighting spirit of the Kachin, moreover, sits somewhat uncomfortably with their assumed vulnerability. The Kachin were not always considered "martial". Initially, the British considered them primitive and dangerous mountain tribes, relevant primarily as a means of securing the borders of their Indian empire and potentially helpful in finding trade routes to China (Fytche 1867; cf. Nugent 1982).[26] During WWI a few Kachin had been employed as military policemen primarily for home defence: they were "very sturdy little men keen as mustard about drill and military exercises" (Kachin Raids 1919; Secretary Military Dept. 1916).[27] Ironically, serious recruitment started after the "rebellions" of 1914–1916. It stagnated at a relatively low level between the wars. In 1937, the Kachin were even con-

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[24] During the war, the British had taken a different view: "Quislings are made up mainly of misguided products of the American Baptist Mission who have ever an eye on the main chance." Leyden 1943a: 162.

[25] The concept originated only in the 19th century, after the "Mutiny" in India 1857/58.

[26] Crosthwaite: 234–286 describes in detail the military campaigns aimed at subduing the Northern Shan states and the Kachin areas between 1886 and 1890. His account is interesting because he documents often close anti-British cooperation between Kachin, Shan and Burmans.

[27] Crosthwaite: 286, similarly, stated in 1912: "[....] the Kachin tribes, whom it was necessary to subdue with such severity, have been for many years furnishing excellent recruits to the military police; and Kachin detachments, officered by men of their own race, can now be entrusted with the charge of frontier outposts."

sidered so weakened by a dissolute life-style, "dirty" habits and drug addiction that they were in danger of extinction. Means were considered to reverse the trend in 1938, especially checking the spread of VD (Teasdale 1939).

Perceptions were to a large extent guided by a strictly utilitarian viewpoint of British security interests and usefulness. By their own admission, they defined the geographic, ethnic, political and administrative status of the hill frontier as it suited British needs. In other words: they created ethnicities and minorities. Once defined as such, minorities were immediately seen as in need of protection and special treatment, because they were allegedly unable to defend themselves against the Burman majority, though they had done that quite ably for centuries without British paternalism. But this "vulnerability" became the justification for British paternalism and continued separate and direct control of the hill areas after 1935, depriving them of even the small measure of self-government granted to Ministerial Burma (Leyden 1943a: 162; Correspondence 1948). This, it was believed, had prevented political agitation there: "[...] the hills remained unaffected by the political agitations which disturbed the plains (Burma 1948: 12–13)."[28]

In sum, the Kachin were treated by the British something like the "house-elves" of Harry Potter, the useful and loyal, but in the first place slightly dumb and easily-led lesser beings, who are supposed to exist to serve the higher wizards:

> Kachin self-respect and national spirit must be developed. Obviously, unless it is carefully guided, it may be troublesome later on; but so far it has not got beyond the stage of asking government to see that Kachin rights are not ignored and in return pledging unswerving loyalty to them (Teasdale 1939: 9).

The British presumed to speak *for* the Kachin, not *to* them or even *with* them (Battersby 1945).[29] Dorman-Smith e.g. called the British the trustees of the hill people and defined indirect rule as "educating the indigenous people towards native local self-government" (Dorman-Smith 1943: 164). Another example: "[...] met Major Zau Jung[30] […] (Myitkyina 1947b)"; "[...] the Kachins haven't

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28 Another reason was that allegedly they had no leader of the calibre of a Nehru.

29 Or they did not take their views seriously, as Laithwaite 1947a states: "One of the dangers in the frontier is the vacillating character of these people who have no experience and want one day this, another the next."

30 Major Zau Jun(g), a member of the Kachin levies and a teacher was, according to his daughter, later the assistant to Brang Seng, the first Myanmar citizen to be appointed Additional District Commissioner. He got two military crosses for parachuting in from India, where he was stationed (probably with the Chindits). He died of Malaria at the age of 34. His students suspected foul play and demanded an inquest. The Indian doctor who had treated him was subsequently deported to India. The Zau Djune Lan in

got a clue what is going on in Rangoon – they have woken up, but are a long way behind (Howe 1948)".

But the British did not have the courage of their convictions; the self-styled protectors withdrew speedily when the going got difficult, if finance or political interests did not allow, they would just abandon their charges: "Our promises did not mean anything, though people thought so (Walsh Atkins 1947b)." The British raised expectations among protégés, only to disappoint them and throw them to the wolves when they were no longer useful. The minorities were for the British just so many pawns. If they could not continue to rule them, they would simply be abandoned (Bless 1990: 321–325). And yet the British managed to deceive themselves until the end that, if not for the machinations of Aung San, the Kachin would have preferred to be ruled by the British. Voices that claim that British rule was at the bottom of current conflicts are only partly right. It is not so much British political rule as British interference in social and local political constructions they did not know and did not understand (Sadan 2013: 38). Yet their arbitrary ethnic and social ascriptions were quickly and willingly appropriated by the groups concerned. The Kachin used the British to strengthen their position. E.g. they took up military service eagerly and on the strength of their new and enhanced status demanded better schools and education, which in turn was interpreted by the British as a sign of loyalty (ibid.). Sadan interprets both as career options, which did not necessarily imply an acceptance of the colonial system, but ensured access to the resources and life chances this system could offer (ibid.: 221; 243). Her interpretation gains strength when we consider that until quite recently a career in the Burmese forces was a favoured option for young Kachin men, notwithstanding their sympathy for the independence movement.

In fact, independence in 1948 was welcomed among the Kachin, despite the vague provisions for Kachin self-administration (Ledwidge 1947). Only the constitution of 1947 contained any provisions for the shape and competences of the yet-to-be-formed Kachin State, and these were mainly administrative (Constitution Myanmar 1947: §§166, 167, 173–177).[31] Moreover, the right of secession provided for the Shan States in Chapter X of the draft was explicitly not applicable to Kachin State (Constitution Myanmar 1947: §178). The Kachin defended the new government militarily, in fact in 1948 the Kachin Rifles defeated the CPB in Pyinmana and then

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Myitkyina was named after him to appease the people (interview with Lahpai Seng Raw, 5 January 2014).

31 The Kachin State Council should, moreover, be composed of equal numbers of Kachin and non-Kachin members.

secured Tounggoo for the government (Bowker 1949b; Fellowes-Gordon 1957: 252, 329f; Smith 1999: 115, 138). That said, in late 1949 a splinter group under Naw Seng[32] organised a short-lived rebellion (Pawng Yawng) in the Kachin areas of Northern Shan State. His lieutenant Zau Seng, a former intelligence officer for the American 101 force, later became the president of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) (Smith 1999: 93, 141–42).

That British policy was guided strictly by "national" interest became painfully clear when in 1967, five years after the Kachin revolt (see below) started, Duwa Zau Seng, the President of the Kachin Independence Council in Thailand asked for moral support from Mountbatten and the prime minister. He claimed that the Kachin "defend our independence achieved from the British Government", that the Panglung Agreement and the constitution had expired in 1957 and 1962, and that therefore the Kachin had a right to independence. Since they had supported the UK, they had a right to expect help in return. The prime minister never even acknowledged the letter (Duwa Zau Seng 1967), while Mountbatten's answer was non-committal (O'Keefe 1968b).

Some Foreign Office notes were not happy with the Burmese path to socialism or with the treatment of the minorities, but this counted less than continued friendly Anglo-Burmese relations. Protests would drive Burma towards China (O'Keefe 1968a).[33]

It is intriguing that in 1987 the fight of the ethnic groups in Burma finally gained international recognition when members of the National Democratic Front (NDF), including Brang Seng, the leader of Kachin resistance, travelled to London to meet with British politicians, some of whom had actually been observers at Panglung (Smith 1999: 388; Pangmu Shayi 2015).

Emergence of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and Kachin Independence Army (KIA)

It is often assumed that the resistance of the Kachin to the Burmese state was mainly fuelled by religious, i.e. Christian considerations. But religious demands as such or even a religiously defined state have not been foremost among the demands of the Kachin. Though many Kachin converted from

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[32] According to Smith 1999: 139, Naw Seng was originally a commander of the Kachin Rifles who began talks with the Karen, with whom he had fought against the Japanese, and eventually joined them.

[33] The efforts to keep on the right side of Burma went as far as subtle advice to ASSK not to return to Burma (Gore-Booth 1967).

traditional animism to Christianity under colonial rule and a majority now profess to belong to a Christian denomination, Sadan claims that large-scale conversion only started after, not before, independence, possibly even after armed resistance formed (Sadan 2013; 321–323, 367–375, 382),[34] though this is strongly contradicted by the Kachin themselves.[35]

Resistance started in the early 1960s because of perceived social and political discrimination, but it turned violent, Sadan argues, only after the Kachin felt that their identity was attacked by the Burmese state (Sadan 2013: 280, 321; Duwa Zau Seng 1967). That contradicted all hopes and aspirations the Kachins had associated with becoming part of Burma. It coincided with, but was not caused by, the declaration of Buddhism as state religion by then Prime Minister U Nu in 1961. It had started with the handing over of three Kachin villages (among them Hpimaw) to China in 1958, which was interpreted by the Kachin as disregarding them and their needs completely (Smith 1999: 158). In the 1950s they had fought virtually alone against intrusions by both the KMT and the Communist Chinese, but their only reward was the loss of their land to the Chinese and their weapons to government soldiers (Sai Kham Mong 2005: 175–76).

The Kachin had always been able to organise on the basis of negotiation and consensus and find allies by defining them as related (see Sadan 2013). Wherever the *gumlao* system was emphasised, mutual help and obligation loomed large, but they were strong even when *gumsa* tended to prevail. Christianity now became another useful principle of organising for resistance. After 1963 it became a marker of identity for the Kachin, particularly because religious leaders, mostly high-ranking members of the Baptist community, were frequently in the forefront of minority demands and acted as mediators during the ceasefire negotiations between the army and KIA in 1994. Christianity became a way of resisting a state that treated minorities as of no consequence. But in some ways that made them also suspect, not so much because of their different doctrines and beliefs, but because in Christianity they had a principle around which they could organise unity and resistance.

Kachin organisations first emerged in the shape of the KIO in 1958, though a Kachin National Organisation had already been formed in 1947 (Monthly Report 1947). The considerably more militant KIA was founded

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[34] The Burma Handbook (1944: 11) mentions that in 1931 most Kachin were still animists, and only 10% Christians. Bowerman 1946, however, claims, that Baptists and Catholics (American, Irish and Italian) had considerable success in converting the Kachin.

[35] Smith 1999: 192, also states that the largely Christian Kachin population strongly resented U Nu's move as contrary to the voluntary spirit of the Union; cf. Dean 2012: 120.

in February 1961, and the KIC followed in 1962. The KIA founders were two brothers, sons of a pastor, Zau Tu and Zau Dan, later joined by their elder brother Zau Seng.[36] They were able to attract Kachin intellectuals like Brang Seng, headmaster of a Christian School and the son of one of the participants in Panglung (Smith 1999: 192). As leader of a Kachin youth movement he had organised protests against Rangoon over the neglect of the Kachin state and its infrastructure.

Periodic negotiations with the government mostly came to nothing, and the army's attempts to deal with the problem had indifferent success (Smith 1999: 206, 220). The new leader from 1975, Brang Seng managed to get clandestine Chinese military support (ibid.: 330–31), which contributed to some successful KIA resistance against the Burmese army (ibid.: 401). This had less to do with ideology than with the periphery negotiating its autonomy among the big players (ibid.: 332).

Risks and side effects of ceasefires

The dissolution of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in 1989, despite having finally acknowledged the legitimacy of ethnic struggle (Smith 1999: 362–63), left a vacuum that was filled by diverse ethnic groups. Counter-centres and counter-unities emerged, and the junta, which had been in power since 1962, was able to deal with them one by one instead of facing a united front. It persuaded or coerced cease-fires with a range of militant groups, thereby dividing the opposition.

Even in the KIA a certain war weariness had set in by 1994, and a ceasefire was negotiated in February (Smith 1999: 445–46). Such a move in itself can – and did – effect a split between the co-opted elites and the rank and file of the minority groups, particularly as economic development does not follow and issues of cultural rights remain unsolved. This development worked to the advantage of the ruling junta, which subdued or assimilated the minorities culturally as well (Callahan 2007: 3). Karin Dean (2012: 116; 124–25) argues that the ceasefire was almost wholly to the advantage of the government. Individual KIA and KIO leaders profited by being able to finalise business deals – timber, jade, etc., but for the rank and file the ceasefire merely brought a halt to fighting and violence and not much more.[37]

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[36] According to Smith 1999: 191, it had originated as a small student cell at the university of Rangoon.

[37] Smith 1999: 451, however, argues that in the first years of the ceasefire the hopes were high, because a number of development schemes were started and some factories, like

Many young men, often former fighters, were unemployed and succumbed to drug addiction and other social evils. Early marriages, teenage pregnancies and HIV-infection soared (Dean 2012: 127).[38] Moreover, the army established and maintained a much larger presence in the Kachin areas than before the ceasefire, particularly in Myitkyina and Bhamo. The administrative HQ of the KIO shifted to the little border town of Laiza; since 2011, when fighting broke out again, the HQ has operated from there as well (Dean 2012: 127; interview with Lahpai Seng Raw, 5 January 2014).

Current violence and peace prospects

Violence between the army and the KIA flared up again just when it seemed that Myanmar was opening up to the world: in June 2011. The ostensible reason for the renewed violence was the demand by the army that the KIA should cease to be an autonomous military outfit and become part of the army structure as a border protection force. It would then have been under army command and lost all power of decision and autonomy (Smith 1999: 5; Dean 2012: 128). But this was only the last straw, so to speak. The build-up had begun earlier. Like most of the ethnic groups, and unlike the National League for Democracy (NLD), the Kachin had participated in the deliberations of the National Convention till the bitter end (ICG 2011: 6),[39] but were disillusioned because not one of their 19 demands for language autonomy, recognition of religious freedom, etc. was even acknowledged.[40]

Again they felt that this negligence struck at the core of their being and identity (ICG 2011: 6). Their impression of mounting vulnerability was strengthened when the party formed by the Kachin, the Progressive Party, was refused registration and thus not permitted to take part in the elections (Dean 2012: 128). In 2010 the government reneged on the ceasefire agreement because of alleged attacks by the KIA (ICG 2011: 7; ICG Briefing 2011: 11). The suspension of work on the Myitsone Dam on 30 September did not stop the clashes, though the president ordered an end to the offensive in December 2011 and warned the army against unprovoked attacks (BCN 2012: 10). A new cycle of violence saw people fleeing from Waingmaw to

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the sugar-mill at Namti, reopened. The KIO opened a liaison office in Myitkyina.

38 Interviews with Saboi Jum, Revd. President of the Kachin Baptist Convention, in June 2007 and in March 2013.

39 Most armed groups remained in the Convention; only the Mon walked out with the NLD, but returned later as observers (interview with Lahpai Seng Raw, 5 January 2014).

40 Interview with Saboi Jum, June 2007.

the towns of Myitkyina and Bhamo, bearing the now sadly familiar tales of murder and atrocities by the army (BCN 2012; ICG 2011). People from the vicinity of Laiza fled to the town, the HQ of the KIA/KIO, because ostensibly safe camps in and around Laiza were bombarded, driving the people over the border into China. China was irritated because of the possible impact on its own Jinghpo community and because refugee camps there had been strafed by the Myanmar army (ICG 2013: 12, 16).

Between 2011 and 2013, negotiations and military engagements went on side by side with varying negotiators on the government side and with indeterminate success. To forestall US and UK involvement in the negotiations China joined the peace talks in 2013. At talks in February, March and finally on 31 May 2013 in Chiang Mai, Shweli and Myitkyina the KIA could chalk up a success, since for the first time representatives from other minority organisations participated in the United National Federal Council (UNFC) (ICG 2013: 13; Saw Yan Naing 2013) and negotiated a common platform with the government. Talks with the KIA restarted in Nay Pyi Taw in March 2015, with the outlook slightly more hopeful (*Myanmar Times*, 10 March 2013).

A Technical Advisory Team was set up in Myitkyina with the brief to ascertain the opinion and wishes of the population about the future shape of Kachinland. Its members comprised an advisory and resource person from an NGO, five representatives from the KIO and ten from the Kachin public to determine grass roots opinion (Lahpai Seng Raw 2013; ICG 2013: 18). The task of the team is to provide support for the negotiations and the peace process, to document proceedings and, very importantly, to set the agenda and procedure based on the wishes of the public. Seven issues or themes were set for the dialogue with the government: military issues and the cessation of hostilities; political dialogue; the composition of the joint monitoring committee; IDP resettlement; discussion of separating troops on both sides; establishing the KIO technical advisory team, and inviting this team and other observers of the ceasefire and statutes to follow-up meetings. Negotiations would have to be conducted on the basis of a representative sample of opinion and by consensus. The often autocratic administration by the KIA and KIO (*gumsa* is now understood as legitimate, but somewhat unrepresentative government, while *gumlao* stands for democratic representation; Sadan 2013: 337; cf. Leach 1970) was resented, especially by young people who saw their future collapsing and rebelled against their elders, so far with indeterminate success.

Kachin aspirations

The political and economic aspirations and demands of the Kachin after more than 50 years of struggle differ not that much from the analysis furnished by the Kachin Elders in 1946: autonomy in political, social, religious and economic matters (Smith 1999: 209; Maran La Raw 1997). Autonomy here means financial (ICG 2011: 14), religious and educational self-determination. Language instruction in schools is a particularly sensitive point (Ja Nan 2013).[41]

Nowadays, particular emphasis is given to the economy: in the 1940s the Kachin saw themselves as economically disadvantaged, which has given rise to an increased awareness of economic potential denied. Pipelines carrying oil and gas pass through their areas, but benefit the South and China (ICG 2011: 2). The reopening of the Burma Road to China has only brought a flood of cheap Chinese goods and Chinese businessmen into the area. In an interview in the *Irrawaddy* Major General Gun Maw, deputy chief of staff of the KIA, declared that Chinese investment in the Kachin areas would be welcome. They were working closely with China, since there were Kachin the other side of the border as well. Implicitly, however, it was clear that Chinese investments are not considered an unadulterated benefit and that worries about the environmental impact weigh quite heavily (*Irrawaddy*, 11 January 2014: 6–7).

Intruders destroy the forest for timber, and there is no planning for improved agriculture or a market for products (ibid.). The Myitsone Dam, work on which was begun in 2000, is symptomatic for economic and political disregard: the Kachin were not consulted on the project, and by 2007 it was clear from land erosion and river pollution that the environment was being destroyed (ICG 2011: 14).[42] The local people had been driven out of the area and relocated on poor or barren soil (Lahpai Seng Raw 2013: 2–3).

In the above mentioned interview with the *Irrawaddy*, Gun Maw emphasised another point: the armed forces. The army was a career option for Kachin both before and after independence. They want to keep this career option in a truly federal army[43] drawn from all population groups, which is quite different from the ancillary and toothless Border Guardian Force (BGF) envisaged by the government.

Unrest seems to be developing between generations, not least due to the lack of a peace dividend that would benefit the younger veterans. The

41 Interview with Ja Nan, director of Shalom Peace Foundation, March 2013.

42 Interview with Saboi Jum, June 2007.

43 This was also an important point on the agenda at Myitkyina.

older generation of KIO/KIA leaders want to reach a negotiated agreement, but especially younger Kachin media activists are dissatisfied with this approach. They claim that the majority of the population demand independence, not any sort of federal system. While this criticism is not publicly expressed in Kachin quarters, the leadership is quite aware of it.[44] Kachin independent media, like Laiza FM and Laiza TV, are in any case controlled by the KIO/KIA, and other Kachin media like Kachinland News are also close to the group. That means that there is no open criticism of the leadership. Journalists at Kachin FM have to have their programmes approved by a KIO/KIA committee before they are aired.[45] What is more serious is that there is hardly any discussion about what the terms federalism, autonomy or "new system" as used by the Kachin media actually mean, particularly in the Myanmar context, and what could be the benefits for the minorities. The Kachin News Group,[46] initially established by a group of Kachin students as an independent source of news, also struggles to express criticism of the Kachin leadership.

Although this group and other more independent media groups are aware of the involvement of the KIO/KIA leadership in the abovementioned often illegal business activities, these issues are not deemed suitable for publication at times like this, when the war could suddenly flare up again. This still generates loyalty to the leadership, particularly since there is currently no obvious alternative.[47] Criticism of Kachin leaders can be found on Facebook and in smaller blogs. Here even the legacy of Rev. Saboi Jum, who was instrumental in the achievement of the 1994 peace agreement, is critically discussed. Younger Kachin dare to argue that the KIO leadership are out of touch with the population, especially in political and economic matters, particularly the mentioned alternatives of federalism and independence. This criticism is all the more significant in the face of the vanishing peace dividend discussed earlier. It becomes even more poignant with regard to Kachin women. They often feel insecure and endangered at home or in refugee camps[48] and thus join the KIA in order to protect themselves and others. Yet they cannot (unlike the Tamil Tigers) join combat

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44 Lahpai Seng Raw e.g. commented on this in an interview in March 2013. Cf. also Lahpai Seng Raw 2012: 3.

45 Interview with a Kachin journalist, Chiang Mai, 9 December 2014.

46 The Kachin News Group runs a Kachin news homepage (http://www.kachinnews.com) and also produces a radio show for Radio Free Asia.

47 Interview with Kevin McLeod, Chiang Mai, 9 December 2014.

48 The case of two young voluntary teachers who were raped and killed near Laiza has drawn particular attention in recent months (Ye Mon 2015).

and are mostly denied decision-making positions in the military or in the peace process (Hedström 2015).

Outlook: revolt of the "house-elves"?

The crux of Kachin grievances remains that they are not accepted as equal negotiation partners by the Myanmar government. The ethnic minorities are considered subordinate, they should be loyal, not equal (ICG 2011: 11). The government is not prepared to listen to the "house-elves", a syndrome that persists even in the NLD.[49] This attitude strikes, to repeat Sadan, at the heart of Kachin being and identity and might reignite countercyclical violence. The Burman attitude to the minorities is not new, to judge by an article written by the District Commissioner of Sagaing, Kyaw Min, on 7 March 1946, when the discussion about whether the hill tracts, especially Myitkyina and Bhamo, should join Ministerial Burma was at its fiercest: "The Kachin are a primitive, suspicious, vindictive and revengeful people. They are not as virile as the Chin and by no means as lovable (Formation of a Kachin Council 1946)."[50]

They should be grateful, or so the commissioner thought, if Burma accepted them in the Union, because their economic and financial acumen was abysmal and their choice was to be ruled by Burma or England. They reject Burma because that would mean the end of Duwa rule and democracy. Their only use for Burma is to guard the border with China. But why should they be rewarded for loyalty to Britain? They keep grudges, which the Burmans, accommodating, friendly and forgiving quickly, forget – in the best tradition of Buddhism.[51]

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49 Interview with Saboi Jum, June 2007.

50 According to Dorman-Smith 1943: 164, at that time the Kachin areas fell under the Commissioner of Sagaing, which Dorman-Smith considered a mistake.

51 There seems to be a cultural misunderstanding here: According to Sadan (2013), a feud is over only when it is over, i.e. when it has finally been settled by bilateral negotiations and the payment of the debt or exoneration by the injured party, but not until then. Once concluded, the feud is considered over and cannot be reopened. Leyden 1943a: 162 and Leyden 1943b, report another interesting example: at the beginning of WWII the Kachin levies asked the British how it was possible that the Germans restarted the feud: the British should have dealt with them summarily at the end of WWI and prevented this. Cf. Armstrong 1997: 140–41.

The Kachin are not Buddhists, it would be best for the country, the commissioner thinks, to send monks there to civilise them and to abolish Nat worship, but they refuse to let monks come:

> The ultimate aim of any administration in any country is the elimination of any feeling of enmity that may exist in the hearts of the different people that inhabit the country (Formation of a Kachin Council 1946).

In other words: the commissioner claimed the hill areas as Burmese territory as a matter of course with a right to rule. Yet the commissioner omits to explain why he was so eager to have this unprofitable area included in Burma. This dismissive attitude led the Kachin to violent, militant protest. As long as they felt able to negotiate their interests more or less as equals among several hegemons, being regarded as primitive, barbaric or uncivilised did not matter too much; but marginalisation always led to violence.

It would be instructive here to look at the way India has dealt with the Singpho and other minority and marginalised groups, though there is no space here for a detailed comparison: Kachin state is a nominally autonomous entity with few independent competences that complains of long-term neglect. The Singpho, on the other hand, are a recognised ST not affiliated to other groups in Assam fighting for secession. Violence is a feature of ethnic demands in both countries, but India employs a carrot-and-stick approach in which opponents are brought into the political system and given political power (Mitra / Singh 2009). Myanmar has omitted this aspect: it relied on coercion and economic bribery, but did not provide a stake in the country's politics for the minorities. Moreover, the sad reality of everyday oppression and poverty notwithstanding, under the Indian constitution all citizens have equal rights which are justiciable in the courts. So far, this path has not been open to the Kachin in Myanmar.

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