Policy Studies 45 (Southeast Asia)

The Karen Revolution in Burma:
Diverse Voices, Uncertain Ends

Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung

EAST-WEST CENTER

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This publication is a product of the project on *Internal Conflicts and State-Building Challenges in Asia*. For details, see pages 63–81.

The project and this publication are supported by a generous grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the Center.

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In Asia, hardcopies of all titles, and electronic copies of Southeast Asia titles, co-published in Singapore, are available through:

Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang Road
Singapore 119614
E-mail: publish@iseas.edu.sg
Website: <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>

ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Thawnghmung, Ardeth Maung.
The Karen revolution in Burma : diverse voices, uncertain ends.
(East-West Center policy studies series, 1547-1349 ; 45)
1. Karen National Union (Burma)—Political activity.
2. Karen (Southeast Asian people)—Burma—Politics and government.
3. Burma—Politics and government—1948–
I. Title.
II. Series: Policy studies (East-West Center) ; 45.
DS1 E13P no. 45 2008

ISBN 978-981-230-804-7 (soft cover)
ISBN 978-981-230-805-4 (PDF)
ISSN 1547-1349 (soft cover)
ISSN 1547-1330 (PDF)

Typeset in Singapore by Superskill Graphics Pte Ltd
Printed in Singapore by Seng Lee Press Pte Ltd

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List of Acronyms

ABSDF	All Burma Students Democratic Front
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
BIA	Burma Independence Army
BSPP	Burma Socialist Program Party
CE	Christian Endeavor
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
IDP	Internally displaced person
KBC	Karen Baptist Convention
KBTS	Karen Baptist Theological Seminary
KC	Karen Congress
KCO	Karen Central Organization
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KNA	Karen National Association
KNCD	Karen National Congress for Democracy
KNDO	Karen National Defense Organization
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNLP	Kayan New Land Party
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	Karen National Union

KRC	Karen Refugee Committee
KRCWDG	Karen Refugee Camps Women's Development Group
KSO	Karen Solidarity Organization
KWO	Karen Women Organization
KYO	Karen Youth Organization
NCGUB	National Coalition Government Union of Burma
NCUB	National Council Union of Burma
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
NLD-LA	National League for Democracy-Liberated Areas
NMSP	New Mon State Party
PKBC	Pwo Karen Baptist Conference
PNO	Pao National Organization
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSNLO	Shan State Nationalities Liberation Organization
TBBC	Thailand Burma Border Consortium
UKL	Union Karen League
UKO	United Karen Organization

Executive Summary

The Karen armed revolution emerged in 1949 as a broad-based movement supported by what seemed to be the majority of the Karen population. Its main goals were to realize the aspirations of the Karen National Union (KNU) for an independent Karen state and to protect the Karen people from a renewal of the violence that had ruptured the Karen and Burman communities during the Second World War. Despite the revolution's failure to meet these objectives, the KNU remained one of the strongest and best-equipped ethnic armed insurgent groups until the early 1990s, in part as a result of the taxes it collected on goods crossing the Thai-Burma border and the abundant natural resources in the areas under its control.

In the new millennium, however, the KNU and its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army, have lost control over many of their territorial bases and have failed to provide even basic protection for those whose interests they claim to represent. Hundreds of thousands of Karen have been killed, maimed, and displaced as a direct and indirect result of the armed conflict between the KNU and successive Burmese governments. As a consequence, conventional analyses have portrayed the KNU and the residual conflict and human rights abuses taking place in the Thai-Burma border areas as representative of the experience of the Karen people in general. Such studies are generally limited in focus, however, neglecting the diversity of Karen identities, social trends, goals, and interests, and thus have limited value in determining the future course of action.

This study demonstrates how the nature of conflict in Burma has changed over the six decades of civil war and how the various types and stages of conflict have been experienced by diverse groups and generations of Karen in Burma. Instead of focusing on those who are internally displaced, those in the refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border or living abroad, or those in the KNU, it places particular emphasis on the "other" Karen, or the majority segment of the Karen population living inside Burma, a population that has hitherto received little scholarly and journalistic attention. The story of the various segments of this broader Karen constituency will reveal many interesting voices, ideas, activities, positions, and organizations that may or may not resonate with, or be approved by, the armed resistance movements. This study analyzes the various implications these factors may have on ceasefire negotiations, long-term political settlements, and policy options.

An analysis of the views held by different segments of the Karen population and the roots of the failure of the ceasefire negotiations between the KNU and successive Burmese military regimes gives rise to three broad policy implications. First, future ceasefire talks should focus on the most pressing, urgent, and achievable issues, leaving the more complex issues to be addressed later. The question of a "political settlement," which the KNU has demanded be included in any ceasefire talks, is a complex subject requiring a complicated negotiation process and the involvement of multiple actors. It is not an issue that can readily be dealt with in ceasefire talks, given the diverse and conflicting views of the various segments of the Karen constituency toward the KNU and other political organizations, and toward the majority populations and the territorial and minority rights issues that have divided the Karen elite in the postwar era.

Second, this study sheds light on the "normal" and "self-help" activities that are already taking place in various pockets of both peaceful and conflict areas, and recommends adopting policies that expand and endorse these activities. Third, it argues that priority should be given to the promotion of universal civil and political rights (under which access to the polity is granted to all citizens irrespective of their cultural affiliations and ethnic origins) over particular minority and state rights (which generally require special provisions for territorially based political and economic autonomy, reserved legislative seats for minority groups, and an autonomous institution that governs the affairs of minority groups). The general extension of

religious tolerance and human rights would protect ethnic and national groups indirectly by allowing them to earn a livelihood and to practice their culture and religion freely, and would simultaneously pave the way for social integration across ethnic and national boundaries. This would constitute a positive starting point from which to resolve "minority" issues and the conflict between "center" and "periphery," as it would also guarantee individual rights for the majority of Karen who are living outside the Karen state and who may not necessarily benefit from whatever measure of state rights is granted in a federal union.

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The Karen Revolution in Burma: Diverse Voices, Uncertain Ends

Six decades of armed conflict between successive Burmese governments and the Karen National Union (KNU) have generated a stream of literature on the Karen people and their struggle for self-determination. The majority of these studies, however, have focused on the construction of Karen identities and the structure, organization, and activities of the KNU.[1] Many studies also examine the lives of Karens living in refugee camps and the military atrocities inflicted upon Karen civilians, as a result of the fact that gaining access to the Karen living in refugee camps in the Thai-Burma border areas is easier than conducting research inside Burma.[2] Undoubtedly, these studies of the KNU and human rights violations suffered by Karens have raised the profile of the Karen people, increased public awareness about victims of armed conflict, and helped ameliorate political and social conditions in Thai-Burma border areas.[3] However, very little attention has been given to the majority of the Karen population who are living inside Burma.[4]

Not all Karens share similar grievances and political aspirations

Not all Karens share similar grievances and political aspirations. For example, older Karens, who in the 1940s witnessed communal violence and fighting between armed government forces and

the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), still conceive of the town of Insein as a battlefield. Those who were born after the Ne Win coup of 1962, by contrast, simply consider it a peaceful town. In addition, whereas educated Karens from Rangoon and the Irrawaddy Delta who grew up in the 1940s and 1950s were very involved in calls to establish a Karen state, their present counterparts are more interested in opportunities for education and work in Burma and abroad. Likewise, according to the author's conversation with junior KNU officials in November 2006, many of those who were born in refugee camps and have spent their entire lives there have no idea what it is like to be displaced or the significance of the "four-cut strategy," a counterinsurgency strategy used by the Burma national army to cut off the supply of intelligence, food, recruits, and finances to the insurgent groups.

This study argues that Karen lifestyles and the strategies they have pursued are diverse and certainly not confined to armed resistance. It places the entire Karen population within a broader context to demonstrate how different types of conflict have been experienced by Karen, and how different generations and groups have experienced that conflict differently. This holistic approach will enable us to understand and assess the diverse experiences of different segments of the Karen population, and even help us to devise policies that address their needs.

The first part of this study provides a background to the Karen armed resistance movement in Burma and highlights the original divisions that opened up between those who favored accommodation with state authorities and those who advocated for armed resistance. The second part then sketches the diverse experiences of Karen populations who grew up in government-controlled areas, those who lived in KNU-controlled areas rife with armed conflict, and those living throughout the Karen diaspora during the sixty-year span of the Karen armed revolution. Particular emphasis is placed on the "other" Karen, or the majority of the Karen population living inside Burma, who have hitherto received little scholarly and journalistic attention, especially when compared to the Karen living in the Thai-Burma border area. The KNU and its organizational structure and membership, refugees, and internally displaced Karens are given only a superficial analysis, as they have been extensively covered by previous studies.[5]

The third part of this study briefly analyzes the structure, organization, and sources of support of a number of political organizations that claim to

represent the interests of the Karen people. It assesses the varying attitudes of Karen peoples toward these organizations and successive Burmese governments, as well as the political issues that led to the original rift between the "accommodators" and "rebels." The primary focus of this section is the KNU and its various rounds of ceasefire negotiations with successive Burmese governments.

The final section analyzes the implications of the various views held by different segments of the Karen population for ceasefire negotiations, long-term political settlement, and policy making. It offers guidelines for future ceasefire negotiations between the KNU and the Burmese military regime and a possible long-term political settlement within the context of a militarized Burma.

Background

The term "Karen" encompasses about 20 subgroups of Karen-speaking peoples who come from diverse religious, cultural, and geographical backgrounds. They are the second-largest minority in Burma, and, depending on the source one consults, their numbers in Burma are estimated at between three and seven million.[6] The two dominant groups, and those that speak the most common Karen languages, are the Sgaw (mostly Christians and animists living in the hill regions) and the Pwo (mostly lowland Buddhists). These two groups alone account for 80–85 percent of Karens.

About 15 to 20 percent of Karen are Christian, 5 to 10 percent are animist, and the remainder are Buddhist. Although Christians account for a small percentage of Karen, members of this group have historically led privileged lives and assumed leading roles in society because of their association with foreign missionaries and the level of education they have often achieved. Not surprisingly, the first pan-Karen organization, the Karen National Association (KNA), or Daw Kalu, which "presumed to speak for the entire diversity of Buddhist and Animist Kayin" who lived in different parts of Burma, was generally perceived as a Western-educated and "Christian-led" organization (Taylor 2005: 278).[7] Six of the seven Karens in the legislative council after the 1923 reform were Christians (Truxton 1958: 24).

Karen communities are widely dispersed across Burma. The Karen have spread all over Lower Burma, from the Irrawaddy Delta region and

the central Pegu Yoma mountain range to the eastern hills along the Thai border, where one finds the current Karen state and the Tenasserim division of Burma. Less than one-quarter of Burma's Karen population currently lives in the Karen state. Those who live in the plain and delta areas interact extensively with the majority Burmans, and many have adopted the Burmese language and other aspects of Burman culture. Most of those living in Burma's Eastern Pegu division, the Karen state, and the Tenasserim division, however, speak Sgaw or Pwo Karen and retain many distinctive features of Karen culture.

Less than one-quarter of Burma's Karen population currently lives in the Karen state

Although the nature of the relationship between Karens and the majority Burman population has varied greatly over time and across different regions, some missionaries, scholars, and Karen nationalists have traced the origin of the long period of hostility between Karens and Burmans to precolonial times. They consider the tensions to be the result of both the efforts by individual Burman kings to subjugate or enslave Karen hill tribes and the differences in the religious beliefs, cultural practices, and agricultural cultivation methods of the Karens and Burmans (Marshall 1927: 22; Mark 1978: 55; Karen National Union n.d.). Karen nationalists claim that Karens, whom they characterize as a peace-loving and hospitable people, are united by their kinship; their common origins, language, national costume, and cultural practices; their high moral standards; and their shared experiences as an oppressed people (Htoe 1948: 34; Karen National Union n.d.).

The British took advantage of these preexisting tensions and used the Karens in their wars against the Burmans, especially during their second and final annexations of Burma, in 1853 and 1885, respectively (Cady 1958: 42–43, 137–41). Both prior to and after the annexations, many Karens benefited from Western-style education and learning a system of writing developed by American missionaries. Soon Karen leaders began to develop the concept of pan-Karen nationalism, spreading the idea in Karen languages (mostly Sgaw) through missionary-sponsored Karen schools and churches and vernacular newspapers. These efforts linked the dispersed Karen villages, which had previously lacked any kind of sophisticated

political organization (Ibid.). The establishment of a Karen state was first proposed by Doctor San C. Po, who advocated the creation of an autonomous Karen nation under the aegis of a loosely federated "United States of Burma" (Po 1928: 81).

Most colonial policies did very little to forge mutual understanding between the majority population and Burma's various ethnic groups (Lewis 1924: 108–28; Po 1928: 28). In particular, the British government's preference for recruiting hill people into the army, as well as missionary education that disproportionately benefited the Karen, led to the overrepresentation of the Karens in the military, police, and schools, and fostered Burman resentment of the Karen population (Cady 1958). Furthermore, the reservation of communal seats in the legislature for Karens living among Burmans in lowland areas eliminated the need for Burman and Karen leaders to build alliances across the ethnic divide (Tinker 1967: 3).

In addition to implementing this "divide-and-rule" strategy, the British administered Rangoon, Tenasserim, and the Delta—the areas where most Karen lived—as "Burma Proper" or "Ministerial Burma." An elected parliament offered a limited form of local democracy, including seats reserved for minorities such as Karens, Indians, and Anglo-Burmans. Karens living in the eastern hills, on the other hand, were placed in "scheduled areas" under the direct rule of the British governor (Smith 1999: 43).

During the Second World War, the Karen fought alongside the British against the invading Japanese army. At that time, many Karens became victims of violence as a result of their privileged status and their association with the British. The Japanese-sponsored Burma Independence Army (BIA) took hostage and brutally executed almost two thousand Karen in the Salween district in the east and in the Irrawaddy Delta. This was followed by three months of violence between the Burman and Karen communities (Guyot 1978; Selth 1986: 491; Smith 1999: 63).[8]

The Karens believed that they would be rewarded with a separate, independent state and other special privileges for their loyalty to the British government and for the sacrifices they had made in fighting the Japanese invaders. It was a major disappointment for Karen leaders when in 1947 the British government canceled its plan to retain the frontier areas (where many Karen lived) under its direct rule. Instead, it allowed for the immediate election of a constituent assembly, paving the way for Burma to become

fully self-governing within one year. In addition, a provision in the 1947 constitution denied the right of secession to any future Karen state and left its precise boundaries and rights unspecified, while allowing other ethnic groups such as the Shan and Karenni to secede after a 10-year trial period if certain conditions were met. Before the questions of the status and borders of a Karen state were addressed later, in the post-independence period, the Karens were guaranteed "minority rights" in the form of 22 reserved legislative seats in the Chamber of Deputies, a Karen Affairs Council, and a Karen minister who would have control of all administrative, educational, and cultural affairs relating to Karens (Smith 1999: 82).

The Origins of the Divide

During the postwar period, the various Karen leaders seemed to share a collective pan-Karen identity and common grievances, which originated in their ancient animosity toward what they considered a domineering Burman population and was reinforced by the atrocities committed by the Burman-led BIA in 1942 and the communal violence that followed. However, Josef Silverstein correctly points out that "the public expressions of the Karens made it clear that they were less united in their demands for an autonomous state, being divided on its size, location, and relationship with Burma proper" (Silverstein 1980: 115). Specifically, two prominent Karen political organizations, the Karen Youth Organization (KYO) and the Karen National Union, were divided over the degree of political, economic, and cultural autonomy that would be enjoyed by the Karen state, as well as its territorial boundaries. Formed in 1945 as the youth wing of the Karen Central Organization (KCO), the KYO advocated accommodation with the Burmese state and expressed willingness to compromise on issues related to the status and extent of any Karen state. On the other hand, the KNU, formed in 1947 as an umbrella organization to represent all Karen groups, wanted to include the Irrawaddy Division and the Insein and Hanthawaddy districts into the Karen state (Smith 1999: 87). The areas claimed by the KNU amounted to around one-third of Burma's territories.

Karen leaders seemed to share a collective pan-Karen identity

Before the issues of the status and territories of the Karen state could be discussed, however, the KNU boycotted elections to the constituent

assembly in 1947. All eighteen of the KYO candidates who participated in the elections ran unopposed for the Karen constituencies (Silverstein 1980: 119). Saw San Po Thin, the first chairman of the KNU and also a member of the KYO, left the KNU and became a representative on the Executive Council, filling a post vacated by the president of the KNU, Saw Ba Oo Gyi.

After Burma gained independence in January 1948, its first native government was dominated by members of Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) party. Soon thereafter a series of incidents, which were inspired by the government forces' demands that Karen veterans and members of the KNDO surrender their arms, eventually led to communal killings and armed insurrection (Cady 1958: 589–94).[9] The situation was exacerbated by mutinies of Karen troops in the government army and their seizure of several towns, including Toungoo, Prome, and some parts of Bassein, in late January of 1949 (Dun 1980: 62). After Karen residents in Alone and Thamaing were attacked on January 31, 1949, battles between government forces and the KNU and KNDO ensued in Insein, a suburb of Rangoon, for more than three months. By that time, several other minorities in Burma—the Karenni, Pao, Mon, and Rakhine—were also involved in armed rebellions.

From a cursory analysis, it might seem as if the division between the KYO and the KNU took place along religious or linguistic lines, as the KNU leadership was composed predominantly of Sgaw Christians, whereas some of the most prominent KYO members were Pwo and Buddhists.[10] Because the majority of Pwo are Buddhist, it is generally assumed that most Pwo are on better terms with Buddhist Burmans than other Karens. The KYO, however, also counted many Western-educated Karen Christians among its leadership.[11] Prominent KYO leaders such as Mahn Win Maung, Mahn Kyaw Sein, and Mahn Ba Khaing, for example, were Pwo Christians.[12] Others KYO leaders also did not conform to the stereotype of Pwo Buddhists. Saw Myint Thein and Saw Tun Sein, for example, were Sgaw Buddhist and Christian, respectively.

Mrs. Ba Maung Chain, the daughter of San C. Po (a prominent Karen medical doctor who first called for the formation of an independent Karen state) and the first minister of the Karen state in 1952, was a Sgaw Christian. Despite her religious affiliation, however, she was opposed to armed resistance and disagreed with many of the principles espoused by the KNU. She wanted younger Karens to be well educated, knowledgeable

about politics, and able to compete successfully with Burmans in education, business, and economic development (Tinker 1967: 75).[13] It is not clear how her father, San C. Po, would have reacted to the Karen armed rebellion had he been alive when it took place in 1949 (he died in 1946).

In the early days of independence there were a number of high-ranking government officials and ordinary Karen, both Pwo and Sgaw, Buddhist and Christian, who, like the majority of leading members of the KYO, did not join the armed resistance movement (Interview with Ba Saw Khin, 2006; Kyei 1967: 103–04). The general secretary of the KNU, Thara Tha Htoe, failed to join the armed resistance because he was arrested at the outset of the armed revolution. He later formed a party called the Karen Congress, but he chose not to run for election in 1952, after receiving a fiercely critical letter from a KNU leader.[14] Likewise, the KNU, which had a much wider support base among the Karen, especially in the eastern hills, enjoyed a strong Pwo and Buddhist Karen representation especially in its middle and lower ranks.[15]

Some observers have suggested that the KYO was led by members of the younger generation, who entered public life during and immediately after the war, while the KNU leadership, by contrast, consisted of the older, prewar generation, most of whom had retired from public office by the time the Karen armed revolution broke out.[16] In fact, the KYO was formed as the youth wing of the Karen Central Organization in order to support the KCO during the Japanese occupation, and later, in 1947, it joined other Karen organizations, including the KCO, to form the KNU. Two prominent KNU leaders, Ba Oo Gyi and Hunter Tha Hmwe (both born in 1905), were a decade older than many of their counterparts in the KYO, such as Mahn Ba Khaing and Mahn Win Maung (both born in 1916). However, the KNU also had younger leaders, such as Sgaw Ler Taw (born in 1914) and Mahn Ba Zan (born in 1916). Similarly, some KYO leaders were older. The well-known KYO leader San Po Thin, for example, was a contemporary of Ba Oo Gyi and Hunter Tha Hmwe. In addition, KYO's prominent leader Mahn Kyaw Sein and many of the KYO's grassroots members joined the armed revolution.[17]

the KYO was formed as the youth wing of the Karen Central Organization

In sum, an examination of the socioeconomic, religious, and educational backgrounds and the ages of Karen nationalist leaders offers few clues about who would collaborate with the state authorities, who was to opt for armed resistance, and who would simply submit to the status quo.[18] Generally speaking, these leaders were drawn from the middle and upper socioeconomic strata, and they were among the most talented and mostly highly educated people in Burma. A disproportionate number came from Rangoon and the Delta, areas well known for their high rates of higher education, superior employment opportunities in the civil service and the private sector, and economic prosperity.

It is equally difficult to compile a socioeconomic profile of the rank-and-file soldiers who participated in the resistance at the onset of the rebellion. Many older Karens who witnessed the insurrection generally regarded it as a popular Karen uprising with widespread popular support. However, General Smith Dun, a native Karen and the first commander-in-chief of independent Burma's armed forces, claimed that "roughly five percent of the total population [of Karens in Burma] was estimated to be directly involved in the insurrection, *with the rest remaining loyal*" (Dun 1980: 63 [author's emphasis]).[19] Those involved in the fighting were either veterans of the Karen Rifles and of the Burma Military Police (post-independence government forces), or young men caught up in the conflict in various parts of Burma, particularly in Rangoon and the Delta, who rose up to defend their communities. A KNDO veteran who did not go underground with the KNU described the almost casual way in which he found himself caught up in the fighting: "I was living in Insein and things started in my hometown, literally on our doorstep, and I had no choice but to join in.... I also figured that with the mortar bombs and field battery 35-pound artillery shells falling all over Insein, I might have been killed at any time then, and it would be better if I also had a weapon in hand to fight back with."[20]

By the time the KNU held its first peace talk with the AFPFL government, in April 1949, its forces had already taken Insein, nine miles from Rangoon, then the capital of Burma. The government, amid turmoil and on the verge of collapse from multiple insurgencies, seemed ready to make concessions to avoid further deterioration of the political situation (Cady 1958: 591). Ba Oo Gyi, the president of the KNU, and General Ne Win, who had replaced General Smith Dun as commander-in-chief of the

government forces, signed a preliminary treaty granting amnesty to Karen troops who had joined the rebellion and allowing Karen civilians to keep weapons for their own protection. However, two leading KNU/KNDO commanders stationed in Toungoo issued a new set of proposals, which included demands for an immediate general ceasefire in Burma and government acceptance of the right of all insurgent organizations to retain any territories they occupied for the duration of the peace talks. Saw Tu Gaw, a KNU brigade major, later told a researcher that a majority of the KNU members "saw that [the truce] was not good because the Burmese [Burmans] were very weak at that time" (Angie 2000: 88). A KNU veteran also explained to Martin Smith that "our aim was to take up a position of strength first. We believed we could always negotiate later" (Smith 1999: 87). Many members of the KNU were under the impression that the war would be short and end with few casualties, and one claimed, "We thought we would win the war in two to three years. We never thought we would be in the jungle 40 years later."[21] U Nu, then the prime minister of Burma, and General Ne Win rejected these new proposals of the KNU/KNDO, and on April 9, 1949, the fighting resumed (Tinker 1967: 46–47).

The Karen lost Insein after three months of fighting in 1949. Shortly thereafter, Bassein, Mandalay, Maymyo, Meiktila, and Thazie fell to government forces. Some of the main KNU and KNDO troops were driven back into the hills east of the Salween River, while others in the Delta retreated into the foothills north of Bassein (Ibid.: 49).

Segments of the Karen Constituency

The "Other" Karen

Despite this history of armed struggle, a sizable number of Karen remained in the Union of Burma, either because they rejected the principles and methods of the KNU, because they thought the risk of joining the armed resistance was too great, or simply because they were politically passive. If we subtract from the total estimated number of Karen a generous figure of 20,000 KNU members, some 200,000 internally displaced Karen, and the 140,000

> ***Conventional studies...have largely ignored the existence of these "[other]" Karen***

Karen refugees in Thailand, the number of Karen people still living inside Burma—still the majority of the Karen population—could not be less than one million. Conventional studies, however, which focus predominantly on the Karen insurgency and Karen refugees, have largely ignored the existence of these "quiet" Karen, which I refer to as the "other" Karen. This group includes many prominent figures, both Buddhist and Christian, who command a great deal of respect within the Burmese community. These first-, second-, and third-generation Karen nationalists, who demonstrate varying degrees of awareness and support for the KNU, have chosen to collaborate with successive Burmese governments or have attempted to effect political change by working within the system. The majority reside in the original areas of armed conflict: Rangoon, the Irrawaddy Delta, and a number of major cities, such as Paan in the Karen state, Moulmein in Mon state, and Mandalay in Upper Burma.

After the KNU took up arms in 1949, and until the military coup d'état in 1962, the Karen leaders who remained in government-controlled areas promoted the Karen cause through three political parties: the Union Karen League (UKL) (fundamentally a new name for the KYO), the United Karen Organization (UKO), and the Karen Congress (KC). Some of these leaders served in important government positions, such as the president of the Union of Burma, minister of the Karen state, and minister of health (Ibid.: 76).

In 1951, the AFPFL government promoted legislation to create a Karen state, which was to consist of the Salween district and adjacent areas. In 1952, legislation was passed adding Kya-in, Kawkareik, Hlaingbwe, Paan, and Thandaung districts to the Karen state territory. With the creation of a Karen state, however, came the abolition of minority rights and the scrapping of Karen institutions such as the Karen Affairs Council (Ibid.: 75). By 1956 the UKL and the UKO had ceased to exist, as result of the abolition of seats reserved for Karens in the national parliament. Former members of the UKL later stood as AFPFL candidates in the general election, but all parties, including the AFPFL, were abolished after General Ne Win's 1962 military coup d'ètat, whose leaders cited the threat of multiple insurgencies and the disintegration of the country as the reasons for the coup. After he took power in 1962, Ne Win formed a civilian party called the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), in which he served as the chairman and president. Under the BSPP, Ne Win nationalized

private enterprises, missionary schools, and hospitals, abolished civil and political rights, established central command over the economy, banned foreign investments, and restricted tourists' entry into the country. From that time until 1989, foreigners found it increasingly difficult to gain access to the Karen communities that remained in government-controlled areas.

Generally speaking, the experience of these "other" Karen has differed markedly from that of their counterparts in areas of armed conflict—who are reportedly subject to extreme forms of human rights violation—in several ways. First, unlike those in area of armed conflict, "mainstream" Karens have thus far been able to manage their own affairs and preserve their identity as Karens under the watchful eye of the authoritarian military government. They have largely been spared the physical insecurity and violence of their counterparts in the guerrilla war zones, even though they have no greater chance of advancement than the impoverished majority of Burmans. Second, a significant number of the "other" Karen have managed to obtain professional and high-ranking civil service positions. Third, unlike other Karen, these "quiet" Karen have enjoyed relatively amicable relations with the Burman population. In another way, however, the experience of "mainstream" Karen has been similar to that of those living in areas of armed conflict. Although one might expect that the "mainstream" Karen might not express a strong interest in Karen issues, they share with their counterparts a certain degree of Karen nationalistic sentiment and a strong sense of Karen identity.

> ***the experience of these "other" Karen has differed markedly from...their counterparts***

Despite official policies, both past and present, that have been less than favorable to the survival of their culture, both Karen Buddhists and Christians have been able to carry out activities whose goal is to preserve their identity and culture. Beginning in 1962, the military government discouraged the use of minority languages in areas outside the Karen state by making Burmese the official language of instruction. In minority areas, the use of minority languages would be permitted only until the fourth grade in government schools.[22] In response, organizations as diverse as Buddhist monasteries, the Karen Literature and Cultural Association, and Karen Baptist churches, in addition to private Karen citizens, stepped up and

offered training in the Karen language amid increasing concern about its disappearance.

For example, individual Buddhist monks and laymen in the Delta and in Karen state have carried out an impressive array of activities that preserve traditional dances, traditions, and culture and promote Karen literacy and the economic and social development of the Karen people. Under the leadership of the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC), Christian Karens have also taken positive steps to preserve their language and their Christian values, despite the fact that they have had less freedom to maneuver than their Buddhist counterparts. This study focuses on Baptist Karens rather than Catholics or Anglicans because the majority of Karen Christians are Baptist. In addition, the Catholic and Anglican Karens organize their activities by region and diocese rather than according to language affiliation, as does the KBC.

The KBC, which is legally registered with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, is an umbrella organization for all the Karen Baptist churches in Burma. It is organized into eighteen regional associations, and it also has departments assigned to various functions, such as "evangelism and mission" and "care and counseling." The majority of KBC members are Sgaw, as Pwo Baptists have organized themselves under the aegis of a rival group, the Pwo Karen Baptist Conference (PKBC). The KBC has grown steadily, from 887 churches and 92,200 members when the Revolutionary Council took power in 1962, to 1,456 churches and 224,055 baptized members in 2005.[23]

Although they admit to being closely watched by the government, and they must ask for permission to conduct high-profile activities and large meetings, many Karen Christian leaders in Burma's core areas agree that they are able to conduct worship services and engage in religious activities relatively free from government interference. They typically claim that "the government does not involve itself in our day-to-day activities ... as long as we are not politically involved," or "as long as we operate within their legal limits and procedures." Newer churches and those in the peripheral areas, however, face more restrictions. For example, many Christian leaders complain that since 1990 it has become increasingly difficult to obtain permission to build new churches, especially in newly established towns. Several others, however, state that establishing a good rapport with local authorities has eased the restrictions imposed by the central government.

One theologian in the Delta area summed up the situation as follows: "While I would not go so far as to say that current government policy is based on freedom of worship, I would certainly say that it is based on toleration of diverse religious practices, at least for the Karen Baptists."[24]

The KBC has been instrumental in preserving Karen languages and culture. A survey of 67 members of the Karen diaspora who lived in Burma for their first 20 years shows that 32 learned to read and write Karen at Sunday school and summer Bible camps conducted by the church (2003–05 survey). A few of the survey respondents who had lived in the Karen state said that they had learned the language through the Karen Literature and Cultural Association. Another survey of 75 Karen living in Burma showed that 61.3 percent of respondents learned to speak and write Karen in church settings (Ah 2003: 43, 88).

The KBC has been instrumental in preserving Karen languages and culture

The Karen language is also promoted through the publication of religious magazines, hymnals, Sunday school materials, and calendars in both the Sgaw and Pwo dialects. Although minority religious literature faces more official red tape than popular Burmese magazines and literature, Karen Christian publishers have largely managed to overcome these obstacles.[25]

Although the main objective of the KBC is to foster the Christian faith, in the process of doing so it has inadvertently strengthened ties among the Karen through its various institutions. Theological schools and the church's Youth Department have played a crucial role in promoting Karen education and language, providing a training ground for Karen leadership, and establishing close networks of communication among Karens.'

The KBC has thirteen Bible schools and seminaries, of which the Karen Baptist Theological Seminary (KBTS) in Insein, on the outskirts of Rangoon, is considered to be the most prestigious. Sgaw Karen is the language of instruction for most academic courses, while English is used for business and community health classes. A strict dress code requires staff and students to wear traditional Karen clothing on campus. When surveyed by the author, KBTS professors unanimously agreed that they have not experienced any form of government interference, and that they are generally

allowed to conduct their affairs as long as they do not pose a threat to the government's institutional order. One Karen theological professor amusingly recounted that the KBTS was the only school that was left opened during the political turmoil of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Paradoxically, this apparent space for the church occurred during a period normally considered a time of political repression.

While the KBTS was established to foster theological education and to spread Christianity, it has also acted as a cultural platform for Karen. A fourth-year Karen student from Upper Burma commented that "before I came to KBTS, I did not know how to read and write Karen, and I knew nothing about Karen history. After being here for three years, I have learned much more than the Karen language. I have also come to understand my people's origins, something I now care about a great deal." These students and graduates of the KBTS promote the Karen spirit through their evangelistic and humanitarian work, as well as through the teaching of Karen languages, all of which serve as a catalyst for Karen unity and national pride.

Another institution that has played an important role in preserving Karen identity is the KBC's Youth Department, or the Christian Endeavor (CE), as it is also known. In its attempts to meet the spiritual needs of young Christians and strengthen their faith through weekly worship services led by young people, summer Bible study camps, and other social and humanitarian activities, the CE has fostered interaction and mutual understanding among young Karens from different regional backgrounds. The organization has also promoted leadership, public speaking, and language skills, sponsored sports tournaments, and offered musical and vocational training. Most of the nationally known Karen singers and songwriters in Burma made their debut at CE events. Indeed, the majority of Karens in high-ranking positions in Burma have, at one time or another, been active members of the CE, and many have served on its executive board.

The KBC has also been running a number of social and humanitarian organizations in full view of the authoritarian government. KBC-led initiatives aimed at serving the underprivileged include health clinics, women's shelters, orphanages, preschools, boarding schools, a school for the handicapped, a training center for women, and the provision of microloans, scholarships, assistance with funeral arrangements, aid to

displaced people, and relief for victims of natural disasters. Again, Karen have been able to provide these services without being subject to excessive government regulation and scrutiny. In addition, there have been initiatives taken by Karen in their capacity as individual citizens. These include cultural activities such as private tuition in the Karen language and the promotion of Karen dress, customs, and music groups. Others activities focus on general development (in health, education, business, literature, and culture) and provide training in education, leadership, and vocational training for community development and humanitarian works. Most of these initiatives, both individual and under the aegis of the KBC, attempt to encourage cooperation among Karen across barriers of language and religion, and a few have included non-Karens and non-Christians in their efforts. The KBC clinic, for example, has treated Burman Buddhist monks as well as government military intelligence personnel and prison employees in Insein. These efforts have been accurately interpreted by Ashley South as reflecting a "less aggressive" stance toward the state and an effort to seek "an accommodation with the state of Burma, rather than challenge its foundations" (South 2007a: 64).

In addition to being able to operate relatively autonomously under the military regime, the "other" Karen have also had a major impact on employment patterns in Burma. Although statistics are not available, it is clear that a number of Karen have taken up important positions in higher education, the white-collar professions, and the civil service. Members of various ethnic groups, however, see the various ethnic groups as becoming increasingly marginalized. It is very rare, for example, that minorities are admitted into military schools, nor are they often promoted to positions in the army higher than major. However, the fact that many Karen have reached the top ranks in education, various white-collar professions, and the civil service reveals that they have not been completely denied opportunities. This is confirmed by Oh Yoon Ah, who conducted interviews with 75 Karen residents in Burma in the early 2000s and claims that "Many of the [Karen] civil servants and professionals [interviewed] said they have not encountered ethnic discrimination" (Ah 2003: 97, 98). However, as a result of alternative job and educational opportunities both inside and outside Burma and the

> ***the "other" Karen have...had a major impact on employment patterns in Burma***

perception that official policies are increasingly hostile toward minority ethnic and religious groups, the best and brightest of the younger Karen generation are no longer motivated to join the civil service.

These better-off Karen have differing views about official policies on access to education, government jobs, and promotion. When interviewed by the author between 2005 and 2007, most claimed that they had not personally experienced any discrimination by Burmans or the Burmese military authorities. Some of the prominent Karen civil servants and businesspeople who made this claim emphasized that their promotion and success had been purely a result of their hard work, confidence, proactive approach, trustworthiness, loyalty, and competence. Some went even further and claimed that they had benefited from special treatment. Some commented that their ability to influence decision-making and hiring processes was enhanced as a result of their connections with influential local and regional military authorities. A few of those interviewed were rather unsympathetic to the Karen cause and dismissed the allegation of official discrimination against ethnic minorities. One Karen Buddhist intellectual in Rangoon said, "Karens have a pessimistic outlook and inferiority complex. They like to blame others for their shortcomings and failures. They should remember that Karens are not the only group that is being oppressed. The Burmese government will weed out or come down hard on any group that poses a threat to it."

Despite their relatively advantageous situation, Karen Christians generally believe that they are not looked upon with favor by the current regime.[26] A considerable number of disgruntled Karens claimed that they have been constantly penalized, reprimanded, and denied opportunities for jobs, promotion, and study abroad. Interestingly, however, they were not sure whether this discrimination was based on their ethnic or religious identities, their political stance, their lack of connections, or the nature of their personal relationships with their superiors.[27] Significantly, Oh Yoon Ah found it difficult to support the argument that "ethnicity is [a more] powerful guideline for social and economic interaction than the patron-client network" (Ibid.: 98).

When interviewed, some Karen emphasized that they had been penalized, dismissed, demoted, or reprimanded not because of their ethnicity, but because of other considerations such as their political stance or party affiliation. A former university lecturer, now living in the United States, recalled that the faculty was required to fill out 33

questionnaires on politically sensitive subjects when the universities were reopened in the aftermath of the regime's suppression of the pro-democracy movement in 1988. The authorities may not have liked her responses; she and four Burman colleagues were dismissed from their jobs. She said, "The decision was based on my political stance rather than on my ethnicity." A professor retired from Myanmar Theological Seminary also commented, "I was reprimanded by the authorities because I preached about freedom." On the other hand, a few Karen stated that they were quite certain that they had been denied promotion and study abroad because of their ethnicity or their religion.[28]

The third unique aspect of the "other" Karens is the nature of their relationship with the Burman population. Although most Karens express a certain level of distrust, prejudice, and suspicion toward Burmans, relations between "other" Karens and the Burmans have been free of violence, and even friendly at times. Even individuals who felt they had been the targets of official discrimination could recount warm and friendly relationships with their Burman colleagues and superiors.[29] This experience is very different from that of the KNU supporters and Karen living in the border areas, whose first encounter with Burmans usually takes the form of soldiers who commit rape, torture, and other atrocities against their fellow Karens.

Finally, many "other" Karen are as nationalistic as their counterparts in the KNU and conflict areas, a sentiment that is expressed in their concern for the Karen people and their strong desire to preserve their ethnic identity. This may explain why the rate of intermarriage with the Burman population has remained quite low, despite the extensive interactions between the groups. One middle-aged Karen from Rangoon declared, "I will kick my children out of my house if they marry Burmans." A blackboard hanging in his living room reads, "You must speak Karen in this house." Another well-to-do Karen in Rangoon had designed his front gate to resemble a Karen flag, showing nine rays representing the nine geographical areas originally claimed by the KNU. The Karen New Year is celebrated across the country with activities such as a flag-hoisting ceremony and traditional Karen entertainment. Well attended by Karens

many "other" Karen are as nationalistic as their counterparts in the KNU and conflict areas

of different ages and backgrounds, these celebrations are an opportunity to display ethnic costumes. Some Karen proudly adorn the door of their house or their car window with a sticker representing the Karen flag. There is also an increasing demand among the Karen for the colorful Karen dresses and *longyi,* which have been redesigned to suit modern tastes. In sum, then, most Karen living in government-controlled areas have learned to tolerate the negative effects of the Burmese government's state-building agenda while creatively exploring ways in which they can retain valued aspects of their cultural identity.

Internally Displaced Karen

Another segment of the Karen population consists of those living in areas formerly controlled by the KNU who have been displaced as the result of armed conflict and the government's counterinsurgency operations. This displacement is sometimes motivated by political reasons, and at other times by economic ones (TBBC 2007b). The first often occurs as whole villages are relocated away from areas that government officials believe to be providing food, recruits, and intelligence to the KNU. This form of displacement is expected to decline in ceasefire areas and in areas where armed resistance groups are no longer active. Other villagers, displaced as a result of economic motivations, have been forcibly relocated by local military and administrative personnel who, in partnership with private companies, need to acquire land to build infrastructure, large-scale commercial enterprises, and military bases; to plant food crops for either military or commercial purposes; or to fulfill the government's development goals (author interviews in Burma, 2007; EarthRights International 2003, 2005; Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) 2006; Free Burma Rangers 2005). This form of displacement has become prevalent in government-controlled areas and ceasefire regions in recent years.

Another segment of the Karen population...[has] reportedly been displaced [and resettled]

Some displaced Karen populations are still in hiding, while others have been resettled in areas controlled by ceasefire groups or the government. The latter have been dispersed across several regions under the control of competing authorities and have reportedly been subject to various taxes

and competing demands from the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), and other smaller Karen factions (Amnesty International 1999, 2002; Thornton 2006: 68; author interview in Burma, 2005; KHRG 2006). In the Karen state alone, in 2007 there were reportedly 51,600 people in hiding, 9,700 people living in relocation areas, and 55,600 living in ceasefire areas (TBBC 2007b: 25). The Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) and partner groups recorded the total number of internally displaced people in Karen areas (Eastern Pegu division, Karen state, and Tenasserim division) in 2005 as 179,800.

Some reports suggest that human rights violations have decreased in the ceasefire areas and that residents may prefer to stay in their new villages, especially when they offer better health and education services and access to markets than their old villages (South 2007b: 15). In many cases, resettlement has been accompanied by successful community and economic development activities, the expansion of indigenous-language school and literacy programs, and the reemergence of civil society networks within and between communities affected by conflict. At the same time, however, these new settlements may also be subject to increased control by the military state (Ibid.: 18).

resettlement has been accompanied by successful community and economic development activities

A less optimistic assessment shows the SPDC consolidating its control through the implementation of its basic administrative structure, registration of private households and possessions, the formation of local militias and other government-run organizations, and enforcement of the cultivation of crops such as rubber, sesame, and castor beans (KHRG 2006). In fact, these reports suggest that conditions in the ceasefire areas may become even worse, since residents in some relocation areas are not allowed to work their fields or farms and are still deprived of basic necessities such as food, shelter, education, safe water, healthcare, and a means of livelihood (KHRG 2006: 72).

The "Refugees"

Other displaced Karen left the country for refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. These camps were originally established in 1984 to provide

shelter for the 10,000 Karen refugees who fled to Thailand after the KNU's strategic base at Me Thaw Waw and a number of strongholds in its powerful seventh brigade were taken over by the Tatmadaw, Burma's national army (of the KNU's seven brigades, the sixth and seventh were financially and militarily the strongest). In July 2007 the Karen Refugee Committee reported that 134,043 Karen refugees were living in seven camps along the border.

The conditions and constraints in the camps vary. In some locations refugees cannot leave the camps. At other camps, however, refugees are allowed to leave the camp in the morning for work and return in the evening (Christopher 1998: 84). The Karen refugees are entirely dependent on aid agencies based in Thailand, European Union countries, and the United States for their basic needs. The Thailand Burma Border Consortium provides basic food items every month and household supplies and building materials on an annual basis. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) attached to the camps deal with health, sanitation, environmental concerns, and women's issues.[30] Education is provided free of charge, and universal enrollment in schools is encouraged.

Mae La camp, located 62 kilometers north of Mae Sot, is better equipped than other camps and offers relatively "good and diverse" education programs and health services. It has eighteen nursery schools, thirteen elementary schools, three middle schools, four high schools, two Bible schools, and a continuing education program. These schools, which are funded and assisted by NGOs, are run by the refugees themselves (Lee 2001: 34).

Although life in the refugee camps may often be boring, constrained, and uncertain, and it may encourage a "culture of dependency," it offers refugees a temporary safe haven and the prospect of a better future. These camps also serve as sites where Karen culture and history are transmitted to the next generation, Karen nationalist sentiments are nurtured and preserved, and resistance against Burmese military rule continues to be fostered. Most important, they serve as a stepping stone for many ambitious Karens who long for a better life or who want to continue waging the Karen revolution from the relative safety of another country (Christopher 1998: 105).

The...[refugee] camps...serve as sites where Karen culture and history are transmitted

Some commentators argue that the KNU has been able to maintain a "non-territorial" basis of power in the refugee camps, despite its territorial losses (Ibid.: 6). Because of their education, administrative experience, and ability to deal with Thai officials and NGOs, KNU leaders who previously held positions in the civil administration of the KNU are able to play key roles in running the refugee group known as the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) (Rajah 2002: 532). Their status has enabled these former officials to control the distribution of aid and to determine who receives refugee status in Thailand (Christopher 1998: 70–71). As a result, "the distribution of food via the KRC serves to perpetuate the idea among the Karen refugees that the KNU still cares for its people" (Lee 2001: 80). Many observers concur that the camps not only serve as a source of food, healthcare, and recruits for the resistance movement, but they have also been exploited by the KNU, which sometimes denies benefits to settlers who fail to profess allegiance to the required political, ethnic, or religious principles.[31] One researcher concludes, "It is not unreasonable to purport that such camps have become Kawthoolei's [the KNU government's] villages transplanted into Thai soil" (Christopher 1998: 70–71).

Another major consequence of the concentration in refugee camps of a large number of Karens who share a common sense of dispossession and a common experience of suffering at the hands of the Burmese army has been the increase of solidarity between strangers and the growth of nationalist sentiments within the camps (Rajah 2002: 532–33). Thus, although some analysts have pointed out that the KNU bears "some responsibility for the plight of civilians in areas where they operate" (South 2006b), it has nonetheless been able to tap into a reservoir of resentment toward the Burmese military state.

A final consequence of the establishment of refugee camps has been the fostering of nationalist sentiment through the teaching of Karen history and culture by means of the establishment of a standardized Sgaw Karen educational system in the camps (Rajah 2002: 532). Children, for example, are taught from a young age to support the KNU and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) (Christopher 1998: 81). At homes, in school, at church, and through newspapers and magazines, children are

refugee camps have...[also led to] the fostering of nationalist sentiment

encouraged to maintain their Karen identity (Lee 2001: 79). A portrait of Saw Ba Oo Gyi with a list of his four principles, for example, is hung on the wall of every house in the Mae La refugee camp (Ibid.). Karen dance, dress, and songs are all celebrated, and the Karen national anthem, a powerful, emotionally charged song, is sung on appropriate occasions, strengthening the sense of belonging among the Karen in the camps (Ibid.).

Since the early 1990s, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has relocated thousands of Karen refugees, including KNU military and civilian personnel and their families, to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Finland, and Norway. In 2006, 4,789 people left the Tham Hin camp for resettlement in the United States (TBBC 2007a). It is estimated that in 2007 another 10,181 Burmese (the majority of whom are Karen) Karen refugees entered the United States, following the initial prohibition of their entry for their alleged connections with "terrorist organizations." With the relaxation of asylum policy in the United States and other Western countries, increasing numbers of the "other" Karen living in Burma have sought entry to the camps in order to claim the right of resettlement in these "third countries."

Some commentators speculate that the closure of refugee camps along the Thai border may end the Karen armed insurgency. This possibility has caused increasing alarm among the KNU leadership, as intellectuals from the organization and highly trained teachers and medics are among those most likely to be resettled in a third country (South 2006b). However, several KNU officials and supporters I interviewed insisted that committed individuals will remain in the border region and continue the fight for Karen freedom and independence.

The Karen Diaspora

Another piece in the mosaic of various Karen populations is those Karens who left the refugee camps and have resettled in a "third country."[32] There are currently around 12,800 Karen refugees living in various U.S. cities. The largest U.S. Karen community is in St. Paul, Minnesota (approximately 726 people), followed Utica, New York (599), and Houston, Texas (442).[33] Karens in Canada are clustered in Vancouver, British Columbia (approximately 1,000 people) and the Thunder Bay area. Hundreds of Karen families have also resettled in Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. Most of those living in Asia (particularly Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore), however, are temporary workers, both legal and illegal. It is

estimated that there are 1,000 Karen in Singapore and 5,000 in Malaysia. Most of those living in Singapore work in low-paid jobs as maids, technicians, and construction and shipyard workers, while those in Malaysia are employed in restaurants, plantations, construction, and fish and shrimp farms. A few earn higher wages as doctors, nurses, engineers, information technicians, and systems analysts. Most of these migrants come from government-controlled areas of Burma.

Karen diasporic communities will become more significant as they increasingly seek to promote the interests of Karen people and assist the work of the KNU. Many of the recent migrants maintain strong nationalistic sentiments and political consciousness. Although they are small in number, they are making an impact in their host communities by raising public awareness of Karen culture and the repressive policies of the Burmese government. Many have organized protests in their new countries against the Burmese army's atrocities in Karen areas.[34] Some have written to local and national politicians and launched media campaigns to pressure the Burmese government into halting human rights violations in Karen areas. Quite a few of them donate money or participate in humanitarian and educational projects to help Karen refugees in the Thai-Burma border areas (Lee 2004: 11). They have also established global communication networks to exchange views, share information about Karen issues, and educate others about Karen history. Finally, they host reunions and Karen New Year celebrations at which they commemorate Karen martyrs and celebrate their culture in dress, dance, and song.

In addition to the Karen living around the world in comparatively free and safe environments, there are also a significant number of Karens who are Burmese citizens living in Thailand outside the refugee camps. Although their numbers are difficult to calculate, some analysts estimate that there are approximately 50,000 in Bangkok and between 50,000 and 100,000 in the Mae Sot area, where they account for less than half of the total Burmese residents. Most are employed as domestic workers, and many others work in factories, shops, and construction, often doing dirty and dangerous jobs. As a consequence of their constrained economic circumstances and their political environment, this group has generally made negligible political

the KNU has generally not sought significant support from the Karen diaspora in Thailand

and economic contributions to the KNU compared to their counterparts in other foreign countries. And although a few Karens are involved in Karen NGOs in Mae Sot, the KNU has generally not sought significant support from the Karen diaspora in Thailand.[35]

Karen Political Organizations

This section briefly discusses the structure, organization, and sources of support of a number of political organizations that claim to represent the interests of the Karen people. It then sketches the Karen people's varying attitudes toward these organizations, successive Burmese governments, and the political issues that led to the original divide between the "accommodators" and the "rebels." It focuses primarily on the KNU, which until the early 1990s was one of the most powerful armed ethnic organizations in Burma and is seen by many Karen as the most legitimate and popular organization that speaks for the Karen people. It also examines the complicated issue of the ceasefire conditions proposed by the KNU and successive Burmese governments. Finally, it demonstrates how an analysis of the views held by different segments of the Karen population and the roots of the failure of the ceasefire negotiations can help us identify a more realistic approach to ceasefire negotiations and long-term political settlement within the context of a militarized Burma.

The KNU

A researcher who conducted fieldwork in KNU-controlled areas in the 1990s noted that the KNU was the "largest, most powerful and influential, most visible and best-organized ethnic political/military organization in Burma" (Petry 1993: 132). Indeed, the KNU and its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Amy (KNLA), had continued to survive, despite the fall of its strongholds in the Delta area and the Pegu Yoma mountains after the notorious "four-cut strategy" was launched in 1968 by General Ne Win's regime.[36] From the early 1970s until the early 1990s, the KNU, with its new headquarters at Manerplaw, operated as a quasi-government along a 500-mile stretch of the Thai-Burma border, from Toungoo province, opposite Mae Sariang in the north, to Tavoy, in the far south of Burma.[37]

In this new form, the KNU was organized into seven administrative districts, or brigades (Thaton, Toungoo, Nyaunglaybin, Mergui-Tavoy, Papun, Dooplaya, and Paan), each of which was further subdivided into

townships and tracts. For each district, a committee, a chairperson, a vice-chairperson, a secretary, and departmental district officers were selected. Each of the KNU districts was also controlled by an associated KNLA military brigade. The KNU Dooplaya and Paan districts, for example, corresponded to the KNLA's sixth and seventh brigade areas, respectively. Each brigade was largely responsible for raising its own funds and arming its own troops. The KNU was governed by an executive committee of eleven, which until recently was dominated by educated Sgaw Christians, most of whom came from the Delta area (Falla 1991: 299; Thornton 2006: 6).[38]

General Bo Mya, the leader of the KNU and its president from 1976 to 2000—variously described as "undisputed," "ruthless," and "autocratic"—was atypical when compared with most of his intellectually inclined contemporaries from the Delta. He rose to the position of commander of the seventh brigade in the eastern hills, later becoming the commander-in-chief of the KNLA and finally the president of the KNU. Despite his "authoritarian style of leadership," Bo Mya was considered one of the most successful KNU commanders of his generation due to his ability to generate a "coherent sense of identity" among diverse Karen groups in the eastern hills (Smith 1999: 391). He continued to wield power after stepping down as president in 2000, attempting to exert his influence by leading the ceasefire negotiation team of 2004, despite strong disagreement within the KNU. He died in 2006.

[KNU leader] General Bo Mya... generate[d] a "coherent sense of identity" among...Karen groups

The KNU was divided into fifteen departments, including finance, agriculture, defense, justice, information, transport and communications, administration, forestry, mining, health, and education. Some of these departments had branches that extended down to the district, township, and village levels (Ibid.: 287). Before its headquarters were overrun by government forces in 1995, the KNU had established hospitals, clinics, high schools, and hundreds of village schools in the areas it controlled.

The KNU enjoyed friendly relations with the Thai government, which implemented a "buffer zone" policy that exploited the presence of insurgent

troops along the border to avoid direct clashes between the two countries (Myoe 2002; Chachavalpongpun 2005). The KNU's leaders also maintained close personal contacts with senior Thai intelligence and army officers, who allowed them to receive treatment in Thai hospitals, to participate in the region's thriving black market in weapons, and to buy ammunitions in return for KNU assistance in the fight against communist insurgency (Smith 1999: 299).

The KNU, however, was financially self-supporting, relying for its revenue on taxes on black-market goods crossing the Thai-Burma border, levies on households in KNU-controlled areas, and taxes and revenue from the operation of timber mills, rubber plantations, and fish farms and the extraction of mineral resources. Unlike some insurgencies in the Shan state, which relied on income generated by the cultivation and trafficking of drugs, the KNU practiced a "drug-free" policy and took harsh measures against drug traffickers.

In the early 1980s, the KNU was estimated to have approximately 10,000 personnel serving in its regular and village militias (Ibid.: 394). Each family living in a KNU base area was usually expected to nominate one son to join the KNLA, and marriage was denied to militia members for their first seven years or service, or until they reached the age of 35. Although the KNLA soldiers received no pay, they were provided with food and uniforms and a daily cheroot allowance (Ibid.).

Although the Karen resistance forces had originally been drawn heavily from Rangoon and the Delta, the KNU gradually lost touch with the Karen population in those areas as they came under government control. Nevertheless, a few supporters from the Delta and Rangoon still managed to join the revolution in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. As the number of recruits from Rangoon and the Delta declined, an increased number came from the areas controlled by the KNU's seven brigades and their adjacent regions. After the popular protests against the military government in 1988, an especially large number of Karen in the government-controlled areas joined the insurgency, mostly out of fear of retaliation for their participation in the demonstrations.

The reasons given for joining the armed resistance were varied. Although most of the KNLA fighters joined "to avenge abuses committed by the Burma army against their family or against their people," some saw membership in the KNLA as preferable to living unarmed in the villages

and being constantly on the run from government forces (Human Rights Watch 2002). Many fighters also had relatives or friends who were already part of the resistance movement. Some were forcefully recruited (Interview of former KNU child soldier, November 2006; Human Rights Watch 2002), while others simply bowed to the wishes of desperate parents who, unable to afford school fees, signed up their sons to serve with the KNU, either as a soldier or in a civilian capacity, in exchange for the KNU caring for him and sending him to school (Human Rights Watch 2002). In sum, some KNU leaders and soldiers have been motivated by perceived grievances and have made their choices on moral and ethical grounds, others have joined the movement to improve their economic situation, and some, of course, have been motivated by a combination of both. In addition, as we will see, the values, beliefs, and actions of the KNLA fighters have evolved in response to their experiences and their interpretation of the changing nature of the conflict.

Since 1984 the Burmese army has gradually taken control of the KNU's strategic bases in its powerful seventh brigade areas, built supply routes, and established new bases in the territories previously controlled by the KNU (Myoe 2002). These actions resulted in a major reduction in border trade revenues for the KNU and enabled the Tatmadaw to maintain frontline positions from which it could launch annual dry-season offensives (Smith 1999: 396). In 1988, General Ne Win stepped down as the chairman of the BSPP in response to student-led demonstrations caused by a deteriorating economic situation and outrage against the military's mishandling of a local riot. These protests gradually turned into a nationwide pro-democracy movement, which would be crushed in September of that year by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In 1988 and 1989, thousands of students and democracy activists fled into KNU-controlled territories after taking part in a popular uprising that was met with severe military repression. Increasing numbers of anti-government forces in the rebel-controlled areas led to the founding of the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), which was comprised of members of an earlier alliance of armed ethnic organizations, the National Democratic Front (NDF), and several pro-democracy groups that either supported the armed struggle or had taken up arms themselves, the most notable of which was the All-Burma Student Democratic Front.

Mired in domestic crises and stung by international criticism, the SLORC held a multiparty election in 1990. The main opposition party,

the National League for Democracy (NLD), which was led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of a leading nationalist who was assassinated in 1947, won a landslide victory. The military junta, however, refused to honor the election results, and instead cracked down on opposition parties. A dozen members of the parliament-elect from the NLD fled into KNU-held territory in the early 1990s, where they formed the exiled National Coalition Government Union of Burma (NCGUB). Bo Mya was named joint head of the new National Council Union of Burma (NCUB), an umbrella organization of anti-government groups that included the NDF, DAB, and NCGUB.

After having signed bilateral ceasefire agreements in 1989 with various ethnic armies that had mutinied against the Communist Party of Burma, in 1991 the SLORC negotiated a ceasefire with the Pao and other NDF members. The SLORC attempted to revamp its image by instituting a new policy of what the Burmese military regime termed "national reconciliation" and "peaceful settlement by negotiation." The ceasefire agreements that resulted required the groups involved to give up the "policy of armed struggle," but they allowed armed opposition groups to continue to bear arms, control territory, and pursue a variety of economic and other development initiatives. The SLORC made it clear, however, that they had to abandon their arms once the National Convention was completed and a referendum on the constitution and subsequent elections for people's assemblies were held.[39] In 1992, the SLORC offered the KNU a unilateral ceasefire proposal.

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The KNU, however, adhered to the DAB policy that demanded that the SLORC must negotiate a nationwide ceasefire and political settlement with the DAB collectively. Consequently, the KNU leadership asked for a political dialogue between the opposition political alliance and the military junta, which was to take place outside Burma with the assistance of an international mediator or observer.[40] These demands were rejected by the SLORC. To the KNU's dismay, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), their main NDF ally, reached a ceasefire agreement with the SLORC in 1994.[41] Another key DAB member, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), signed a ceasefire in 1995. The KNU felt betrayed (Mya 2004; Author interview with Pa doh Mahn Sha in Mae Sot, 2006). Between 1989 and

1997, 23 resistance groups reached a settlement with the junta, including the KNU's Kayan and Karenni ethnic cousins (Smith 1999: 440).

By the early 1990s, the geopolitical situation was no longer favorable to armed resistance groups. The Thai government now adopted a "constructive engagement" policy toward Burma in an attempt to secure lucrative logging, fishery, and gas pipeline deals offered by the SLORC (Myoe 2002; Chachavalpongpun 2005).[42] Funds from this emergency sell-off of natural resources to Thailand enabled the Burmese junta to buy much-needed arms, ammunitions, and aircraft from neighboring countries, particularly China. The SLORC's successful negotiations with other major groups involved in the ceasefire enabled it to concentrate its resources on mounting a stronger military campaign against the KNU.

However, the most severe blow dealt to the KNU was the defection of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), which resulted from the dissatisfaction of the organization's rank and file, who were primarily Buddhists, with the corruption, abuse, and religious discrimination of the Christian-dominated KNU leadership. The DKBA's defection led to the fall of the KNU's headquarters in 1995 and the consequential influx of KNU personnel from all sectors of the organization into refugee camps and eventually abroad. This was soon followed by the formation of a series of smaller KNU factions that signed ceasefire agreements with the Burmese military regime.

the most severe blow...was the defection of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

The SLORC and the KNU managed to launch another round of ceasefire talks in 1995, during which the SLORC demanded that the KNU "enter the legal fold," renounce its "policy of armed insurrection," and lay down arms after the new constitution was introduced. In return, the regime promised to implement development programs in KNU-controlled areas. According to Martin Smith, Bo Mya and his advisors argued that accepting such terms would not only involve a choice between admitting to their extralegal status and surrendering, but it would also mean rejecting the four principles of Saw Ba Oo Gyi (Smith 1999: 449).[43] The KNU leadership insisted that instead, "something in the form of a political agreement was needed on the table—not only as a guarantee of reform, but also to justify the sacrifices of the many who had died" (Ibid. 2003: 20).

In response, the SLORC negotiators argued that they were only a transitional government and were thus not in a position to engage in a political dialogue with any opposition groups. According to the SLORC, such a dialogue could only be meaningfully undertaken by those elected in the forthcoming elections. Eventually, negotiations broke down. In 1997, the SLORC launched a major military offensive against the KNU's fourth and sixth brigades in the Mergui-Tavoy and Dooplaya districts, taking command of the last of the territory under KNU control (Enha 2005; Taw 2005).

In retrospect, the failure of the KNU to agree to a ceasefire reveals more than just their adherence to Ba Oo Gyi's principles and their lack of trust in the Burmese military regime. The KNU's close association with various Burmese opposition groups also made it difficult for them to negotiate separately with the regime.[44] These circumstances have shaped the KNU's insistence on engagement in political dialogue as a negotiation strategy. Martin Smith, for instance, notes that whereas the strategies of other ceasefire groups were based on a "peace-through-development policy of mutual trust building," the KNU (as well as the NLD) advanced a "politics-first demand" (Smith 2003: 20). This latter policy calls for the discussion of substantial political issues such as "equal rights," "the right to self-determination," and movement toward "federalism" as a first step toward negotiating a ceasefire arrangement.[45]

After a period of stalemate, General Khin Nyunt, head of military intelligence, attempted to reopen negotiations with the KNU in 2003. The State Peace and Development Committee (the post-1997 name for the SLORC) agreed to joint discussions with the KNU in order to formulate an alternative to the KNU "entering the legal fold," the phrase used by the Burmese military regime to describe its demands in earlier ceasefire agreements.[46]

In 2003, the KNU representatives and SPDC government made a verbal ceasefire agreement (known as the Gentlemen's Agreement) that acknowledged the continuing discussions about the resettlement of internally displaced Karen refugees and the resolution of issues arising during the interim period. Then, on January 15, 2004, Bo Mya led a delegation of 20 Karen officials to Rangoon to discuss an official ceasefire, although he had stepped down as president of the KNU in 2000. By this time, according to the author's interviews of KNU and former KNU officials in 2006–07, there were signs of disagreement between Bo Mya, who wanted to conclude

a separate ceasefire settlement with the SPDC as a means of reasserting his power, and a number of other leading KNU figures, who preferred to frame the Karen struggle within the wider struggle for democracy in Burma.[47] However, these negotiations faltered in 2004 due to the removal of General Khin Nyunt, a major architect of the various ceasefire deals.

Soon afterward, the junta launched a number of massive offensives against Karen populations in areas controlled by the KNU's second, third, and fifth brigades and their surrounding villages, claiming that these attacks were necessary to stop bombings allegedly instigated by those opposed to the ceasefire negotiations ("Burmese Military Blame Karen Situation on KNU" 2006). Some observers saw this as a clean-up operation directed against areas that were close to the new capital of Nay Pyi Taw, near Pyin-Ma-Na.[48] The Thailand Burma Border Consortium reported that more than 27,000 people were displaced as a result of this campaign (TBBC 2007).

By early in the new century, the KNLA forces had lost the majority of the territories they had previously controlled to Tatmataw forces. It is difficult to estimate the current strength of the KNU, since many of its soldiers and other personnel, along with their families, are based in the seven Karen refugee camps in Thailand. Ashley South estimates the KNU's combined forces at between 5,000 and 7,000 soldiers in seven brigades (including mobile battalions and village militia), plus more than a thousand active political cadres (South 2006a: 8).[49] Recruitment into the KNLA is now "primarily voluntary," and many of the earlier restrictions on terms of service and punishments imposed for rule violations have been relaxed.[50]

There is considerable disagreement between the military and political wings of the KNU over the organization's relationships with exiled opposition groups in the border areas and the appropriate strategy for proceeding with ceasefire talks. The KNU's central executive committee, which was once led by educated and relatively young leaders, has lost most of its educated members to defection, old age, and death and is now made up mostly of 60- to 80-year-olds. Although a number of young township-level officers and departmental staff still work within the KNU system, many of the younger educated leaders have left the party out of frustration with what they consider to be a lack of a dynamic, coherent, and well-thought-out strategy. They tend to either find work with humanitarian organizations or seek educational and job opportunities in Thailand and Western countries.

Today the KNU has to rely on hit-and-run guerrilla tactics to attack or to defend itself against the SPDC army. Its central administrative operations have moved to Mae Sot and a number of towns on the Thai-Burma border. With little or no revenue from black-market customs duties, some of its revenue-generating departments, such as forestry, mining, finance, and agriculture, have virtually ceased to function. Although many of its high schools and hospitals have been dismantled, the KNU continues to provide basic administration in pockets of the "liberated" areas; to provide some support for the establishment of village schools; to organize villagers to resist the excesses of the SPDC and other KNU splinter groups; and to treat patients and distribute medicine through mobile clinics and backpacking medical teams (KHRG 2006: 14; author interview with a Karen refugee camp leader, 2007). Some activities crucial to the security of the KNU, such as data collection, intelligence gathering, and organizational work, are still conducted through the KNU networks at the village level.

In sum, it appears that future negotiations will founder if either the SPDC regime insists that the KNU lay down its arms and "enter the legal fold," or the KNU continues to insist on tripartite "political talks" (involving the SPDC, ethnic armed resistance groups, and Burmese opposition parties) as a precondition for ceasefire negotiations. The late general secretary of the KNU, Pa doh Mahn Sha, asserted that the KNU would continue to demand a tripartite dialogue as a prerequisite for negotiations.[51] According to former leaders of the seventh brigade, which defected to the regime in early 2007, and sources close to the junta, these demands have encouraged the SPDC to seek dialogue with the military, rather than the administrative, wing of the KNU.[52] At the time of this writing (November 2007), there is no indication that the Burmese military is seeking to resume ceasefire talks with the KNU.

The DKBA and Other Karen Factions

The KNU is obviously not the only organization that claims to represent the interests of the Karen people. Several other armed Karen factions that have broken away from the KNU as well as a few politicians popularly elected in the 1990s have also claimed a mandate to speak for the Karen constituency.

The KNU is...not the only organization that claims to represent the interests of the Karen

Although the three Karen political parties that stood in the 1990 national elections—the Karen National Congress for Democracy (KNCD), the Karen State National Organization, and the Union Karen League—fared poorly, a few Karen candidates who ran under the banner of the NLD party and the National Union Party (the legacy party of the BSPP) were elected. Like most of the NLD candidates, some of these Karen NLD leaders were detained for a time, and others have since died. Unlike other major ethnic parties—many of which won a significant number of seats in the 1990 elections—the Karen political parties were neither numerically or financially strong enough to garner significant support across different regions and constituencies. Most Karen ended up voting for the NLD.

Apart from the KNU, the main armed organization that is operating legally within the state of Burma and professes a political mandate is the DKBA. Since its defection from the KNU, the DKBA has established its headquarters at Myaing Gyi Nyu, and its forces are operating in the vicinity of the KNU's sixth and seventh brigade areas (KHRG 2006: 12). The DKBA, which still subscribes to Ba Oo Gyi's four principles (Thornton 2006: 72; Smith 2006), has "a clear ethno-nationalist agenda," and some of its leaders "appear concerned for the political emancipation and socioeconomic development of the Karen people" (South 2006a: 9).[53]

In theory, the DKBA is overseen by six honorary chairmen (all of whom are Buddhist monks) and a central committee consisting of nine members, including the president, the commander-in-chief, the second commander-in-chief, the vice president, three brigade commanders, the general secretary, and the head of military affairs. Most of the central committee members also lead one or more of the organization's eighteen departments, which range from religion, commerce and trade, forestry, agriculture, health, budget, accounting, public relations, and literature and culture to drug control and prevention. In addition, there are three brigades, three special units, and a central intelligence unit that are all theoretically under the supervision of the commander-in-chief. In practice, however, the DKBA's command structure is weak. Many of its units enjoy almost complete autonomy, and some even answer to local Tatmadaw commanders, for whom they serve as a proxy militia. There are a number of Christians within the ranks of the DKBA, including some high-ranking officials subordinate to the central committee members.

Reports suggest that, at the district level, DKBA forces focus most of their efforts on their own survival and that many units are involved in

extorting money from villagers and those passing through road checkpoints, as well as involved in logging operations, mining operations, and running passenger vehicles at a profit. Some are allegedly engaged in trafficking methamphetamines to Thailand (KHRG 2006: 12; South 2006a: 9).

Some observers estimate the DKBA's troop strength at about 3,000–4,000, a number that also includes a small number of civilian officials (Ball and Lang 2001: 18, 24; South 2006a: 10). Although the members of the original army formed between December 1994 and March 1995 were defectors from the KNLA, DKBA forces are now predominantly comprised of new recruits enlisted from the villages on a quota basis. A small village is required to provide two youths or to pay a fee of about 20,000–30,000 kyat per person. Many young men end up being forcibly recruited (KHRG 2006: 8). Other recruits are attracted by the prospect of making a living from the DKBA's various business ventures, exerting power over other villagers, or exempting their families from taxation and forced labor (KHRG 1996; Interviews in Burma, 2007).

Although the DKBA has in many ways been the KNU's nemesis since the split, the relationship between the two groups is complex. For example, although the DKBA forces often work in conjunction with the SPDC army units or clash with the KNLA, there are suspicions that some DKBA soldiers continue to deal with the KNU/KNLA, sometimes selling them ammunition and other supplies provided by the Tatmadaw (Ball and Lang 2001: 7). Also, whenever the DKBA captures KNLA soldiers, they force them to join the DKBA. Many young Karen men have gone back and forth between the two militias as many as three or four times by the time they reach the age of 18 or 20 (Human Rights Watch 2002). In addition, it is not uncommon to find a DKBA soldier or officer whose father or brother is a member of the KNU or the KNLA (Thornton 2006: 69). The KNU leadership has expressed its willingness to accept into its ranks any DKBA members who want to return to armed struggle, with the exception of a few of their "wicked" leaders. There is also a concern within the Burmese military establishment that the DKBA may revert to active armed resistance if the Tatmadaw insisted that they lay down their arms.

Other smaller breakaway KNU factions currently operating inside Burma include: 1) Thu Mu Hei's Peace Force (formerly the KNU's sixteenth battalion), which defected in 1996 at Kyar-Inn, in the Karen state; 2) Perry Moe of Thandaung, formed from the KNU's second brigade in 1997; and 3) Padoh Aung San's Karen Peace Force, which defected from the

KNU in 1998. With fewer members than the DKBA, these factions control small patches of territory in the Karen state (Ball and Lang 2001: 24–25) and have actively recruited villagers in and around the areas they control. Most, however, are primarily concerned with making money through logging, taxation, extorting goods and materials, and drafting labor from villages near their camps (KHRG 2006: 13). These groups have been joined by the latest splinter group from the KNU's seventh brigade, known as the KNU/KNLA Peace Council. Led by their veteran commander Bo Htay Maung, this force is now based in a village in Kawkareik township, in Karen state.

In addition, there are other groups based abroad that seceded from the KNU without surrendering to the government. In 1997, Mahn Robert Zan founded the Karen Solidarity Organization (KSO) to explore alternatives to armed resistance.[54] In 1998, Doctor Marta broke away from the KNU to form the Working Group for Karen Unification. There are also a number of militant millenarian sects among the Karen. These Christian and Buddhist sects, which emphasize strict diet and moral discipline, engage in various magical practices, and perform animist and Buddhist rituals, have fought against both the KNU and the Tatmadaw in the past. In recent years, the most celebrated of these groups has been the so-called "God's Army," led by Karen twins in the Tenasserim division in Burma's far south. It is not clear, however, whether these groups have any political objective beyond a desire to practice their own brand of Karen identity and nationalism (Ball and Lang 2001: 7; South 2007a).

Opinions and Attitudes

Although the present political environment in Burma is not conducive to a comprehensive assessment of Karen perspectives on the organizations that claim to represent their interests, the information we have suggests that there are diverse and ambivalent attitudes toward the groups and toward the territorial boundaries of the Karen state. Most Karen militants joined the armed resistance movement to "liberate the Karen people from the oppression of the Burmese military regime," "to settle score with the

there are diverse and ambivalent attitudes toward...the territorial boundaries of the Karen state

military regime," to have their "own country," and to "fight for justice, equality, and the preservation of their culture" (Thornton 2006: 5, 16, 17, 19; Interviews). Despite these claims, however, most Karens do not have a clearly defined position on the status and territorial boundaries of the Karen state—the issues that inspired the Karen armed revolt—and such concepts as "self-determination" and "equality."—Neither are current and former high-ranking KNU officials united in their views on such matters. While some would be satisfied if the boundaries of the Karen state were to remain the same, others insist on the inclusion of the Tenasserim coast and the Delta regions.[55] When 67 interviewees were asked which territorial units should constitute the Karen state, 27 respondents did not know, 15 opted for the status quo, and 25 listed those that comprise the present Karen state, with the addition of the Tenasserim division, the Delta region, and "the areas where Karens are the majority."[56] A number of strong negative reactions toward some of the "other" Karens who have recently served as mediators between KNU breakaway groups and the Burmese military shows the continuing support for the KNU among many overseas Karens. This by no means implies the absence of moderate voices, but it is difficult to assess the strength of this group, as they tend to remain relatively hidden.

In government-controlled areas of Burma, where the regime maintains control over communication, the dissemination of information, education, and the mass media, there is a lack of knowledge about the history of the Karen and the KNU, and a sense of uncertainty about KNU policies, especially among the younger generation. When, in 2005, the author asked 100 Karen theological students on Seminary Hill in Insein, a suburb of Rangoon, questions about Karen history, only 5 percent could answer them correctly. This data is confirmed by another recent study, which identified the differences in attitudes and preferences between the older generations and the "post-1949" generation (Ah 2003). This study found that younger Karen had less knowledge about Karen history, a higher level of interaction with Burman residents, and a greater tendency to converse in Burmese.

The lack of knowledge about the KNU and its principles, objectives, and goals, is not confined to the younger generation. As a well-to-do middle-aged Karen woman in Rangoon succinctly stated, "I perceive the KNU as neither a liberator nor an insurgent organization. The problem is

that I don't know what they stand for. I need to have a dialogue with them to find out what they stand for and whether they represent my interests. However, I respect them as an organization that is fighting to promote its own cause."[57]

Nevertheless, many Karen accept the KNU as a legitimate organization that stands for Karen interests. In interviews with the author, the "other" Karen who claimed to support the KNU cited their relatively comfortable lives in government-controlled areas, a sense of obligation to promote development among the Karen, familial ties and responsibilities, geographical distance, and a lack of contact with the revolutionary movement as major impediments to joining the armed insurgency. In addition, there are also a few Karen both in Burma and abroad who emphatically denounce the policies and practices of the armed resistance movements or of individual leaders within the KNU, whether for personal or ideological reasons.

It is equally difficult to assess the views of ordinary Karen in armed conflict areas. Many Karen villagers have been forced to adopt multiple roles—as a KNU liaison officer and an SPDC village secretary, for example—either out of ideological commitments or as a survival strategy. As a result, most Karen households in these areas have close relatives in the KNLA, the DKBA, and the local SPDC "People's Militia" (Heppner 2006). Some Karens have fled to escape the fighting between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw or between the KNLA and the DKBA, or to escape abuses committed by these parties. Others have avoided siding with any group, either because they reject the groups' policies, because they are suffering from "war fatigue," or because acts of violence committed by the various armed resistance groups have alienated them from all participants in the conflict.[58]

The activities of the DKBA forces, their behavior toward local villagers, and the way they are perceived by Karen residents vary greatly from area to area (KHRG 2006: 8). Some groups are despised for their looting and their vicious torture of villagers. In particular, refugees who arrived at the Mae La camp after 1995 mentioned the DKBA as a major cause for their plight (Lee 2001: 21). Other villagers said if they were forced to join the DKBA military, they would do better to join up with the KNU army instead (KHRG 2006: 6). Other DKBA groups, however, seem to have a genuine desire to improve the lot of the people (KHRG 1996; South 2007a: 69). In some areas, such as the eastern Dooplaya district, the DKBA is reportedly very effective in protecting villagers against SPDC abuse and retaliation (Ball and Lang 2001: 21). In addition, some research indicates that "the

conditions for IDPs [internally displaced persons] in ceasefire areas—including the presumably DKBA-controlled zones—are better than those in zones of ongoing armed conflict, or in the range of government-controlled relocation sites" (South 2007a).[59] This sentiment is echoed by many "other" Karen who have been impressed by the DKBA's initiatives to erect new buildings and undertake cultural projects and economic expansion in its base areas.[60]

When interviewing Karen in Burma, the author heard very few positive comments about the other KNU breakaway factions. For instance, despite the assistance they provide for Baptist religious meetings in the Toungoo area, the Perry Moe faction of Thandaung are not looked upon favorably by local residents. Villagers in Toungoo complained that the government had confiscated their lands and given them to the former KNU members, "who were drunk most of the time, and forced us to perform work for them." One Karen community leader asserted that these defectors "got many privileges, and abused their power and authority. They are now bullying the local people who live in the areas where they were relocated."

positive comments about the other KNU breakaway factions [are few]

Recommendations

Although today the Karen are geographically disconnected, dispersed throughout the world from North America to the jungles of the Thai-Burma border, they share a common desire to preserve their language, culture, and customs and to eliminate suffering among their people. Some Karen will always exhort their fellows to make contributions to the KNU, or to relief efforts for refugees and IDPs (this phenomenon is not unique to the Christian community).–Among the Karen Buddhists, there is not only a desire to identify themselves as Karen, but also a desire to find specific Karen solutions to their fundamental problems of underdevelopment and insecurity (South 2007a: 68–69). These sentiments are echoed by many Karen, including those who have allied themselves with the Burmese military, as well as those labeled by the KNU as "unpatriotic," "traitors," "dividers," or "businessmen with ulterior motives."

However, while most Karen complain that they have suffered discrimination, displacement, and military atrocities, their political objectives

are not always clear. They are divided over their differing relationships with exiled opposition groups, their involvement in Burmese politics, and the means by which they believe the welfare of the Karen people should be secured. Their views on Karen political organizations and their opinions on how to resolve the "Karen issue"—which involves matters such as the territorial demarcation of the Karen state, the problem of IDPs and refugees, and the role of the Karen language in Burmese education—are often ambiguous, inconsistent, or altogether unexpressed.

For example, some may dislike particular leaders within the KNU establishment, but would still regard the defeat of the KNU as a defeat for the Karen people as a whole. Some may disagree with the KNU's policies and practices but continue to see themselves as a separate ethnic group. A Christian Karen pastor from Toungoo who now lives in America said, "At the end of the day, we Karens tend to stick with one another no matter how corrupt our leaders and how badly run the revolution is." Likewise, many Buddhist Karen who feel alienated by the KNU leadership and disappointed by the outcome of the DKBA defection from the KNU continue to perceive themselves as an ethnically distinct group (Ibid. 2006b). This sentiment is shared by many Karen. Finally, there is a subset of Karen who are apolitical, either only dimly aware of their ethnic identity or likely to view their ethnicity as a private matter. In the absence of reliable opinion surveys, however, and as long as Karen political parties and armed resistance organizations are prevented from participating in the political system, it will be impossible to determine the level of support among Karen enjoyed by candidates put up by the KNU, the DKBA, and the NLD.

defeat of the KNU [would be regarded] as a defeat for the Karen people

The question of a political settlement, which the KNU has demanded be included in any ceasefire talks, covers a variety of issues, ranging from self-determination and cultural rights to the sharing and devolution of power. It is a complex subject requiring a long and complicated process of negotiation and the involvement of multiple actors. It is not an issue that can be dealt with in ceasefire talks alone. In an ideal scenario, not only would the KNU leadership enter into negotiations with the SPDC, the NLD, and other ethnic groups, but they would also iron out the differences

of opinion that exist within the KNU itself and among the various armed resistance factions, as well as take into consideration the views of the Karen and the majority Burman populations and other communities in Burma's ethnic mosaic. The KNU should recognize, however, that the fact that the organization has resisted the Burmese state for almost sixty years and that it is still perceived by many Karen as one of the most credible pro-Karen organizations does not automatically endow it with the authority to administer a separate Karen state. The late general secretary of the KNU demonstrated his awareness of the issue, saying, "We will temporarily administer the Karen state during the transitional period, but we will hand over power to the successful political parties after free and fair elections are held in Burma."[61]

The first priority when approaching the Karen issue as a whole should be to focus on the most urgent and solvable issues; the more complex issues should be dealt with later. The fewer preconditions attached to these talks, the better the prospects of success. Few people would defend the SPDC's continuing offensives that have so often resulted in reported human rights violations and have caused displacement, the outbreak of disease, and suffering. Ceasefire talks, then, should focus on pressuring the SPDC to halt these atrocities, opening a dialogue between the SPDC and the KNU, and solving the problem of displacement. The SPDC needs to be convinced that reliance on repressive measures to solve the Karen issue has only hardened Karen nationalist sentiment and will continue to do so in the long run. While many "other" Karen, including the so-called apologists for the SPDC, would like to see the KNU resolve outstanding issues through collaboration and peaceful means, most advocate retaining arms as a form of self-defense.[62] This seems a reasonable prerequisite for any ceasefire settlement, given the SPDC's failure to deliver on its past promises and its widespread use of violence and repression.

Focusing on issues on which agreement can be reached would create isolated pockets of peace, which could then be expanded as other issues are resolved. This strategy could also be used to undertake piecemeal reforms and to advance and accumulate further rights, privileges, and autonomy for the Karen. That some former KNU breakaway ceasefire factions have been able to negotiate with the SPDC a certain degree of political autonomy, and that they have been allowed to commemorate Martyr Day, celebrating Ba Oo Gyi, the KNU president, are both positive signs.

In the meantime, the KNU needs to prevent further splits within its ranks and repair its damaged relationships with Karen ceasefire factions. There have been complaints about the mistreatment of rank-and-file soldiers by senior KNU officers, including failure to promote younger leaders, skimming off resources, physical abuse, favoritism based on religious affiliation, and nepotism. The KNU also needs to publicize its goals and objectives among other Karen communities who may be sympathetic to the KNU cause but have little knowledge of what the organization stands for. Efforts are needed to bring together Karens from diverse backgrounds to exchange views, promote mutual understanding, and identify areas where they can collaborate while maintaining their own values and preferences. Organizing a Karen reunion to discuss important issues would be a first step toward bridging the differences among Karens.

The second priority when addressing the Karen issue should be to encourage local initiatives to deal with the humanitarian crisis and to foster social, economic, cultural, and educational development. Unfortunately, the recent literature on ethnic issues in Burma has focused primarily on violence and has ignored many positive features of ethnic relationships, including harmonious communal relations and attempts to promote peace and stability. This negative orientation of the literature not only paints an incomplete picture of the situation in Burma, but it also fails to acknowledge the efforts of many outstanding individuals and disempowers those characterized as "victims."

Sang Kook Lee, who has lived among Karen refugees on the Thai-Burma border for a number of years, for example, contends that "humanitarian relief agencies draw attention to the plight and suffering of refugees with the intention of securing assistance and intervention. However, by doing this they tend to objectify refugees collectively, dismissing [the fact] that individual refugees have their own narratives and stories to interpret their situations" (Lee 2004: 3). Similarly, Lisa Brooten notes that there is a strong feeling among those she interviewed, journalists, and readers of opposition journals that the media's "focus on human rights had become excessive" and that it "needs to portray people at the grassroots as active decision-makers with significant contributions to make toward change in Burma in order to move beyond stereotypes of refugees and rural villagers as simple and unsophisticated" (Brooten 2004: 187–88). Examples of positive stories identified by these readers include the successful struggle

for everyday survival and the establishment and survival of Mon schools and the Mon language (Ibid.: 188).

Kevin Heppner of Karen Human Rights Watch also warns that labels such as "conflict-induced displacement" or "IDPs" can reduce people to "helpless bystanders" and ignore individuals' capacities to respond to their situation and mount effective resistance strategies. According to Heppner, the homogenous appearance of Karen villages conceals a great diversity of skills, without which collective survival would be almost impossible (Heppner 2006: 22). Heppner unveils a host of strategies devised by Karen villagers to counter abuses and attacks by SPDC soldiers. For example, villagers frequently evade relocation orders by bribing officials to postpone their move or by going into hiding in places such as field huts. Women gather in groups to work, sleep, and participate in other activities in order to avoid rape. They also provide support to local women who have been raped, exposing the offense if the victim is married or concealing it if she is unmarried (Ibid.: 23). Their resistance to the state's intrusion into their lives takes many forms, including flight into the forest to evade relocation orders; hiding rice to avoid confiscation; avoidance of forced labor and concealment of assets at relocation sites; foot-dragging when complying with relocation and other orders; lying to or attempting to bribe officials; assisting deserters to escape instead of turning them in; and passing information to resistance forces or human rights groups (Ibid.: 26). Heppner thus argues that the most appropriate response to the ongoing suffering experienced by Karen villagers is to identify their needs and support their existing survival strategies in order to counter the abuses meted out by the government and other armed actors (Ibid.: 38). He describes this local-level aid as "unabashedly political," but claims that it will empower individuals in their resistance to state repression (Ibid.: iii).

> ***labels such as... "IDPs"...ignore individuals' capacities to...mount effective resistance***

Even in refugee camps and areas of conflict, one can identify ways in which individuals have been empowered to take control of their own destinies, preserve their culture and identity, and help alleviate suffering. For example, although refugee camps "combine the worst features of human living," normal activities nonetheless continue there, displaying a

measure of human creativity, ingenuity, and initiative (quoted in Lee 2001: 192). Within the refugee camps, restrictions on movement have led to the emergence of small-scale businesses that make use of the residents' enforced leisure, as well as help to create a sense of normalcy within an otherwise constrained atmosphere. These local enterprises range from operating weaving and sewing machines, to opening video shops and renting electric generators and even karaoke machines. A few well-off refugees have opened shops worth from a few thousand to nearly a million Thai baht, while others, especially in the relatively spacious Mae La camp, raise livestock, make handicrafts, traditional clothes, and souvenirs, or, when allowed, work outside the camp (Ibid.: 47–50). Some are employed as teachers, while others work for NGOs, which hire them as trainers, accountants, and general office workers.

A number of organizations whose goal is to empower youth and women are active in the refugee camps, such as the Karen Youth Organization, the Karen Student Network Group, and the Karen Women's Organization (KWO) (Angie 2000: 52–54). The KWO seeks to help women become more self-reliant and assertive and to create their own future. It also provides training for income-generating activities such as weaving and sewing. The activities of the Karen Refugee Camps Women's Development Group (KRCWDG) include taking care of orphans, improving nutrition, providing training in weaving and sewing, running libraries, and improving the rights of women in general (Lee 2001: 54). While most of these organizations are affiliated with the KNU, on numerous occasions they have asserted their own voices, challenging their hierarchical and male-dominated parental organization. The Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Church at Mae La camp has several suborganizations, such as the Youth Department and the Women's Department, which foster cultural, social, and religious activities. Doctor Simon, the principal of Kawthoolei Karen Bible School, is a good example of someone who implements this practical approach to religion. He notes that the school's motto emphasizes learning "the work of God to be well equipped for every good work." While some of the school's graduates have become pastors, others work as aid workers, schoolteachers, and community leaders. The Bible school began offering secular education in 2000, and a bachelor of arts program now includes classes in history, English, education, economics, and political science (Ibid.: 58).

Other organizations founded to address the wider humanitarian crisis in the region include Doctor Cynthia Maung's medical clinic in Mae Sot, Thailand, which started out in 1989 as an "old wooden storeroom made from scraps of wood left over from an old saw mill." Six babies were delivered there in its first year. It has now spread to cover an area the "size of a couple of football fields," treats 200 to 250 patients a day, and delivers five to six babies each day. It treats patients who are the victims of land mines and SPDC abuses, as well as people suffering from AIDS and diseases such as malaria and dengue fever (Thornton 2006: 83). In areas of armed conflict and ceasefire, local relief and development groups have provided humanitarian aid and undertaken community development and educational work among displaced communities (South 2004; Interviews).

Likewise, in government-controlled areas, church, monastery, and private initiatives relating to cultural preservation, education, development, and training are widespread. There are a number of Karen-language schools and at least one cultural museum in the DKBA-controlled areas (South 2007a). In 1996, U Panya Tharmi, a Karen monk from Taung Kalay, in the Karen state, opened a secular monastic school that offered classes for children from kindergarten to tenth grade. The school, which has an annual enrollment of 400 students, has thus far produced 151 high-school graduates. Most of its 23 teachers were educated with the monk's financial assistance. The institution also hosts some cultural events, such as competitions in writing Karen poetry, or *htas*; the performance of a traditional form of Karen dance called *doneyin*; and a Karen kickboxing tournament. U Panya Tharmi is also a board member of the Karen Education Foundation, which provides lodging and scholarships for Karen students. He also serves on the Peace Negotiation Committee in the Karen state.[63]

Another example of a local solution to the ongoing crisis in Burma is the establishment of peace zones in armed conflict areas, an initiative sponsored by the late abbot of Thamanya, an elderly monk from the Pao ethnic minority group. Peace zones are designated areas where armed conflict is proscribed, and where firearms, whether owned by residents or outsiders, are prohibited. In 1980, the abbot set up a monastery on Thamanya Hill, twenty miles outside Paan, the capital of the Karen state. He allowed Karen villagers fleeing the fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KNU to build huts on monastery land around the foot of the mountain. In 1996, several thousand Karen villagers were living there, free from the

food and labor demands of both the Tatmadaw and the KNU. Some of the villagers farmed, but many worked at the monastery preparing food for the continuous stream of visitors (Fink 2001: 220, 221). Similar local initiatives are not hard to find.

The third major point to make about addressing current Karen issues is that there must be more realistic strategies that assume the existence of an increasingly entrenched and repressive military establishment. A ceasefire agreement is not the final solution to Burma's current political problems. Instead, it is only one of several steps that must be taken to achieve national reconciliation, along with the drafting of a new constitution. The SPDC, in fact, completed a draft of its own constitution in September 2007 at the National Convention, which has been held intermittently since 1993. According to its seven-step road map, the military regime plans to call for a national referendum to adopt the constitution and to hold elections for the legislative bodies. At the same time, it has pressured many ceasefire armed groups (which had previously signed an agreement with the regime to give up the "policy of armed struggle" while continuing to bear arms in a delimited area) and non-ceasefire armed groups to "exchange arms for peace," or to lay down arms. This new formula for ceasefire agreement, or "exchange of arms for peace," is unacceptable to the KNU, since it violates Ba Oo Gyi's principles.

A ceasefire agreement is not the final solution to Burma's current political problems

According to the seven-step road map formulated by the SPDC, the regime's constitution will be submitted to a popular referendum and will eventually result in the holding of "free and fair elections" for the legislative body.[64] However, the 104 principles formulated at this year's National Convention reveal the SPDC's intention to expand and consolidate its control over territories, the population, and resources—plans that stand in diametrical opposition to drafts of the constitution proposed by both the opposition movements and the KNU.[65] For example, whereas the opposition parties advocate for federalism and devolution of power, the regime's objectives remain "non-disintegration of the union," "non-disintegration of national solidarity," "perpetuation of sovereignty," and a leading role for the Tatmadaw in the state.[66]

The SPDC's proposed governmental structure is based on a federal model and would contain 14 regions and states having equal status and

authority, including the Karen state, which would fall within its present boundaries. These entities, however, would not have explicit rights of self-determination. In the KNU's proposed constitution, on the other hand, the Karen state would incorporate "the present Karen state, Tenasserim division, and certain adjoining areas" (Karen State Constitution Drafting Committee of the KNU 2006). On this point, however, both the draft of the constitution by the military's National Convention and the draft by the KNU allow for negotiations to change boundaries.[67]

In addition, while the military regime would limit regional autonomy and emphasize the centralization of political and economic power, the KNU has proposed a higher degree of autonomy for the regional entities. The SPDC's draft constitution proposes that members of the military be given 25 percent of the seats in both houses of parliament, another quarter in state and regional assemblies, and appointments to key cabinet positions. It also endows the central government with the authority to "help promote socioeconomic development, including education, health, economy, transport and communications of the less-developed" national ethnic groups. The KNU's draft constitution, on the other hand, proposes that each state legislative assembly would have powers over "citizenship of the state; internal security; the state police force; the census; environmental protection; natural resources; land ownership and land use; school education; refugees and political asylum; revenue and taxes; registration of births, deaths and marriages; and state transportation and communication." In addition, the armed forces would be subject to civilian authority.

In the regime's version of the constitution, moreover, the issues of cultural, religious, and language rights for minority groups remain vague. It stipulates that Myanmar will be the official language, and that "the 'state' shall help develop language, literature, fine arts, and culture of the various national races. The 'state' recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of its citizens. The state also recognizes other religions." In contrast, the proposed Karen constitution explicitly recognizes Karen as the official language of the Karen state.

Not surprisingly, the exiled opposition movement and the NLD have rejected the National Convention on the grounds that it is illegitimate, unrepresentative, and repressive (Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALSEAN) 2005)). This argument is based on the fact that the nine political parties that together held 91 percent of the parliamentary seats in 1990, as well as several key non-ceasefire groups, have been excluded from

the National Convention, and that the majority of delegates are handpicked supporters of the regime (Ibid.).

The opposition would be well advised to plan its strategies assuming the existence of an increasingly entrenched and repressive military establishment that is not interested in sharing, let alone relinquishing, power, despite the fact that the SPDC itself has described the post-constitution system as a "power-sharing arrangement," since it would retain only a quarter of the seats in the parliament and the regular assembly. One journalist rightly argues that the National Convention does not represent "a proper process," but that is "the only way out of the political impasse" and "the only path open to constitutional rule and eventual elections." Indeed, it is the "only game in town." He continues, "It is naïve to think that any other game is possible in this situation and that pressure from the UN Security Council can change that" (Janssen 2006). Attempting to effect change by working within the system will be the option most readily available to many anti-government opposition groups. This should occur simultaneously with efforts to pressure the SPDC to make the political processes more open and inclusive. So far, none of the Karen ceasefire factions or political parties seems prepared to take part in eventual elections. Nor are they likely to generate nationwide support, given the absence of strong political organization or a charismatic Karen leader who could bring together the diverse Karen communities.

an increasingly entrenched and repressive military establishment [exists]

Last but not least, this study argues that priority should be given to the promotion of universal civil and political rights (granting access to the polity to all citizens, irrespective of their cultural affiliations or ethnic origins) over particular minority and state rights (which generally require special provisions for territorially based political and economic autonomy, reserved legislative seats for minority groups, and an autonomous institution that governs the affairs of minority groups). The most pressing issue at the moment is to advocate for the opening up of the existing political system

priority should be given to the promotion of universal civil and political rights

and the granting of civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech, association, and conscience, to all people. This is a starting point from which the conflict between the "center" and the "periphery" might be resolved, as it would guarantee individual rights to the majority of Karen who are living outside the Karen state and who would not necessarily benefit from any privileges that are attached to a Karen state in a federal union. Indeed, the "other" Karens have learned how to live in a restrictive situation without making the loud noises that attract outside attention; they have already learned how to create some space for themselves, and they would be able to do so even more if greater pressure were brought to bear on the Burmese government.

The general extension of religious tolerance and human rights would also protect ethnic and national groups indirectly by allowing them to cultivate their land without interference from the Tatmataw and other armed forces and by allowing them to practice their traditional culture and religion freely. Simultaneously, it would pave the way for social integration across ethnic and national boundaries. Focusing on the status and territorial boundaries of various ethnic states, on the other hand, could intensify competition among different elite groups, politicize ethnic identities, and polarize the communities that have remained relatively free of communal violence thus far. Inside Burma, the junta's authoritarian rule, which has indiscriminately repressed everyone (Buddhist and Christian, Karen and Burman), has created a sense of common experience among citizens who are, for the most part, equally oppressed. This, along with the regime's tendency to frame minority conflicts as a political rather than an ethnic issue, and a social and cultural environment that allows for interaction across different ethnic groups, has spared Burma from communal violence, with the exception of conflict between Muslims and Buddhists. Most analysts take for granted this lack of communal violence, which is so commonly experienced in other parts of the world. The success of the NLD as an interethnic political organization that is able to command support across ethnic and religious boundaries demonstrates that peaceful interethnic relations are indeed possible, and is an achievement to be celebrated and nurtured.

peaceful interethnic relations are indeed possible

Reports from the Thai-Burma border areas, however, have shown that organizations that are formed strictly along ethnic lines, and that deny all benefits to members of other ethnic groups, have highlighted ethnic differences and created resentment.[68] Tin Maung Win, a prominent student activist who fled to the border zone in the 1960s, laments the fact that "most Burmans had no idea of the strong sentiments that ethnic resistance groups harbored against Burmans until they fled to the border areas.... I am already weighed down by the thought of the challenges involved in building national reconciliation and unity among ethnic nationalities" (Win 2004: 115).[69]

Thus while the promotion of minority and states rights should not be neglected, priority should be given to universal civil and political rights. After all, the concept of "self-determination" need not only imply the right to an independent sovereign state; it also means that individual citizens, regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, should have the freedom to determine their political status and to pursue their own economic, social, and cultural development (Young 2004: 178).

Postscript

On February 14, 2008, Pa doh Mahn Sha, the general secretary of the KNU, was shot dead at his home in Mae Sot, Thailand by two assassins who greeted him in Karen. His assassination may have been the result of ongoing tensions between mainstream KNU members and splinter groups, such as the DKBA and the breakaway Brigade 7 or the KNU/KNLA Peace Council. The assassination of this 65-year-old Buddhist Pwo Karen leader is a major blow to the KNU as he served as a bridge for non-Sgaw and non-Christian Karen within the KNU whose leadership is predominantly made up of Christian and Sgaw Karen. Mahn Sha was probably the most articulate leader of the KNU and was well respected among anti-government forces in exile for his call for a political dialogue among the NLD, various ethnic groups, and the Burmese military regime as a precondition for a ceasefire negotiation. Some KNU breakaway factions, however, perceived his approach as undermining the "Karen cause" and impeding the prospect for the KNU's ceasefire negotiation with the Burmese military junta. They also allege the KNU leadership's involvement in the assassination of a few prominent leaders who either attempted or successfully attempted to separately negotiate with the

Burmese military junta and break away from the KNU. Mahn Sha was succeeded by Htoo Htoo Lay, 61, a former lawyer and son of a Karen commander who was killed during the battle at the onset of the Karen rebellion. It is not clear the extent to which this change of leadership will affect the KNU's relationship with its breakaway factions and its strategies on negotiation with the Burmese military junta.

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Endnotes

The author would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their meticulous, constructive, and insightful comments and suggestions. Special acknowledgment is owed to participants at the Burma study group on *Internal Conflicts and State-Building Challenges in Asia*, held in Bangkok, Thailand in July 2006, and Doctors Robert Taylor, Alan Smith, and Duncan McCargo, who provided helpful comments and suggestions, and to Uncle Ba Saw Khin, Saw Aw Baw Mu, Doctor Maung Aung Myoe, Mahn Robert Zan, Saw Kapi, Paul Sztumpf, Dylan Chain, Zin Mar Oo, Ba Maung Sein, Sang Kok Lee, Saw Victor, Saw Daniel Zu, Martin Smith, and Ashley South for their assistance in supplying valuable information. This monograph would not have been possible without the generosity and support of the Asia Research Institute (ARI) in Singapore. The author greatly appreciates the help of KNU officials and members, as well as Karen residents in North America, Singapore, Canada, Australia, Burma, and the Thai-Burma border area, who generously granted interviews and participated in her opinion surveys.

1. Examples are Mark 1978; Mirante 1987; Falla 1991; Petry 1993; Christie 1996, 2000; Rajah 2002; Sheppard 1997; Smith 1999, 2003; Thornton 2006; Tucker 2003; Rogers 2004.
2. Amnesty International 1999, 2002; KHRG 1996, 2005, 2006; TBBC 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Angie 2000; Brooten 2004; Rajah 2002; Rogers 2004; Hayami and Darlington 2000: 137–53; Lee 2001: 2004; Horton 2005; Christopher 1998.
3. Burma (Myanmar) is a multicultural country comprised of 14 major and more than 100 minor ethnic groups. Although an official census of ethnic composition has not been conducted since 1983, the five largest ethnic groups are Burman, Shan, Karen, Rakhine, and Kachin, which are estimated to comprise 66.9 percent, 10.5 percent, 6.2 percent, 4.2 percent, and 1.4 percent of the total population, respectively (Than 2005: 67). I use the term "Burman" to refer to the country's ethnic majority, "Burma," to refer to the country, and "Burmese" to refer to its citizens. In 1989, the military junta replaced the existing English names for the

country and its divisions, townships, cities, streets, citizens, and ethnic groups with what it considered to be more authentic Burmese names. Thus "Burma" became "Myanmar" and its citizens "Myanmars"; "Rangoon" became "Yangon"; and ethnic groups such as the Karen were renamed "Kayin." The choice to use the old or new names has become one method of indicating one's political stance toward the Burmese junta. I use the pre-1989 terms to avoid confusion, as these terms are commonly used in English-language publications, including the books, journals, and other sources cited in this study.

4. Exceptions are the works of Ashley South (2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b) and Nicholas Cheesman (2002).
5. The terms "KNU," "IDPs," "refugees," "diaspora," and "other" Karen are used broadly here and do not readily fit all situations and circumstances.
6. In part as a result of linguistic, ideological, and religious differences, these twenty or so subgroups have been represented by five separate armed nationalist movements: 1) the KNU (composed predominantly of Sgaws, Pwos, Paos, Bwes, and Pakus); 2) the KNPP, or Karenni National Progressive Party, operating in Kayah state (made up of Kayahs, Kayans, Pakus, Sgaws, Pwo Karens, and Shans); 3) the PNO, or Pao National Organization; 4) the KNLP, or Kayan New Land Party, operating in Karenni state, Shan state, and Pyinmanah (composed of Kayahs, Kayans, and Paos); and 5) the SSNLO, or Shan State Nationalities Liberation Organization, operating in southern Shan state (made up of Paos, Shans, and Kayans) (Smith 1999: 31, 63, 145, 211). For strategic and ideological reasons, the KNU has supported their Karenni and Pao cousins in their quest for political autonomy (Smith 2003: 14, 16). All these organizations except the KNU and the KNPP signed the ceasefire with the SLORC in the 1990s.
7. The KNA was founded in 1881 to provide leadership and higher education for gifted young Karens and to promote Karen literacy and identity.
8. The Burma Independence Army (BIA) was formed in 1940 by thirty comrades—all ethnic Burmans—who were leading nationalists. They received their military training in Japan and China during the war and participated in the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942. They are now considered heroes in the history of modern Burma.
9. The KNDO was formed as a paramilitary organization to protect Karen populations from communal violence during and after World War II.
10. Author interviews, 2005–07. In some author interviews that follow, names have been withheld for their own protection.
11. Author interviews in Burma, 2005–07, and with Ba Saw Khin in the U.S., 2006.
12. Mahn Ba Khaing was assassinated along with General Aung San in 1947. Mahn Win Maung later converted to Buddhism in order to assume the presidency of the Union of Burma.
13. E-mail communication with Zin Mar Oo, July 24, 2006. Oo, who is currently working on her PhD at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok, is the granddaughter of Mrs. Ba Maung Chain.
14. Author interview in Burma, 2006.
15. Author interview with Ba Saw Khin, 2006.
16. Author interviews in Burma, 2007.
17. Author interviews in Burma, 2007; Mahn Kyaw Sein later returned to the "legal fold."

18. An apparent passive acceptance of a political situation does not necessarily reflect an acceptance of the government in power. Individuals may appear indifferent to the political process either because they are reasonably satisfied with the status quo or because they see no practical value in actively opposing it.
19. According to Tinker, about 200 soldiers and 800 civilians made up the Karen Insein force (Tinker 1967: 41).
20. Author interview with Ba Saw Khin, 2006.
21. Author interview in Minnesota, 2006. Smith 1999: 141.
22. According to one Karen leader inside Burma, however, this official policy rarely resulted in Karen-language instruction, since it required 90 percent of the students to be Karen in order for such instruction to be provided. He also asserted that the government did not provide any teachers, textbooks, or curriculum materials to support the teaching of the Karen language.
23. Author interviews in Burma, 2005.
24. Author interview, 2005.
25. Author interview in Burma, 2005.
26. Author interview in Burma, 2005.
27. Author interviews in Burma, 2005.
28. Author interviews, 2005.
29. Survey in North America, 2003–05, and in Burma, 2005.
30. E-mail communication with KRC official, 2006.
31. See Coordinating Committee for Services to Displaced People in Thailand, "Educational Assessment of Mon and Karenni Refugee Camps on the Thai/Burmese Border" (Bangkok 2005). Other studies of Karen refugee communities have indicated that access to services and other opportunities is much easier for Christians and KNU families than for Buddhists or Muslims. One KNU supporter, however, asserts that religious allegiance is not an issue in the distribution of food and services, because Buddhist monasteries and Muslim associations are also involved in refugee camp welfare activities.
32. Burma, the refugees' original home, is sometimes referred to as the "first country." The "second countries" are Thailand, China, India, and other neighboring countries that offer a temporary home for the refugees. The "third countries" are the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and other countries granting refugee status or political asylum.
33. See www.Karenkonnection.org (as of August 7, 2007).
34. Author interview with Mahn Robert Zan in Minnesota, 2006.
35. Communication with Sang Kook Lee, October 2006.
36. The "four-cut strategy," which attempted to deny essential resources (recruits, food, shelter, and information) to rebel-controlled territories, was initiated when villagers were ordered to move into new "strategic" villages under military control. The Burmese soldiers then confiscated food, destroyed crops, and burned houses in the original villages and hunted down any rebels hiding in the forest. Any who remained in their old villages were treated as insurgents and shot on sight. Farmers and families forced into the new villages were mobilized as a "people's militia" to fight for the government. A curfew was imposed on all villages, and all movement was strictly monitored. Deprived of food, logistical support, and all contact with their family and friends, Karen rebels were left to choose between fighting to the death, surrender, or retreating to the next military area. Once a district is cleared

and taken over from the rebels by the government forces, it is impossible for guerrilla forces to infiltrate it again. This strategy has effectively eliminated rebel strongholds in the Delta by resulting in the death, capture, or expulsion into Burma's eastern hills of communist insurgents and armed Karen fighters (Smith 1999: 265).

37. Doctor Alan Smith, an Australian academic who has visited the liberated areas many times, however, describes the KNU government as "a warlord administration with an on-paper administrative structure that matched revolutionary propaganda" (e-mail communication, September 2007).
38. Only half of the current executive members of the KNU come from the Delta.
39. For an assessment of the impact of ceasefire truces, see Oo and Min 2007 and Callahan 2007.
40. Author interview with Pa doh Mahn Sha in Mae Sot, 2006.
41. One prominent KNU official writes there was an effort by the KNU to open ceasefire talks with the SPDC in 1994, but the move was abandoned due to the opposition from "NCGUB leaders in New York," who saw it as "undermining their own efforts at the UN to win decisive international action against the SLORC" (Taw 2005).
42. This policy, however, was reversed in 1997 by Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, who revived the Thai buffer policy with respect to the ethnic minorities along the border in the name of promoting democracy (Myoe 2002: 13; Chachavalpongpun 2005: 76).
43. Ba Oo Gyi was a young barrister who was born into a wealthy landowning family and educated in England. President of the KNU, he took a hard-line approach of asking for a large segment of territories for the Karen state. His premature death in 1951, at the age of 46, elevated him to a martyr among the Karen, and he is venerated in much the same way as General Aung San is. One example of Ba Oo Gyi's continued importance in the Karen armed movement is the KNU's adherence to his four main principles, which mandate the pursuit of recognition of the Karen state and discourage the surrendering of arms to the enemy. By 1996, however, there was a disagreement between "pro-talks middle-level leaders" and General Bo Mya, who opposed ceasefire settlements (Taw 2005).
44. A few analysts and many who have left the KNU have pointed out that the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) and NCGUB opposed the KNU's ceasefire negotiations with the SPDC. One former ABSDF member was quoted as saying that if the KNU were able to conclude a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC, "we wouldn't be able to remain in the Karen-controlled areas" (Hlaing 2004: 245). In 2006, KNU general Saw Tamalabaw and KNU's president Saw Ba Thin Sein served as president and vice president, respectively, of the National Council Union of Burma (NCUB). The NCUB is composed of the NDF (formed in 1976), the DAB (1988), the National League for Democracy Liberated Areas (NLD-LA) (1991), and the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) (1996). See the NCUB website at www.ncub.org.
45. Author interview with Pa doh Mahn Sha in Mae Sot, 2006.
46. Author's 2007 interview with a Karen delegate who served as a mediator.
47. In 1996, the so-called "young Turks" blamed Bo Mya for the fall of the KNU headquarters. Afraid that Bo Mya would kill or arrest them (Bo Mya had already accused them of plotting a coup against him), they fled the KNU. Some found

jobs in Thailand working for NGOs, while others left for third countries. In 2000, 73-year-old Bo Mya was demoted from the position of president to vice president of the KNU. Although Bo Mya had opposed a ceasefire settlement in previous negotiations, he changed his stance, a change that was attributed to his attempt to regain his influence within the KNU (Taw 2005; e-mail communication with Alan Smith, 2007).

48. In 2005 the SPDC relocated the capital from Rangoon to Pyin-Ma-Na, 240 miles north of Rangoon. Some plausible reasons for this relocation include the regime's concerns about safeguarding sensitive information, the desire to create a buffer against possible foreign invasion, the influence of Buddhist tradition and astrology on political geography, a desire to erase the colonial past, and the desire to isolate civil servants from the general public.
49. One mid-level KNU official asserted that 60 to 70 percent of the territories lost by the KNU remain "contested areas," since they are heavily mined and cannot easily be taken over by the SPDC (author interview in Mae Sot, November 2006).
50. The KNU has attempted to extend its authority into refugee camps, but it has to some extent been forced to back down as a result of criticism by NGOs operating in the camps.
51. Author interview in Mae Sot, 2006.
52. Author interview in Burma, 2007.
53. A DKBA general, General Maung Chit Htoo, boasted to a journalist that his portrait of Saw Ba Oo Gyi was bigger and better than the one owned by Bo Mya (Thornton 2006: 71).
54. Author interview with Zan in Minnesota, 2006.
55. Author interviews.
56. This information is based on interviews with 67 Karen living in the United States, Canada, England, Thailand, and Australia between 2003 and 2006. The ages of the respondents ranged from 22 to 82. All had lived in Burma for at least 19 years, and had received a high school or college education or had worked in the public or private sectors. The majority of them were Sgaw Christians, but there were some Pwo and Buddhist respondents.
57. Author interview in Burma, 2005.
58. Author interviews in Burma, 2006–07.
59. This statement has been disputed by the KHRG, which states that "hopefully the present situation in Dooplaya (which is now increasingly militarized under the SPDC) will give pause for thought to those who believe that a ceasefire or a permanent end to the armed combat is sufficient in itself to create peace or justice in Burma" (KHRG 2006: 72).
60. Conversation in Rangoon, 2005–07.
61. Author interview with Pa doh Mahn Sha in Mae Sot, 2006.
62. Author interviews in Burma, 2006–07.
63. Author interview in Paan, 2005.
64. See www.ibiblio.org/ob1/docs/104principles-NLMb.htm.
65. See NCUB 1997.
66. Doctor Robert Taylor, however, argues that other autonomous zones for ceasefire groups of certain sizes and state and divisional governments proposed by the SPDC regime look like a "form of federalism without using the word" (e-mail communication, September 2007).

67. E-mail communication with Doctor Robert Taylor, September 2007. For a comparison of the SPDC-sponsored constitution and those proposed by the opposition movements, see Than (2005: 65–108).
68. Christina Fink, "Ethnic Politics at the Periphery," in *Burma Debate*, available at www.burmadebate.org/burmaView.php?article_id=26&page_no=2. Fink argues that factors such as the tendency of ethnic minority groups to form alliances based on ethnic identification, the content of school curricula, inflammatory speeches by political and community leaders, and the interpretation of compromise as a sign of weakness in the border areas have fostered distrust among ethnic groups. However, Fink also admits that some activities have promoted interethnic alliance and cooperation.
69. Several Burman students in the opposition movement who had spent a number of years in areas where ethnic insurgents were active expressed similar feelings.

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Internal Conflicts and State-Building Challenges in Asia

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Rationale

Internal Conflicts and State-Building Challenges in Asia is part of a larger East-West Center project on state building and governance in Asia that investigates political legitimacy of governments, the relationship of the military to the state, the development of political and civil societies and their roles in democratic development, the role of military force in state formation, and the dynamics and management of internal conflicts arising from nation- and state-building processes. An earlier project investigating internal conflicts arising from nation- and state-building processes focused on conflicts arising from the political consciousness of minority communities in China (Tibet and Xinjiang), Indonesia (Aceh and Papua), and southern Philippines (the Moro Muslims). Funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, that highly successful project was completed in March 2005. The present project, which began in July 2005, investigates the causes and consequences of internal conflicts arising from state- and nation-building processes in Burma/Myanmar, southern Thailand, Nepal, northeast India, and Sri Lanka, and explores strategies and solutions for their peaceful management and eventual settlement.

Internal conflicts have been a prominent feature of the Asian political landscape since 1945. Asia has witnessed numerous civil wars, armed insurgencies, coups d'état, regional rebellions, and revolutions. Many have been protracted; several have far-reaching domestic and international consequences. The civil war in Pakistan led to the break up of that country in 1971; separatist struggles challenge the political and territorial integrity of China, India, Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines, Thailand, and Sri Lanka; political uprisings in Thailand (1973 and 1991), the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1986), Taiwan (1991) Bangladesh (1991), and Indonesia (1998) resulted in dramatic political change in those countries.

Although the political uprisings in Burma (1988) and China (1989) were suppressed, the political systems in those countries, as well as in Vietnam, continue to confront problems of legitimacy that could become acute; and radical Islam poses serious challenges to stability in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. The Thai military ousted the democratically-elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006. In all, millions of people have been killed in the internal conflicts, and tens of millions have been displaced. Moreover, the involvement of external powers in a competitive manner (especially during the Cold War) in several of these conflicts had negative consequences for domestic and regional security.

Internal conflicts in Asia can be traced to contestations over political legitimacy (the title to rule), national identity, state building, and distributive justice—that are often interconnected. With the bankruptcy of the socialist model and transitions to democracy in several countries, the number of internal conflicts over political legitimacy has declined in Asia. However, the legitimacy of certain governments continues to be contested from time to time, and the remaining communist and authoritarian systems are likely to confront challenges to their legitimacy in due course. Internal conflicts also arise from the process of constructing modern nation-states, and the unequal distribution of material and status benefits. Although many Asian states have made considerable progress in constructing national communities and viable states, several countries, including some major ones, still confront serious problems that have degenerated into violent conflict. By affecting the political and territorial integrity of the state as well as the physical, cultural, economic, and political security of individuals and groups, these conflicts have great potential to affect domestic and international stability.

Purpose

Internal Conflicts and State-Building Challenges in Asia examines internal conflicts arising from the political consciousness of minority communities in Burma/Myanmar, southern Thailand, northeast India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Except for Nepal, these states are not in danger of collapse. However, they do face serious challenges at the regional and local levels which, if not addressed, can negatively affect the vitality of the national state in these countries. Specifically, the project has a threefold purpose: (1) to develop an in-depth understanding of the domestic, transnational, and international dynamics of internal conflicts in these countries in the context of nation- and state-building strategies; (2) to examine how such conflicts have affected

the vitality of the state; and (3) to explore strategies and solutions for the peaceful management and eventual settlement of these conflicts.

Design

A study group has been organized for each of the five conflicts investigated in the study. With a principal researcher for each, the study groups comprise practitioners and scholars from the respective Asian countries, including the region or province that is the focus of the conflict, as well as from Australia, Britain, Belgium, Sweden, and the United States. The participants list that follows shows the composition of the study groups.

All five study groups met jointly for the first time in Washington, D.C., on October 30–November 3, 2005. Over a period of five days, participants engaged in intensive discussion of a wide range of issues pertaining to the conflicts investigated in the project. In addition to identifying key issues for research and publication, the meeting facilitated the development of cross-country perspectives and interaction among scholars who had not previously worked together. Based on discussion at the meeting, twenty-five policy papers were commissioned.

The study groups met separately in the summer of 2006 for the second set of meetings, which were organized in collaboration with respected policy-oriented think tanks in each host country. The Burma and southern Thailand study group meetings were held in Bangkok, July 10–11 and July 12–13, respectively. These meetings were cosponsored by The Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University. The Nepal study group was held in Kathmandu, Nepal, July 17–19, and was cosponsored by the Social Science Baha. The northeast India study group met in New Delhi, India, August 9–10. This meeting was cosponsored by the Centre for Policy Research. The Sri Lanka meeting was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 14–16, and was cosponsored by the Centre for Policy Alternatives. In each of these meetings, scholars, and practitioners reviewed and critiqued papers produced for the meetings and made suggestions for revision.

Publications

This project will result in twenty to twenty-five policy papers providing a detailed examination of particular aspects of each conflict. Subject to satisfactory peer review, these 18,000- to 24,000-word essays will be published in the East-West Center Washington *Policy Studies* series, and

will be circulated widely to key personnel and institutions in the policy and intellectual communities and the media in the respective Asian countries, the United States, and other relevant countries. Some studies will be published in the East-West Center Washington *Working Papers* series.

Public Forums

To engage the informed public and to disseminate the findings of the project to a wide audience, public forums have been organized in conjunction with study group meetings.

Five public forums were organized in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the first study group meeting. The first forum, cosponsored by The Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, discussed the conflict in southern Thailand. The second, cosponsored by The Sigur Center for Asian Studies of The George Washington University, discussed the conflict in Burma. The conflicts in Nepal were the focus of the third forum, which was cosponsored by the Asia Program at The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The fourth public meeting, cosponsored by the Foreign Policy Studies program at The Brookings Institution, discussed the conflicts in northeast India. The fifth forum, cosponsored by the South Asia Program of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, focused on the conflict in Sri Lanka.

Funding Support

The Carnegie Corporation of New York is once again providing generous funding support for the project.

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Background on Burma/Myanmar's Ethnic Conflicts

One of the ethnically most diverse countries in the world, Burma (Myanmar) has suffered continuous armed ethnic conflict since independence in 1948. A series of ceasefires since the late 1980s has significantly reduced the levels of fighting across the country, but the legacies of hostility run deep, and the achievement of sustainable peace remains a major challenge in the twenty-first century.

The lands constituting the modern union-state of Burma have a turbulent history. From the foundation of Anawrahta's empire at Pagan in the eleventh century, political authority often fluctuated in wars between different Burman, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan rulers in Buddhist city-states on the plains. Meanwhile Chin, Kachin, Karen, and other ethnic groups in the hills were only nominally brought under control of the various dynasties and kingdoms. On a major crossroads in Asia, a diversity of cultures proliferated and survived.

Colonization by the British in the nineteenth century temporarily imposed external authority over this complex ethnic mosaic, but at the same time exacerbated existing ethnic cleavages. While Central Burma was subjected to British administrative and legal institutions, the non-Burman Frontier Areas were mostly left under the traditional rulers. This division compounded political and economic differences during a time of rapid social change. The British policy of recruiting hill peoples into the colonial army and the conversion of many to Christianity only fuelled interethnic suspicions.

During the Second World War, Burman nationalist forces in the Burma Independence Army initially fought on the side of Imperial Japan, but eventually turned against the Japanese and cooperated with the returning British Army. However, atrocities committed during the early months of the war by Burmans against Karen and other minority groups loyal to the British had dangerously increased ethnic tensions.

At the 1947 Panglong Conference, Chin, Kachin, and Shan representatives agreed to join a new Union of Burma in return for the promise of full autonomy. However the leaders of other ethnic groups were not included in these discussions, and the Karen national union boycotted the 1947 elections. Burma's first constitution deepened these emerging

fault lines by granting unequal rights to different ethnic groups and territories. During the hurried British departure, conditions were being created for conflicts that would endure for decades to come.

The first major group to take up arms against the government after independence was the Communist Party of Burma in March 1948. As violence escalated, armed struggle rapidly spread to the Karen, Mon, Karenni, Pao, Rakhine, and other nationality groups. The invasion by Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang remnants into the Shan State in late 1949 aggravated the breakdown of the embattled central government.

By the late 1950s, the mood of rebellion had spread to the Shan, Kachin, and other ethnic groups, frustrated by what they perceived as governmental neglect. In 1960, Shan and other nationality leaders organized a Federal Movement that sought, by constitutional reform, to replace the centralized system of government with a genuinely federal structure. Their efforts were aborted though, when the national armed forces under General Ne Win seized power in March 1962. Parliamentary democracy was brought to a complete end.

For a quarter of a century, Ne Win attempted to impose his isolationist "Burmese Way to Socialism" on the country. Confronting intensive counterinsurgency operations, armed opposition groups were gradually pushed out of the central plains into the surrounding borderlands. Here, however, insurgent forces were able to maintain control of their own "liberated zones," financing their struggles out of taxes on Burma's flourishing black markets that included illicit opium. Against this unending backdrop of war, Burma became one of the world's poorest countries.

The post-Cold War period has brought major changes to Burma, but no definitive solutions. The new military government, which took power after quelling pro-democracy protests in 1988, refused to hand over power to the newly-formed National League for Democracy (NLD) that won the 1990 general election by a landslide. Instead, following the collapse of the insurgent CPB, the regime forged ceasefires with a relatively large number of armed ethnic opposition groups, while massively expanding the national armed forces.

In these endeavors, the military government was helped by neighboring countries that change their policies of *de facto* support for opposition groups to close economic relations with the post-Ne Win regime. This decisively shifted the military balance in favor of the central government,

which continued to be largely boycotted by Western nations. New infrastructure and economic projects were started in many areas previously contested by insurgent groups, with central government authority extending further than ever before. In contrast, opposition groups became steadily weakened, divided over tactics between militant forces, ceasefire groups, pro-electoral organizations, and those that sought broader alliances.

In the twenty-first century, Burma's future remains delicately poised. A few insurgent groups have continued largely defensive guerilla warfare, but with little apparent hope of reasserting their authority by military means. However, the ceasefire groups similarly fear that the country's new constitution will provide few concessions to ethnic aspirations. Additionally, ethnic parties that stood in the 1990 election have been excluded—like the NLD—from constitutional discussions.

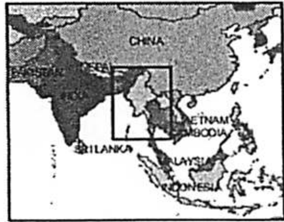
Against this backdrop, conflict and human rights abuses have continued in several border regions, sustaining ethnic anger and resentment. The desire is widespread for peace through dialogue. But the sentiment that future generations will take up arms again to continue the cycles of political violence cannot be discounted.

Pre- and Post-1989 Names

State/Division Names Pre-1989	State/Division Names Post-1989
Chin State	Same
Irrawady Division	Ayeyarwady Division
Kachin State	Same
Karen State	Kayin State
Karenni State (pre-1951)	Kayah State
Magwe Division	Magway Division
Mandalay Division	Same
Mon State	Same
Pegu Division	Bago Division
Arakan Division	Rakhine Division
Rangoon Division	Yangon Division
Sagaing Division	Same
Shan State	Same
Tenasserim Division	Tanintharyi Division

City/Town Names Pre-1989	City/Town Names Post-1989
Bassein	Pathein
Myitkyina	Same
Bhamo	Same
Paan	Hpa-an
Pagan	Bagan
Moulmein	Mawlamyine
Taungoo	Toungoo
Prome	Pyay
Pegu	Bago
Akyab	Sittwe
Rangoon	Yangon
Lashio	Same
Taunggyi	Same
Pangsang	Panghsang
Tavoy	Dawei
Mergui	Myeik

Map of Burma/Myanmar



■ Capital Cities
• Cities and Towns
Provincial Boundaries
Country Boundaries

Note: Map boundaries and locations are approximate. Geographic features and their names do not imply official endorsement or recognition by the UN.

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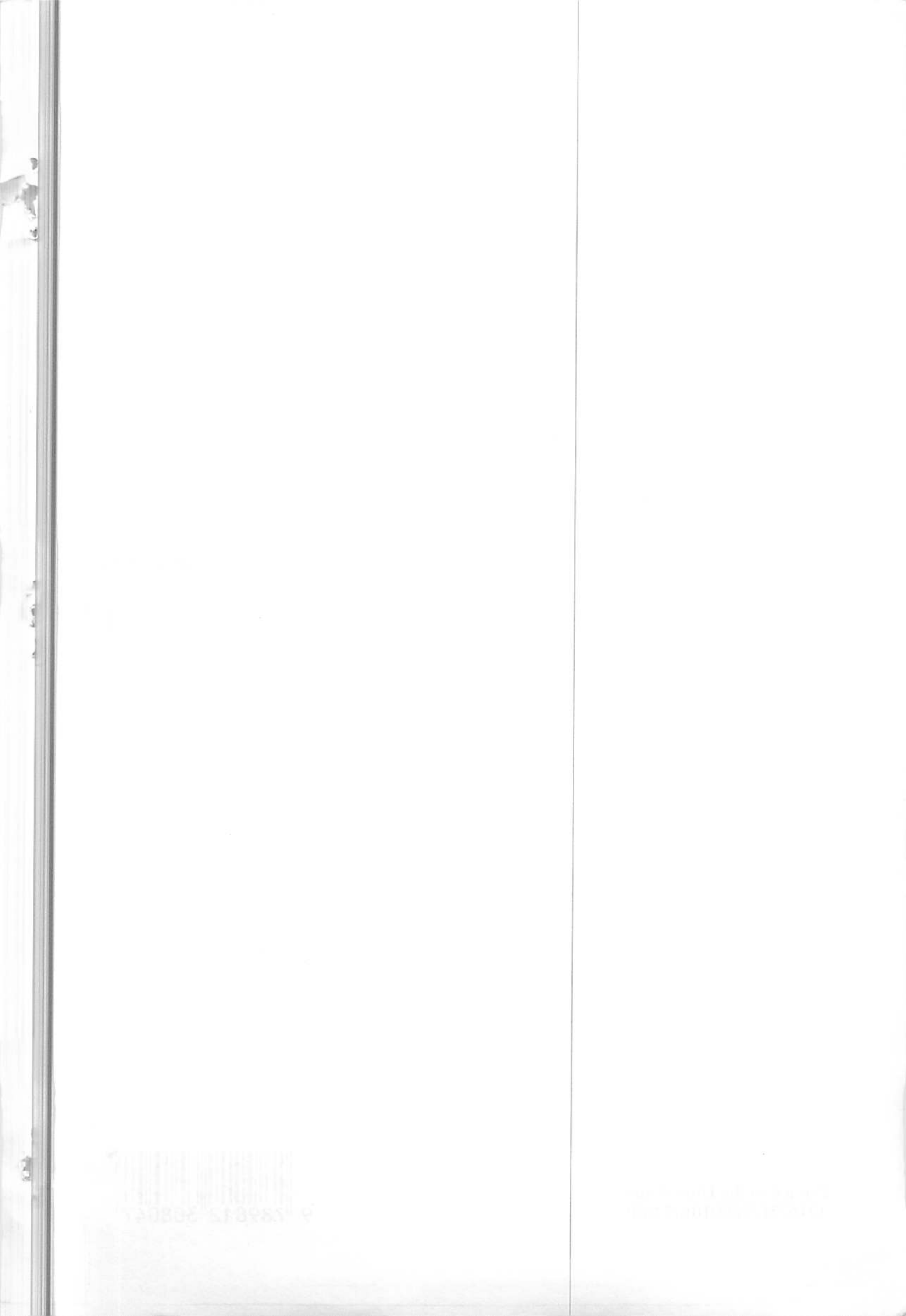

Printed in the United States
121635LV00010B/348/P

About this Issue

This study analyzes the various types and stages of conflict that have been experienced by diverse groups and generations of Karen over the six decades of armed conflict between the Karen National Union (KNU) and successive Burmese governments. Instead of focusing on those who are internally displaced, those in the refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border or living abroad, or those in the KNU, it places particular emphasis on the "other" Karen, or the majority segment of the Karen population living inside Burma, a population that has hitherto received little scholarly and journalistic attention. It also assesses the Karen people's varied attitudes toward a number of political organizations that claim to represent their interests, toward successive Burmese military regimes, and toward the political issues that led to the original divide between "accommodators" and "rebels."

This study argues that the lifestyles and strategies that the Karens have pursued are diverse and not confined to armed resistance. Acknowledging these multiple voices will not only shed light upon the many positive features of ethnic interactions, including harmonious communal relationships and significant attempts to promote peace and stability by encouraging "normal" activities and routines in both peaceful and war-torn areas; it will also help to identify policy recommendations for future ceasefire negotiations and a possible long-term political settlement within the context of a militarized Burma.

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ISBN 978-981-230-804-7