DESCENT INTO DISORDER:
THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY IN ETHNIC REBELLION -
BURMA 1885-1962.

BY
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Thesis submitted to the Department of History at the Northern Territory University in partial fulfilment of requirements for a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Degree. November, 1993.
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<td>A.F.O.</td>
<td>Anti-Fascist Organization</td>
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<td>A.F.P.F.L.</td>
<td>Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League</td>
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<td>B.C.P.</td>
<td>Burma Communist Party (Red Flags)</td>
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<td>B.D.A.</td>
<td>Burma Defence Army</td>
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<td>B.I.A.</td>
<td>Burma Independence Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.P.B.</td>
<td>Communist Party of Burma (White Flags)</td>
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<td>General Council of Buddhist Associations</td>
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<td>G.S.S.U.B.</td>
<td>Gazetteer of the Shan States and Upper Burma</td>
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<td>K.N.U</td>
<td>Karen National Union</td>
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<td>K.Y.O.</td>
<td>Karen Youth Organization</td>
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<td>M.N.D.O.</td>
<td>Mon National Defence Organization</td>
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<td>N.K.A.</td>
<td>National Karen Association</td>
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<td>P.R.C.</td>
<td>Peoples Republic of China</td>
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<td>P.V.O.</td>
<td>Peoples Volunteer Organization</td>
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<td>S.C.O.U.H.P.</td>
<td>Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples</td>
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<td>S.O.E.</td>
<td>Special Operations Executive</td>
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<td>U.M.P.</td>
<td>Union Military Police</td>
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<td>Y.M.B.A.</td>
<td>Young Men's Buddhist Association</td>
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Ethnic Groups of Burma

TIBETO-BURMAN
- Burman
- Chin
- Kachin
- Other
  1. Lahu
  2. Lisu
  3. Naga
  4. Akha

BURMAN AND MON-KHMER

KAREN
- Karen
- Kayah

KAREN AND BURMAN

TAI
- Shan

MON-KHMER
- 5. Mon
- 6. Wa
- 7. Palaung

BURMAN AND SHAN

Islands inhabited by Burmans and Malays
INTRODUCTION

This thesis will explore the factors which led to the phenomenon of ethnic separatism in the Union of Burma between independence in 1948 and the military takeover by General Ne Win in 1962. The Red Flag Communist (also known as the Burma Communist Party or BCP) rebellion under Thakin Soe and the Communist Party of Burma (CPB or White Flags) rebellion will not be the subject of analysis for the purpose of this paper, but will be referred to, since Burma was beset with rebellion from these groups as well as the from ethnic insurgents throughout the period in question. The state almost disintegrated through the combined assaults of multiple rebellions from its very beginning. The thesis will discuss what "ethnic rebellions" are, why they broke out and why ethnic rebellion became the endemic and debilitating status quo.

The justification for the topic is that these questions need analysis due to the frequent assumption that the phenomenon is the inevitable result of previous inter-ethnic animosities between the old Burmese kindgom and the minorities, who had traditionally been under Burmese suzerainty, and of British colonial policies, which can be said to have deepened or exacerbated historical animosities. It has also been assumed that ethnic identity has been a discrete entity, inflexible, isolated and automatically exclusive of and hostile to other ethnic groups.
Despite much scholarly writing there has not been a great deal of attention given to exactly what factors led to such general ethnic separatist rebellion. Commentaries on Burmese politics and history tend not to acknowledge the complexity of interdependence and inter-relatedness which has been a persistent feature of both Burman-minority relations and relations between the minorities themselves, or the extraordinary lack of homogeneity within Burma's minority peoples. The fluidity and complexity of traditional ethnic societies in the hills had enabled them to survive conquest by Burmese kingdoms and pursue their traditional religions and customs despite their obligations to the overlords on the plains. Their traditional structures of government were not interfered with and neither were traditional trading and swidden agricultural patterns.

Although the British Empire artificially isolated and separated the administration of the hill peoples they retained most of their traditional autonomy and were relatively unaffected by their conquest of Burma. The Karens who were closely associated with the British, supporting them against the Burmans, were an exceptional group, moving to the Burman majority areas in great numbers during the British period. Many still lived scattered through the eastern hills, but those who moved to the delta area often converted to Christianity, gained education from missionary schools and were recruited to the British arms of authority - the civil service, the police and the army. They had always held aloof
from the Burmans and were traditionally despised by them. While they benefited from the British presence the Burman society and world were decimated by it, a factor leading to hostility between these groups.

The beginning of the distortion of the traditional patterns in the hills occurred during World War II, which ended isolation and involved the minorities in warfare against the Burmans, Burmans and minorities each siding with a different foreign power. The crucial disjunction between the relative autonomy of traditional vassal status and the frontal attacks made on this autonomy by the Union of Burma after 1948 is, it is argued, the final factor which transformed ethnic identities into political ideologies or identities - foci for separatist movements pressing for the formation of new ethnic states.

It is argued that ethnicity of itself was not the motive for political action by these groups. The central factor in ethnic separatism is that of the politicization of ethnicity. It is not argued that ethnicity is not an actuality, but rather that traditionally in what is now Burma it was not the cause of warfare or antagonism between groups. It will be shown that at times it was a matter of convenience depending on a group's location or perceived political or economic advantage. The Western assumption that ethnic groups automatically have conflicting aspirations and territorial demands because of the difference in ethnicity is rejected.
The independence constitution of 1947 was based on the Western political concept of the nation-state, a concept based on the notion of the state enclosing within its borders one ethnic group or nation. However inappropriate a concept it may have been in a poly-ethnic state like Burma, Burma's educated and politically active elite were imbued with the idea and determined to preserve unchanged the borders of the colonial power. The new state instituted fixed borders, installed a bureaucracy and implemented policies intended to assist "nation building" and "national integration", all of which were absent from the old Burmese monarchical state centred on its despotic god-king. The government instituted policies designed to culturally Burmanize its peoples and a highly

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1 A.D. Smith, The Ethnic Revival (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 87. This notion of nation-state integrally involved with the evolving state system of nineteenth century Europe, which was replicated all over the world, including in post-colonial states. Hegel was very influential in the development of the idea of the state.

2 E.R. Leach, "The Frontiers of 'Burma'", Comparative Studies in Society and History, 3, 1960-61, pp. 49-68. Leach notes that Southeast Asian peoples are not separated by political frontiers, which are the arbitrary outcome of political or military decisions by colonial powers.

3 Ibid., pp. 56-7. The characteristics of the Indian-style of Hinduized kingship followed by the Burmese rulers include absolute authority and the "death" of the state with the king's death. The new king must create a new state and impose his own personal authority to maintain it. All positions, such as myosas and wuns were in the personal gift of the new king - hence no stability or continuity was possible, and officials made the most of their short tenures with this knowledge.
centralized Burman-based political structure. Such a pattern was not unique among post-colonial regimes in the 1950s. It was assumed that ethnic separatist tendencies in post-colonial states would not remain a problem, according to Anthony Smith, who notes that during 1950s it was expected by both "liberals" and "socialists" that ethnic identities and aspirations would die out in the face of the modern state.\(^4\)

The post-colonial borders bequeathed to Southeast Asia rarely corresponded to any "...economically significant feature of natural topography" and did not correspond with language and cultural differences - it being a "European myth" that they should.\(^5\) Despite the European origin of the myth, the newly independent Burma pursued policies of national assimilation in the name of nation-building. The impacts of these policies on the minority peoples resulted in their rejection of the state.

SUMMARY OF METHOD

The method used for research has been extensive analysis and interpretation of literature, including articles and books, in the fields of ethnicity, anthropology, historical commentary and political analysis, incorporating as broad a scope of primary and secondary sources as possible.

\(^4\) A.D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival*, p. 9. The pursuit of world capitalism or Marxism was expected to bring about the demise of ethnicity as a political force.

\(^5\) Leach, "The Frontiers of 'Burma'", p. 49.
Initially the reading was in the area of ethnicity as a phenomenon, including its characteristics in Southeast Asia, and as a political phenomenon, and was undertaken in order to gain some understanding of its nature and parameters, of what ethnicity actually is and what effects it might have on the political actions of a group. It was also necessary to aid understanding in the next area of research undertaken, which consisted of extensive reading of material by anthropologists and others who have written about the ethnic groups of Burma. Included in this literature were books written in the nineteenth century, although it extended to the most recent work available. There has been very little anthropological study done since the coup in 1962, although the genre of books about ethnic groups by partisan writers, which originated in the nineteenth century, continues in small numbers. It was necessary to undertake such reading in order to find out as much as possible about the identities of the various groups, including the degree of homogeneity or otherwise within "ethnic groups", their religions, political structures, cultures, their means of subsistence and their historical interactions with each other and the dominant plains civilization of Burma. The more reading that was done, the clearer it became that the idea of one homogeneous ethnic identity in any of the groups, with the exception of the Burmans, was an over-simplification.

The next category of reading was on the history and politics of Burma and the traditional style of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms
in pre-colonial Burma and Southeast Asia and their interactions with and affects on peripheral peoples. Further reading included the period from the annexation in 1885 through 1917, when the first Karen demands for a separate state were made, and when the Burman nationalist movement began to stir. Further reading followed on the development of the competing nationalisms, the impact on Burmans of British rule and the Great Depression, and the careful insulation of the minority peoples by the British style of rule, through World War II and up to independence in 1948. Reading on Buddhism and its role in Burmese nationalism, including the Saya San rebellion was also undertaken.

Such reading provides the necessary context without which the bare events between 1948 and 1962 cannot be adequately explained or understood. The actions and reactions of this period are uniquely a product of the previous separate histories of the protagonists, particularly during the years from 1885 to independence. Reading on World War II showed the importance of its impact on the minority peoples, its polarising effect on the whole population and the effect it had of hastening the British departure from Burma.

Most of the writing is by historians, political scientists and anthropologists, but there were also primary sources from the politicians U Nu and Dr Baw Maw, civil servants, soldiers, missionaries and consultants to the U Nu government during the 1950s which give interesting insights into attitudes as well
LITERATURE REVIEW

Reviewed below are the most germane or illuminating texts for the purpose of this thesis, although there are many others which have been of use. Official documents proved useful in gaining an understanding of the attitude of the British to the newly annexed province of Upper Burma regarding its potential for trade, products available, its peoples and their customs and taxation potential, as well as for observations the peoples by Scott.6 Others which gave a valuable insight into British thinking from 1944 to independence, both private and public are those edited by Hugh Tinker.7

Primary sources have provided useful insights into events and attitudes, both from Burmans and non-Burmans, which eventually led to rebellion. Dr Ba Maw8 and U Nu's9 writings on Burma's

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6 J.G. Scott & J.P. Hardiman, Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States in Five Vols (Rangoon: Govt Printer, 1901).


9 Thakin Nu, Burma Under the Japanese (London: Macmillan, 1954). The author conveys the joy and then disillusionment and fear of all citizens during this period and describes the dangers to those resisting the Japanese.

politics and war-time experiences conveyed the frustrations, dangers and disappointments of the Japanese occupation period, also revealing Ba Maw's aims during this time and U Nu and his colleagues' experiences in the resistance and their determination to gain real independence at any cost after the War. The Karen leader San C. Po's writing consists of a plea for a Karen state addressed to a British audience and reveals a tremendous dislike and antagonism to Burmans. Chao Tzang Yawnghwe's book presents a biographical account and a Shan perspective on Shan-Burman relations and the factors which led the Shans to rebel. These were valuable perspectives.

There is a paucity of commentaries on Burmese history and politics by Burmese writers, but those consulted have been useful in giving a non-Western perspective to events being discussed and reveal a different focus in analysis. They are primarily concerned with authoritarian personality, hierarchy, traditional myths, including god-king and hero myths, and in tracing the development of the state since 1948 to pre-

and nat worship and his involvement in politics are described in a way which gives an insight into the man as a politician.

10 San C. P, Burma and the Karens (London: Elliot Stock 1928) Po was a Christian doctor knighted by the British and a lifelong advocate of a Karen state, long involved in lobbying for one. The book reveals a long and bitter Karen memory as a basis for political demands.

colonial roots. A degree of Burman paranoia about foreigners and their motives tends to run through much of the analysis.

A number of Western historians and political analysts have been consulted in order to survey the literature on the period and to find details of the development of nationalist movements, the struggle for independence, the World War and its impact and finally the achievement of independence and the conduct of the new state towards its minorities and its survival against a storm of rebellion. The literature tends to reveal a state-centred approach or institution-centred approach, as in work by Taylor or Furnivall, and/or a Burman-centred focus, as is common to almost all works consulted with the exception of Silverstein and Selth. Their work has been valuable, but


the lack of analysis of ethnic groups has led to the consultation of anthropologists' work. Martin Smith's study of the myriad ethnic insurgencies is an essential guide to the identification of rebel groups.16

Anthropological work has been of crucial importance to the pursuit of study into the nature of ethnicity and the interrelationships and contacts between ethnic groups in Burma. Without this background it would be impossible to analyze how changes in the nature of the state would change those relationships and how ethnicity might be politicized.17 Also helpful has been reading undertaken on ethnicity per se, nationalism and the process of politicization of that identity, which is essential to the question.18


RATIONALE OF CHAPTER STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

The chapters have been structured and organized to illuminate the complex factors leading to ethnic separatism and rebellion against the post-colonial state. In order to explain these factors it is essential to understand the history of Burma's peoples in previous eras; pre-colonial, colonial and during World War II.

Chapter one describes the traditional relations of the hill peoples to the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms in the plains of Burma, describing their traditional vassal relationship with and obligations to their overlords, explaining the notion of non-state and state peoples. The changes resulting to Burman society and the relative lack of impact on the hill peoples by the British invasions and annexations, which abolished the old Burmese kingdom and exiled the king, and the effects of these changes are foreshadowed: the background of these factors is essential to an understanding of the magnitude of change experienced in a very short period from 1885.

Chapter two deals initially with the concept of ethnicity and what it is. It is rarely if ever explored outside anthropological studies and has great relevance to an understanding of Burmese politics and history. The chapter explores its nature, what distinguishes one group from another, and foreshadows the challenging concepts of fluid ethnicity. The concept of the nation-state and its introduction to Burma is also discussed, as is its
compatibility or otherwise to the multi-ethnic state of Burma.

Chapter three contains an overview of the minority ethnic groups and sub-groups contained inside the borders of Burma, and is a survey covering where groups live, the number of sub-groups, languages, political structures, means of subsistence and religions contained within each group. The interrelations and interpenetration between groups and the fluid nature of ethnicity is discussed. Change of ethnic identity from one to another and the phenomenon of transitional ethnic identity are examined. It becomes apparent that there is traditional tolerance and flexibility of adaptation to circumstance, in which ethnicity is not a cause celebre. To understand this is to understand why the change to politicized ethnicity has to be analyzed in order to understand the phenomenon of widespread Burmese ethnic separatism.

Chapter four discusses the impact of colonialism on the peoples of Burma, the social, economic and political effects of which were for the Burman majority a complete social disintegration. The repercussions on the minority peoples are discussed and contrasted with those of the Burmans in order to explain opposing nationalisms between the plains-dwelling Burmans and Karens. British separation of the interests of the minorities, giving preference to Karens, and dealing with matters on ethnic grounds is an essential background to the politicization of ethnicity in Burma.
Chapter five describes the impact of World War II on Burma and its peoples. The War was a vital factor in the process of politicizing ethnicity. Ethnic groups were differently affected - the Burmans first thinking the Japanese would give them independence. The minorities supported the British who promised political rewards to their supporters whom they recruited on ethnic grounds to fight Burmans. The Karens, due to their close relationship with the British, were an exception, automatically siding with the British and being massacred in 1942 by Burmans. They were promised political rewards in the form of their own state and found their patrons let them down. This set the scene for Karen rebellion which still continues. The aftermath of War is described, including the negotiations to independence. The importance of Aung San and the impact of his death are also discussed as this loss affected the future descent into disorder.

Chapter six discusses the communist and ethnic rebellions against the post-colonial state between 1948 and 1962 when the military stage a coup, the reasons for which are canvassed. The development of the state which survived the initial rebellions is discussed. It became a centralizing, Burmanizing entity with no resemblance to the state envisaged by Aung San and the minority leaders, with disastrous consequences for minorities and the state itself. The role of U Nu in constructing the state and the state's reaction to near disintegration is examined. Attacks on minorities' autonomy by the state is shown to be important in the initially loyal
minorities' decisions to reject the state, while the Karen rebels are shown to have always rejected it. The nationalistic use of Buddhism and its alienating effects on minorities was a key factor in marginalizing the minorities. The changes in relationships and attacks on the minorities' flexibility and traditional distance from the centre are shown to be factors leading to separatism.

The conclusion discusses the arguments and evidence presented, recapitulating the themes of the analysis, contending that the disjunction between traditional patterns and the new state was brought about by a series of outside interferences beyond the control of the minority peoples, leading to the politicization of ethnicity. Politicized ethnicity became a symbolic rallying point of resistance to state infringement on traditional identities and political, social, religious and cultural autonomy.
CHAPTER 1: FROM KINGDOM TO COLONY: DISRUPTED AND PERSISTING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PATTERNS IN BURMA

The state of Burma which came into existence in 1948 was the product of the European scramble for empire in the nineteenth century; its borders were the borders of the British Indian province of Burma, which encompassed a large and confusing number of ethnic minorities. The plains heartland of Burma consists of the watercourses of the Irrawaddy, Chindwin and Salween river systems, and is home to a Burman majority with an intermingled population of Karens and Mons. The rugged hills which surround this lowland area in a horseshoe are home to various ethnic groups, including the major groups of Chins, Kachins, Shans, Karens and numerous other smaller groups and sub-groups.\footnote{P. Kunstadter ed, Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations, Vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 87-89. Kunstadter presents a Table showing the population and linguistic affiliation of ethnic groups of Burma, based mostly on the last published census of Burma, taken in 1931. This Table lists twenty groups, each with sub-groups, but many of those listed are in fact sub-groups of larger groups.} The notion of fixed state borders is a novel one in a region inhabited by swidden agriculturalists and traversed by migrating tribes. Traders have travelled through the polyglot ethnic mix from Yunnan, through the Hill country of what is now Burma, to India.\footnote{E.R. Leach, Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure. London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology No. 44 (London: The Athlone Press, 1977), p. 35. Leach dates the Chinese trade routes from the 1st century}
were bequeathed to the post-colonial state were drawn with no reference to population distribution and accordingly were meaningless to and ignored by the inhabitants of groups straddling international borders. In common with most of the Southeast Asian hill peoples, those in Burma had found themselves caught up in the peripheries of dominant lowland social systems. Civilizations had developed, spreading from entrepots established on the coast of the Malay peninsula and modern South Vietnam in order to service the trade between China and India. The new civilizations centred on the major river valleys and deltas and it was only in "...hilly areas ill suited to wet-rice cultivation ...[that] primitive and tribal cultures perpetuated". Keyes describes their status as that of

'The holders of the wild', 'the people of the upland fields' who rendered periodic obeisance to the lowland rulers in return for recognition of their status as the first inhabitants of these lands. These relationships found symbolic expression in rituals involving both

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A.D. and speculates that the Shans settlement of these areas followed these trade routes, the Shans settling in the flat plains and strategic passes and growing wet rice.

21 Leach, "The Frontiers of 'Burma'", p. 50. Separating the political units of pre-colonial Southeast Asia were "zones of mutual interest" whose populations were not distinct. These areas experienced continual outside influence and interpenetration.

The surpluses which resulted from settled wet-rice cultivation made possible the adoption of the elaborate religious and political structures which were adopted with the spread of Indian influence throughout the region, leading to "...growing distinction between the hill and lowland peoples", although as Keyes stresses, "...sharp boundaries did not develop between the two".

In Burma the dominant plains civilization was a series of Burmese-Buddhist Hinduized kingdoms based in Upper Burma on the Irrawaddy River and they operated on the pattern common to Southeast Asian kingship, consisting of a strong dominant centre based on a Mt Meru-like capital with power radiating in all directions from the centre until it reached an area on the far periphery over which it could not exert influence. At this point there was overlap with the peripheral area of the neighboring kingdom. Tribute and service were demanded with acknowledgement of tributary status from peripheral peoples but they were, as already noted, "...not an integral part of


24 Ibid., pp. 19-20. Trade between the hills and the lowlands continued unaffected by the emergence of new relationships and lowlanders viewed the hills peoples as potential slave labour.

the society of the central government", and can be described as non-state peoples.

In Burma the pre-colonial king exercised indirect rule over the peripheral minority peoples, who were "...ruled ...[through] the chieftains of certain races such as the Karens and the Shans, and through his [the king's] Burman or Mon appointees" who swore loyalty to the crown. The link between the central and local administrations was weak, due to distance and poor communications. The lack of a national army, police force, state machinery or a bureaucracy allowed the hill peoples a greater autonomy than the Burmans or other ethnic groups close to the capital. However, they were still subject to the "...despotic rule of the wuns", occasional

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26 P. Kunstadter (ed), Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations, p. 19.

27 D.J. Steinberg, In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), pp. 21-25. The whole of Southeast Asia contained non-state peoples, mainly in the mountains separating the river basins which supported the state societies and in the high plateaus of the interior. They traded with the states, accepted political inferiority, paid tribute and kept out of reach as much as they could.


c.f. D.J. Steinberg, In Search of Southeast Asia, p. 61. The "...critical administrative and political links" of the Burmese kingdom were that of patron-client links, whereby the positions and the income accompanying them were granted to various officials and members of the royal family. They would "eat" their districts. Myo-sa means province-eater.
insurrections being put down with brutality.\textsuperscript{29} This did not, however, interfere with the age-old patterns of movement and political, social, economic and cultural patterns in the hills.

The groups which inhabit the hills have been classed under overarching group labels, each group containing many sub-groups. The colonial state divided the hills into administrative areas for its convenience along very rough and inaccurate tribal lines.\textsuperscript{30} By 1900 the British had conducted a thorough investigation of the peoples, languages, social, political and cultural structures and the economic resources and potential of the hills, which they had annexed in 1885,\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. pp. 18-19. Instead of a constant presence in the peripheral areas, the king maintained his authority by "...exemplary punishment such as burning of whole villages and massacre of all villagers".

\textsuperscript{30} H.N.C. Stevenson, \textit{The Hill Peoples of Burma}, Burma Pamphlets No. 6. (Calcutta: Longmans, Green & Co., 1944), p. 4. These divisions were the Arakan Hill Tracts, Chin Hills, Naga Hills, Kachin Hills, Shan States and Wa States, the Karenni States (a protectorate), the Karen Hills and the Salween District.

\textsuperscript{31} J.G. Scott and J.P. Hardiman, \textit{Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States in Five Volumes} (GUBSS) (Rangoon: Government Printer, 1901). This remarkable work, predominantly the work of Scott, also contains exhaustive information about the Burmans, their system of government, religion. Although some of Scott's racial categorisation has been criticized as leading to an even more complicated view of Burma's ethnic mix than it is in fact, due to his assumption of language denoting race, his work helped set categorizations still in use today. Scott, under the name of Shwe Yoe, wrote the illuminating \textit{The Burman, His Life and Notions} as well as his other publications, while carrying out his duties as a colonial administrator.
and which they wanted to administer with minimal cost and effort. Indirect rule through the chieftains was instituted, separating the hill peoples from the Burmans, who suffered direct rule and a consequent disintegration of their traditional social and political units. While the hill peoples retained their autonomy to a substantial degree, their areas remaining in places "...uncharted and little known", the Burmans' situation was quite different. Their old administrative circles were replaced by Townships, each constituting fifty Village Tracts, which were designed on the pattern of Indian villages. Their chieftains were appointed by the Indian government and the focal role of the villages now became the maintenance of the occupying power's law and order; Burma had become an alien society to its own inhabitants. The Burmans and hill peoples experienced very different effects from the colonial period and this gave rise to widely divergent expectations and demands of first the British colonial power, and then of independent Burma.

32 M. Smith, Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity (London: Zed Books, 1991), p. 27. Smith notes that the British government in Rangoon had little effect in the hills, and that this remote rule constituted "chronic neglect".

CHAPTER 2. ETHNICITY AND THE NATION STATE: COMPATIBLE IDENTITIES?

At this point it is apposite to look closely at what ethnicity is before moving in the next chapter to discuss the ethnic groups which inhabit the hills around Burma proper. What then is ethnicity? It is apparent from the work of Leach and others, to be discussed below, that ethnic groups are not the discrete and isolated identities which the neat categorisations of the British and then Burmese administrations and many analysts would lead us to assume. Ethnic minorities in the hills have lived in close proximity and dynamic interaction with each other over centuries and after the British invasions some of them were to a greater or lesser extent affected by Christian missionaries who widened the horizons of the hill peoples immensely. There has been considerable assimilation between groups in some cases and there is clear evidence that ethnicity is not the rigid identity which it is frequently assumed to be. There has been constant trade between groups and imitation by tribal groups of what are seen to be more civilized groups, such as the Shans and the Burmans, and yet the active choice has been made to retain ethnic difference. Therefore ethnicity must be...

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34 P. Kunstadter (ed), Southeast Asian Tribes..., p. 22. This they did through the introduction of literacy and through their "...presence as representatives of an obviously advanced material culture", a factor which Kunstadter notes greatly impressed the Kachins.
acknowledged to be a real and important identity. Keyes notes that it requires more than cultural distinctiveness to make a distinctive ethnic group;

There must also be structural oppositions between groups for ethnic boundaries to exist...the members of an ethnic group share a common interest situation as well as a common cultural identity.

Whether it alone can determines political action is what this thesis seeks to ascertain.

The factors which have affected the social, cultural and political identities of Burma's ethnic minorities have to be taken into account in such a discussion. The ecological factors of where people live have affected their means and levels of subsistence, their elaborateness of political organization and the frequency and type of contact with other minorities and the dominant majority.

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35 R.H. Taylor, "Perceptions of Ethnicity in the Politics of Burma", Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science (SAJSS), 10 (1), 1982, PP. 7-22. Taylor notes that it is incorrect to assume that ethnic groups will be automatically unique and opposed to each other, but takes the notion that ethnicity was a western model imposed on peoples to the extreme, arguing that until World War II only some groups had "...ideas of separate ethnic identity". (p. 8) The Ne Win government's 1974 Constitution he feels removes ethnicity from the agenda and replace it in a traditional role of subordinate importance.

36 C.F. Keyes, Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979), p. 5. Such fundamental oppositions as access to political power or wealth, education or knowledge provide common interests for different ethnic groups.
The nature of ethnicity is discussed by Anthony Smith in his *The Ethnic Revival*[^37], which discusses the politicization of ethnicity and gives a useful set of characteristics which distinguish an ethnic group[^38]. These are: a sense of unique origins, the knowledge of a unique group history and belief in its destiny, one or more dimensions of collective cultural individuality and a sense of unique collective solidarity. The ethnic identity "...assumes some 'primordial' ties to build community sense on"[^39]. An ethnic group is a "...type of community, with a specific sense of solidarity and honour and a set of shared symbols and values",[^40] whose rationale is in its specific history and most importantly, in its "...myths of group origin and group liberation"[^41]. He further adds that liberation "...from all ills past and present...justifies and


[^38]: F. Barth ed, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Oslo: Unversitetsforlaget, 1969). Although this volume is mostly not concerned with Southeast Asia, Barth's Introduction contains a very useful discussion of the nature of ethnic groups, including their roles as culture-bearing units, organizational types and the maintenance of ethnic boundaries and stable patterns of inter-action.

[^39]: Ibid., p. 66.

[^40]: Ibid., p. 65.

[^41]: Ibid. Smith notes that the more vivid these myths are the greater the chance is that the ethnic group will survive and endure.
sustains... the very sense of group uniqueness". These are clearly very potent symbols, values and rationales and it has proved easy for all groups in Burma, including the majority Burmans, to give ethnic identity a political identity. Politicized ethnicity can be based upon

Cultural differences and the sense of cultural distinctiveness... [calling on] communal solidarity... [to press for] recognition of... political demands". Ethnicity as an ideology of separatism is based on difference from rulers and from neighbors and a group's own cultural individuality "...real or alleged", although the nature of the demands for discrete minority states, convenient for separatist movements, has no historical precedent in Burma.

The ideology of a "nation-state" has penetrated to the hill dwellers as well as to the Burman majority; in the case of the Karens, it appeared courtesy of the American Baptist missionaries, who arrived in Lower Burma in the 1820s and was fostered during the British administration from a very

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Ibid. This factor must help explain the propensity for ethnic groups, including Burmans and Karens, to justify present behaviour of whatever character in terms of what has happened to them in the past.


Ibid.

San C. Po, Burma and the Karens (London: Elliot Stock, 1928), p. 2. Adoniram Judson, the American Baptist converted the first Karen in 1828, the first of many Karens to be converted. Their traditional belief in the "Lost Book of Silver and Lost Book of Gold" to be returned to them by a white brother made conversion very easy for missionaries. Nonetheless, the majority of Karens are still not Christians.
early period after the annexation, as in D.M. Smeaton's *The Loyal Karens of Burma*, published a bare two years after the fall of Mandalay.  

In Burma the concept of the integrated multi-ethnic nation state has proved since 1948 to be an unrealized ideal. The ideal state, which can contain several different ethnic groups within its borders, functions on a legal-rational basis, and in which ethnic or group loyalties are subjugated to, or are of less importance than loyalty to the state and its goals has not been achieved in Burma.  

There has been widespread denial of the legitimacy of the state due to fundamental differences in understanding of what sort of entity it was to be. For the Karen group which rebelled from the state's inception the state which sought to include them never had any legitimacy. For other ethnic groups the state lost its legitimacy over a period due to its refusal to grant them their legally constituted autonomy and its interference with their traditional social, religious and political patterns. Once their traditional distance from interference from the centre was lost and the state imposed itself in an

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46 D.M. Smeaton, *The Loyal Karens of Burma* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887) p. 220. Smeaton pleads, "...as a political experiment - to give the Karens a chance of growing as a nation in their own way?...We have here a little people - probably under a million in all- who aspire to keep their nationality intact. Why should we not allow them, encourage them, to do so?"

47 The lack of ability to make a stable state of this type out of disparate ethnic elements has been notable in Yugoslavia and in the old Soviet Union recently.
increasingly more oppressive way, the decisions to secede or rebel were made. It did not necessarily have to happen, but the politicized ethnic chauvinism of the Burman state brought about a reaction of politicized ethnic separatism. If promises of autonomy had been honoured in deed there was a possibility that in Burma the concepts of ethnicity and nation-state could have proved compatible.
CHAPTER 3: BURMA'S NON-STATE PEOPLES - AN OVERVIEW

THE CHINS

Burma's ethnic minority groups and their sub-groups will now be surveyed, beginning with the Chins, a tribal society inhabiting territory "...in or adjacent to Burma's Chin Hills", which from 1948 constituted the Chin Special Division. Some are also found in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hills and the Manipur Valley in India, while a very few live in the plains of Burma and Arakan, and "...appear to be transitional between the Chin and the Burmans." The term "Chin" is imprecise and comes from a 'Burmese word, rather than a Chin word. Lehman notes that although some groups had adopted a variant of the term "Chin" for themselves by the late 1950s, nearly all of the peoples "...we customarily call Chin" have a word for themselves, usually a variant of a single root which "...means, roughly, 'unsophisticated'". The number of Chins

48 F.K. Lehman, The Structure of Chin Society: A Tribal People of Burma Adapted to a Non-Western Civilization (Illinois: Illinois Studies in Anthropology No. 3, University of Illinois, 1963), pp. 4-5. Lehman explains that Chin society could be described as tribal because of traditions markedly different from those of the surrounding civilizations. It was fairly isolated and it was usually excluded from the network of social and political institutions in the "civilized states" with no such institutions of its own, its mainly animistic religion and its unwritten language. (p. 1)

49 Ibid., p. 3. The word is zo, yo or a number of variations. c.f. Scott and Hardiman, GSSUB, pp. 450-1, include a discussion of the various groups and their names, reference to their great diversity and a discussion of the confusion and difficulty in trying to classify
was estimated in 1953 to be 220,000, but population figures for any group in Burma are hard to fix with any certainty. Lehman distinguishes two broad groups within the Chins, the Northern Chin and the Southern Chin, each with a distinct type of society. The few plains-dwelling Chins differ greatly from the hill dwelling Chins and cannot be considered tribal; they became wet rice farmers interspersed among Burman villages and subject to the pressures of acculturation.

The tribal Chins living in the rugged hills are swidden farmers, the staple of the Southern being rice, while the Northern staples are millet, maize and beans. The swidden agricultural regime necessitates regular movement and produces

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50 Lehman, The Structure of Chin Society, p. 6. No official census figures have been published for Burma since the British census of 1931. Cf. Keyes, The Golden Peninsula, p. 38. The Chins form one of the largest tribal populations in Southeast Asia.

51 Ibid., pp. 14-17. The Central Chin had more traditional influence from Manipuri civilization than the other groups, who were Burman influenced. Within the Northern Chin Lehman defines a third group, the Central Chin, but for the purposes of this study classes them as Northern. There is much evidence in this group of transition to another ethnic identity.

52 Ibid., p. 39.

53 Keyes, The Golden Peninsula, pp. 42-3. The Chin Hills, in particular the north are among the most rugged in Southeast Asia. While most remain swidden farmers, on some of hillsides in recent years a few have carved out terraces to grow wet-rice.

54 Keyes, p. 43.
little surplus, although through their trading opportunities the Northern Chin developed a more elaborate material culture and social structure that the Southern Chin.\textsuperscript{55} The Chin, most particularly the Northern, have always had close relations with the Burmese civilization; Lehman describes the relationship between the hill societies and the lowland civilization as "symbiotic sociocultural systems".\textsuperscript{56} In both groups there is considerable linguistic variation; it is particularly the case with the Southern, while among the Northern, who cover a larger territorial range, with a larger population, there is "...relative internal linguistic homogeneity".\textsuperscript{57}

**THE KACHIN**

The term Kachin is, according to Leach, a vague term which is a romanisation of a Burman term loosely applied to North Eastern barbarians.\textsuperscript{58} The Kachin occupy the Kachin State of Burma and spread into south western Yunnan, south into the Shan State and north west into Assam. Their population can

\textsuperscript{55} Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, pp. 14, 28. The Chin developed sophisticated trading patterns, the remote Southern relied only on lowland Burma for trade but the Northern traded into Assam, India and Chittagong.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 22.

\textsuperscript{57} Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society*, p. 17.

only be roughly guessed, but in the early 1950s it was estimated that there were 350,000 to 450,000 in Burma, one quarter in the northern Shan State, and several thousand over the Assam and Yunnan borders.\(^{59}\) There is an enormous linguistic variety within the categorisation Kachin which led the British officials attempting to classify this "polyglot population" to classify language groups as races.\(^{60}\) Leach identifies four separate languages, apart from Tai which is also widely used in the Kachin areas which are also home to large numbers of Shan Tai speakers.\(^{61}\) Each of these four languages contains numerous "sub-heads" and categorisation is not easy as they are mixed up and merging into other languages and dialects. Jinghpaw is used as the *lingua franca* among the Kachins.\(^{62}\)

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60 Leach, *Political Systems...*, p. 43. Lebar and his fellow editors appear to have followed the line of the earlier categorizations, referring to speakers of Jinghpaw as "the Jinghpaw" (a synonym for Kachin) and speakers of Maru and Lashi as "the Maru" and "the Lashi". Leach describes this practice as ethnologically absurd, as linguistic classification is in itself misleading.

61 Leach, *Political Systems...*, pp. 44-6. The languages are Jinghpaw (6 sub-heads), Maru (5 sub-heads), Nung (several sub-heads) and Lisu (includes several different dialects). Many of the sub-heads are mutually unintelligible.

62 Leach, *Ibid.*, pp. 44-6. The use of Jinghpaw as a *lingua franca* is necessary in this linguistic jumble, Leach gives the example of one Kachin village of 130 households within which there were six different dialects "...spoken as 'mother tongue'".
Leach notes that it has been observed that large groups of population "...have transferred themselves from one language group to another", showing that language groups among the Kachin are neither hereditary nor stable. During the British period both Catholic and Protestant missionaries were active in the Kachin Hills and "substantial numbers" were converted. Notwithstanding this and the Buddhist missionary activity of post-independence Burma, most Kachins are still "probably" animists, whose supernatural world is peopled by major and minor deities which must be propitiated in order to avoid their influence becoming malevolent. Although the Kachins are linguistically fragmented, with differences in political organization and a wide variety in dress, their kinship framework ". . . extends over the whole Kachin Hills Area

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63 Ibid., p. 49. Leach contends that the extreme language factionalisation in some groups, as opposed to other conservative groups which will not change, despite close proximity to other languages and dialects, reflects the political structures groups and that the use of a chosen language is an expression of solidarity, social distance or even hostility.

64 Steinberg, Burma: A Socialist Nation..., p. 14.


66 Ibid., pp. 16-17. Propiation is through offerings and prayers. Their Creator is, they believe, little concerned with human affairs. Villages are usually approached through a sacred grove marked by prayer posts and shrines, p.12.
and overrides all political and linguistic frontiers except that between Kachin and Shan"; their religion, housing, myths and traditions are also shared.\textsuperscript{67}

Traditionally Kachins have lived on ridge tops or on the high slopes of the hills, although by the 1960s some had begun to settle in the valleys.\textsuperscript{68} Their domain covers both dry and rainforest climatic zones as well as an intermediate zone which is forested on the north slopes and has grassland on the south slopes. This results in a variety of subsistence methods, including two different styles of swidden farming and a small number of irrigated terraces in some areas.\textsuperscript{69}

Leach describes two contradictory ideals of social and political organization among Kachins, one a replica of the Shan mode, a feudal hierarchy, and the other known as \textit{gumla}, which is "...essentially anarchistic and egalitarian".\textsuperscript{70} The "...majority of actual Kachin communities" are organized

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} Leach, \textit{Political Systems...}, pp. 54-55.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Lebar et al, \textit{Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia}, p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Leach, \textit{Political Systems of Highland Burma}, pp. 22-8. Monsoon swidden (\textit{taungya}) is ideally used one year and left fallow for twelve years resulting in far-flung small hamlets but a good yield of rice. Grassland \textit{taungya} involves a crop rotation and takes place in areas where it is climatically difficult to grow rice. The terraces are used in an intermediate climatic zone which uses a combination of the two swidden techniques as well.
\item \textsuperscript{70} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 8. The Shan type is in turn copied from the Burmese model on the plains.
\end{itemize}
according to neither, but are gumsa, a "...kind of compromise between gumlao and Shan ideals", which is not static, whole communities being in a state of "oscillation" between the two ideals.71 The different systems appear in the monsoon area where almost all Kachins there are Jinghpaw speakers, while in the dry zone, a linguistic polyglot, the anarchistic gumlao is the predominant political form.

The Kachin have always lived in close proximity and interaction with the Shans. Traditionally the Shan capital was situated on the flat plains high in the Hills and surrounded by wet-rice fields with feudal dependents, including wet-rice growing Shans and taungya (swidden farming) non-Shans who inhabited the slopes, forming part of the Shans' elaborate political hierarchy.72 The degree of interdependence and interpenetration between these two groups is of such an order that Leach contends that the Kachin Hills contains one major social system which comprises "...a number of significantly different sub-systems which are

71 Ibid., pp. 6, 8. Leach describes Kachin political units as being inherently unstable. Lebar et al, Ethnic Groups..., pp. 15-6. Prior to the creation of the Kachin State all territory was controlled by various Kachin chiefs or Duwas whose territory ranged greatly in size.

72 Leach, Political Systems of Highland Burma, pp. 34-5. Lebar et al, Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia, p. 193. The other groups include Kachins, Lahu, Akha, (Leach identifies these last two as Kachins), Wa and Palaungs.
interdependent...Shan, Kachin gumsa, [and] Kachin gumlao.\textsuperscript{73}

Leach's observations of the fluid nature of ethnic and linguistic affiliation within and between these groups indicates that much Western assumption about ethnicity in this region is incorrect and simplistic.

THE SHANS

The Shans are located in China and Thailand as well as in Burma, where they are mainly concentrated in the Shan State, although there are Shan communities scattered throughout Burma except in the Chin Hills, Arakan and Tenasserim.\textsuperscript{74} They are almost all Tai speakers with some dialect variations and identify themselves as Tai.\textsuperscript{75} Scott and Hardiman describe the "...bewildering variety of names" by which they are known.\textsuperscript{76} They also describe wide dialectic differences between Tai.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., pp. 60-1. There are clear cases of individual and groups of Kachins becoming Shans and vice versa. The inter-depending social sub-systems are "transient and unstable".

\textsuperscript{74} Lebar et al, Ethnic Groups..., pp. 192-3.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

c.f. Leach, Political Systems..., p. 29. All the Shans in Northern Burma and Western Yunnan speak Tai, except the Shan in Möng Hsa.

\textsuperscript{76} Scott and Hardiman, GSSUB, pp. 187-8. They list forty eight by which they were known, either among themselves or to their neighbors, and note that there many more which are purely local.

\textsuperscript{77} Scott & Hardiman, GSSUB, pp. 187-8, 274. Scott describes the barrier of the Salween River, with its "mountain banks" as having produced differences in dialect and written language among people on either side, although both groups are distinctly Shan.
The Shan States' population has never been homogeneous; it is a mix of ethnic and linguistic affiliation. Other inhabitants including Kachins, Wa, Pao (a group of Karen who are known to the Burmese as Taungthu), Palaungs and Karens live in the hills around the Shan settlements.78

The Shans live in the flat plains at the bottom of river valleys or pockets of flat country in the hills and Scott notes that they do not look upon themselves as hill people at all.79 They are distinguished from their neighbors in that they are always settled wet-rice cultivators and that they are invariably Buddhist.80 Buddhism is very important to the group identity of the Shans and is regarded by them as a symbol of Shan sophistication in regard to their animist neighbors.81

The Shan form of Buddhism is similar to the Burmese variety,

78 Sao Saimong Mangrai, The Shan States and the British Annexation (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Programme Cornell University Data Paper 57, 1965), p. 10. In 1965 Mangrai numbered the Shans as slightly less than half of the population of the Shan States. Burmans, Lolo-Musho, Chinese, Indian races and others are categories he also includes.

79 Ibid., pp. 274-5. A description of their irrigation practices and their "...careful and laborious" cultivation is given here, as well as the types of crops grown in addition to the large amount of rice cultivated. Leach, Political Systems..., p. 21. He describes them and the Burmese as valley dwellers.


81 Leach, Ibid., p. 32.
although it contains many "heretical sects". The Shans have retained a great degree of cultural uniformity which is "...correlated with a uniformity of Shan political organisation, which is in turn largely determined by the special economic facts of the Shan situation", or the surpluses produced by wet-rice agriculture. The ecological factors which allow the cultivation of wet-rice allowed the Shans to establish permanent feudal Buddhist states and what Leach describes as "...a moderate degree of general cultural sophistication".

The Shan form of political organization has been a strongly hierarchical feudal state headed by a ruler, or sawbwa (or saopha). There were thirty three Shan states, some of which were of greater power and size than others, although due to constant warfare between them their status were precarious.

82 I d., p. 32. f. Lehman, "Ethnic Categories in Burma..., p. 96. Despite Shan suzerainty to the Burmese kings, under the kingdom the Shans' Theravada Buddhist Sangha was subject to the Burmese-Buddhist primate. Their Buddhist establishment was quite separate.

83 I d., p. 40 Pott and Hardiman, GSSUB, p. 187. The Tai (or Hans) are described as the "...most widely spread race} of any in the Indo-Chinese Peninsula and in parts beyond the peninsula, and it is certainly the most numerous".

84 Leach, Political Systems..., p. 21. Throughout Southeast Asia the only societies able to establish elaborate hierarchical political and religious structures did so due to the surpluses provided by wet-rice cultivation.

85 Steinberg, Burma: A Socialist Nation..., p. 8. The present Shan State contains these thirty three states and the Wa State.
They were subject to raids from Kachins and Chinese as well as periodic raids from Burmese. The Shans owed allegiance to the Burmese kings, on whose political organization they had modelled their own, their royal regalia was prescribed by Ava\textsuperscript{86}, and their successions were manipulated from the Burmese capital.\textsuperscript{87}

The mixture of population within the Burmese Shan State and the spread of Shans into almost all parts of the hills, including remote areas of the Kachin and Chin Hills, has not resulted in a change of Shan cultural identity.\textsuperscript{88} They have retained their Shan cultural identity, which in all locations retains the same pattern,\textsuperscript{89} yet live in close contact with their neighbors, both in terms of trade and in political systems. The British introduced the political separation between the Shans and the Kachins, through administrative action unrelated to the realities of organization in the

\textsuperscript{86} Mangrai, The Shan States..., p. 54.

\textsuperscript{87} Mangrai, The Shan States..., pp. 54-5. Despite this, the Shan sawbwas had definite places at court and were required for certain ceremonies. c.f Scott and Hardiman, GUBSS, pp. 281-2. The Burmese court held heirs apparent at the court for two purposes; to hold them hostage against the loyalty of the Shan States and to Burmanize and thus alienate them from their people. c.f. Steinberg, Burma: Socialist Nation..., p. 6. There were varying degrees of real or titular autonomy from the Burmese King.

\textsuperscript{88} Leach, Political Systems..., p. 38. These often were also on strategic passes. Leach sees them as small scale military communities.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p. 40.
THE KARENS

The Karens form Burma's largest minority group and straddle the border of Burma and Thailand. In Burma they are found in the Irrawaddy and Sittang valleys and throughout Tenasserim, up through the hills on the Thai border, the Kayah State and into the Shan State. Their numbers are a matter of dispute, but the 1931 census reported 1,340,000 Karen speakers in Burma. There are four major groups of Karen; Sgaw, Pwo, Pao and Kayah (Karenni) with numbers of other small sub-groups, whose identity and classification were still a matter of speculation in 1964, but who inhabit "...the Kayah State, the northern Karen State, the Shan state of Loi Long and the adjoining part of Burma proper. Linguistically they are

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90 Leach, Political Systems..., p. 35. This is described by Leach as a completely artificial separation by a paramount power for its own convenience.

91 Steinberg, Burma: A Socialist Nation..., p. 9.

92 Lebar et al, Ethnic Groups..., p. 59. Most were in the Irrawaddy delta and in the north of Tenasserim.

93 Lebar et al, Ethnic Groups..., p. 59. M. Smith, Burma: Insurgency..., p. 30. Smith quotes the 1931 figure as 1,367,673, including Pao and Kayah. The Japanese numbered them as 4.5 million, in 1988 the Burmese government put them as under 2 million, where the Karen National Union places them as being 7 million. The most neutral sources estimate between 3 and 4 million. Their numbers are a political issue and therefore rubbery.

less diverse than some other groups, falling into two subgroups. The first sub-group consists of the Pwo and Pao, while the Sgaw and other groups of the Eastern Hills make up the other.

There are three distinct geographic regions in which Karens live, giving rise to differing styles of subsistence. These range from the flat rice-growing plains in the deltas of Lower Burma where they grow wet-rice as do the Burmese,95 to forested or grassy hills where they practice swidden agriculture, producing a wide variety of crops, to the valley bottoms in the hills which produce crops including fruits, sugar and tobacco.96 Forest products have always been gathered for trade, but most of the trading was carried out by itinerant traders - Burmese, Chinese, Shans or Indians, while Shan, Burmese and Thai markets were and still are visited by the Karens.97

The Karens have been for many generations under the suzerainty

Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations, pp. 93-124. The term Kayah is that used by that group of themselves. The Burmese generic term is Kayin. The term Kayah has been used instead of the previous term Karenni in order to distinguish this group of Karens from their rebellious fellows.

95 Ibid., p. 59. The Irrawaddy, Sittang and Salween deltas and the coast of Tenasserim are all wet-rice areas in which Karens live.

96 Ibid., p. 60.

97 Ibid., p. 60
of neighboring plains kingdoms. Internally their own most important political unit is the village which is headed by a hereditary chief who is assisted by a council of elders. Traditionally the villages were autonomous except for ritual ties between men in different communities, through which some checks were made on individual villages, and a network of contacts was provided. The majority of the Karens lived among the "...more dominant and aggressive Mons and Burmans" but did not assimilate with their neighbours, retaining a strongly separate identity, the result of which was their contemptuous treatment by Burmans to whom they remained inferior subject people. Karens in the south-west Shan State and the Kayah state have been strongly influenced by Shan culture. The Kayah adopted the hierarchical feudal state political system of the Shans, were ruled by their own

98 H.I. Marshall, The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology (Ohio State University, 1922), p. 304. They have never lived in territory they have not shared, being politically subjected everywhere except in the Karenni statelets.

99 Ibid., p. 61. If there is no hereditary heir, the elders elect a new chief, while an unsatisfactory chief will be deserted, his villagers simply leaving. c.f. Silverstein, Burmese Politics: the Dilemma of National Unity (New Brunswick: Rutgers U. Press, 1980) p. 15. Citing Father Sangermano. The Karens "...Although residing in the midst of the Burmese and Peguans they not only retained their language, but even their dress, houses and everything else are distinguished from them...", they lived dispersed through the forests in small villages of four or five houses.

100 Ibid

101 Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 16. The only Karen sub-group which assimilated to any extent were the Pao of the Shan States, who adopted Theravada Buddhism and developed a written script.
sawbwas, claiming "...jural authority" from the Burmese kings,\(^{102}\) and through this political structure they define their identity as a "...very special type of Karen". They claimed this status through their association with the Shan political system, acting in political concert with Shans rather than Karens.\(^{103}\) Despite this identification they have not adopted Buddhism of the Shans, and are almost all animists.

The Karens were contacted by Christian missionaries in the 1820s and although most remain Buddhist, many converted to Christianity, occasionally whole villages at a time.\(^{104}\) The missionaries established schools and medical centres in the hills, which were not exclusively for Christians,\(^{105}\) but the number of Christian educated politically articulate Karens produced from Christian schools and colleges both in the hills and in Rangoon, has given them a disproportionately prominent position in Karen politics.\(^{106}\) Their close identification

\(^{102}\) Lehman, "Ethnic Categories in Burma...", p. 99

\(^{103}\) Ibid, pp. 99-100. The Karenni protectorate had been defined as separate from, rather than incorporated into British Burma, because of British acceptance of the Burmese king's recognition of its special status. It consisted of three statelets, each with its own sawbwa.

\(^{104}\) C.F. Keyes, The Golden Peninsula..., p. 21. This was a feat of the American Baptist Mission.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., p. 21.

\(^{106}\) Keyes (ed), Ethnic Adaptation and Identity, pp. 17-18. Due to the rendering of Sgaw Karen into an adapted Burmese script by Baptists (the Catholic missionaries rendered Pwo into Roman letters, but it has not been widely adopted) the body of Karen
with the foreign Christian religion of the conquering British deepened the historical cleavage between the Karens and the Burmans. Marshall describes the Karens as isolated, looking back to their golden age.107

In their religion the Karen are not homogeneous, different groups having different religious affiliations. Lebar gives figures the following figures from the 1931 census:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Buddhist</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Animist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sgaw</td>
<td>* 67%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pwo</td>
<td>* 93%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pao</td>
<td># 100% (almost)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100% (almost)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Burmese Buddhist tradition.
# Shan Buddhist tradition.

THE MONS

There are other minority ethnic groups in the Burmese state, including the Mons and the Rakhine (Arakanese), who have risen against the post-colonial state. The Mons are significant in that Burman culture has assimilated many elements of Mon culture, including Theravada Buddhism and a script, since the

literature and Karen literacy in general orients those possessing it to a Christian world view, a view with no function to non-Christians. 107

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107 Marshall, The Karen People..., pp. 304-5. Their inherited customs and precepts were not to be changed.
The Mon kingdom of Pegu was conquered in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{108} There has been a process of "mutual acculturation" however, in that there has been considerable pressure on Mons to Burmanize and until the conquest of Lower Burma in 1852 the use and teaching of the Mon language was actively discouraged by the Burman authorities.\textsuperscript{109} Aided by the assimilation policy of the last dynasty, intermarriage, intermingling and adherence to the same religion have taken place between Mons and Burmans, although a Mon identity has persisted. The British considered them as Burmans.

The ethnic Mon population in 1931 was 337,000; the number today is unknown and is not easy to estimate due to intermarriage between Burmans and Mons, but the population of the Mon State in 1975 is given by Steinberg as 1,371,000.\textsuperscript{110}

The Mons, who in 1931 lived predominantly in the north of Tenasserim around Moulmein, live in much the same way as their Burman neighbors, sharing their religion and growing wet-rice, cultivating garden crops and fruit and supplying most of the

\textsuperscript{108} Steinberg, Burma: Socialist Nation..., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Steinberg, Burma..., p. 10.
fish-paste eaten as an integral part of the Burman diet.¹¹¹

THE RAKHINE

The Rakhine in the past had their own Buddhist kingdom and were buffered against the Burmese kingdom by rugged mountains, nonetheless they were periodically conquered by the Burmese kings, the last time in 1784.¹¹² Arakan province on the border of British Bengal was one of the first conquered by the British in 1826. The Arakanese language is an "...older dialect of Burmese" and its people lived in wild country, "...turned seaward, controlling at various periods the coastal piracy of the northern Bay of Bengal".¹¹³ There were 1,786,000 people in Arakan in 1975, according to Steinberg, an unknown percentage of whom were Muslims or Rohingas, but Steinberg estimates that they may compose up to 20% of the

¹¹¹ Lebar et al, Ethnic Groups..., p. 96. At that time the Mons were reported to grow most of the fruit and vegetable eaten by Burmans.


Communal violence between Buddhists and Muslims at the time of the Japanese withdrawal from Arakan led to a population shift through flight from violence, which resulted in a Muslim north and a Buddhist south in Arakan, a factor which has had long-term political repercussions since independence.

It is clear from examining the disparate ethnic groups of Burma and the fluidity of their identities and boundaries why Leach has called the "...ordinary ethnographic conventions as to what constitutes a culture or a tribe...hopelessly inadequate" in Northern Burma. The conventional Western understanding of ethnicity, culture and religious affiliation is severely challenged by his observations regarding the changes made between Kachin and Shan identity - becoming Shan or becoming Kachin - which are made for advantage of one kind or another. Throughout Southeast Asia where people have habitually moved in the course of swidden agriculture, for trade purposes, or to escape an intolerable suzerain, there are identifiable cases of multi-ethnicity.


115 Ibid., o, 281.

116 Ibid., p. 287. Observed changes of identity were made for what the external observer could identify as political or economic advantage.

most consciously do not fit this model, retaining their separate identity through their assertion that their languages are unconnected to other languages in the area\textsuperscript{118} and through their myths.\textsuperscript{119} The Karens stand out as a more discrete group than the others of the hills, although they do not act in unison and are not politically united any more than they are a homogeneous group.

After a close examination of Burma's minority "ethnic groups" it is clear that the assumption that minority ethnic chauvinism and nationalism will automatically appear and manifest themselves in "ethnic" political movements is made without a clear understanding of the nature of ethnic identity in the region, and is made from a Western nationalist perspective. It is however, clear that ethnic identity is not

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., pp. 10-11. Their language is Tibeto-Burman or closer to Thai depending on which linguistic school prevails. Luce is in favour of Thai, while the prevailing wisdom appears to be Tibeto-Burman.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 11. This myth, including the fact that the Karen lost, while the Burmese, the Thai, the Westerners and the Chinese did not, serves to reiterate constantly that "the people" are inferior to other races (in money, power, knowledge) and presumably reinforces memory of inferiority under the Burmese.
a Western construct placed on peoples for whom it has no meaning as Robert Taylor asserts.\textsuperscript{120} Given the fragmented organization, languages and political structures of most of Burma's minorities, it would appear to be simplistic to expect each, or indeed all "ethnic groups", to react to the central state created at independence in the same way at the same time.

\textsuperscript{120} R. Taylor, "Perceptions of Ethnicity in the Politics of Burma", \textit{Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science}, 10, 1, 1982, pp. 7-22. Taylor sees ethnicity as a false problem in the study and practice of Burmese politics. The author agrees with him that ethnicity does not automatically entail "instinctive and primordial antagonisms" (p.7), as the evidence of this research would indicate.
CHAPTER 4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPPOSING NATIONALISMS AND BRITISH INTRANSIGENCE

Burma proper, incorporating Arakan as well as the plains which were home to the Burman majority and the Mons and Karens who lived among them, was most affected by the British era. The greatest impact was in the Irrawaddy Delta, where a foreign economic system was introduced. As described in Chapter 1, the entire system of local village administration was a foreign structure placed *in toto* into Burmese society and it proved a daily reminder of political dispossession and the loss of the old world order. The subsistence agriculture of traditional Burmese village life was replaced by a colonial export economy and as the rice frontier expanded there was an explosion of rural debt and dispossession. New settlers from Upper Burma cleared land, mortgaging their crops and land to Indian Chettyar moneylenders who provided the capital to finance the expansion in agriculture.¹²¹ By the 1930s the Chettyars had become absentee landlords of two thirds of the delta through foreclosures¹²² adding to the woes of social disintegration experienced in villages full of new settlers.


¹²² Ibid
with no ties to the area and without the moral authority of the Buddhist clergy.\textsuperscript{123} There was a great increase in crime and corruption during this period.\textsuperscript{124} Donnison blames the colonial \textit{laissez faire} economic system, a loss of self respect, the loss of the monarchy and the loss of authority of the disestablished monastic order for the rise in violent crime. The Burmans "...had no place in industry and commerce, and capitalist interests, European, Indian and Chinese dominated economic and social life".\textsuperscript{125} The unlimited immigration of Indians as coolies meant that those Burmans evicted from their land who went to Rangoon for work were unable to find even the most menial jobs, as these were the preserve of the Indian coolies. In effect the Burman heartland suffered gross distortions of the social, economic and political order as a result of colonial rule.

\textsuperscript{123} Maung Win Shein, \textit{Economic, Social and Political Changes...}, p. 38. The villages were artificial entities made up of strangers. The new judicial system administered by the government-appointed headmen was unintelligible to all parties involved and the headmen could no longer rely on the monks to work in tandem with them to maintain the social and moral order. The new world lacked meaning. c.f. Maung Maung Gyi, \textit{Burmese Political Values...}, pp. 47-48. Traditionally Burmese legal disputes were not settled in terms of impersonal concepts, leading to Burmans inability to understand the British rule of law.


The Mons, who in 1885 were regarded as

Fast losing their sense of racial difference from the Burmese and many, perhaps half, of those who called themselves Burmese, were partly of Mon descent.\textsuperscript{126}

were treated no differently to Burmans, sharing their colonial experience, while the Karens who had come down from the hills were seen to be

Coming closer to the Burmese; they had adopted a Burmese way of life and most of them were Buddhists...The Government approved the trend towards greater unity and deprecated the tendency of the Christian missionaries to discourage it.\textsuperscript{127}

They did not experience the disintegrative effects of colonialism and flourished under the British. Karens enjoyed a unique relationship with the British whom they regarded as their saviours from Burman oppression.\textsuperscript{128} They moved in great numbers out of their traditional hill habitat into the delta during the colonial period and due to the proliferation of Karen schools established by missionaries and the favourable view of the British toward them, the Karens were recruited to jobs in the Civil Service, business and the professions, the

\textsuperscript{126} Furnivall, J.S., The Governance of Modern Burma, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid. The government did reluctantly agree to the missionaries' suggestion of using Karen levies to help "pacify" Burma after the annexation in 1886, which has never been forgotten by either race.

\textsuperscript{128} S.C. Po, Burma and the Karens, p. 1. "...The position of the Karens before the advent of the British was that of a subject race in true Oriental fashion. They were treated as slaves...". c.f. H.I. Marshall, The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology, pp. 306, 312. The Karens were so keen to be "liberated" that they acted as guides to the British troops in all three invasions of Burma - a fact never forgiven by the Burmese.
army and the military police. The colonial Burma Army favoured the minority races, being composed of ethnic units, mostly Indian, Karen, Chin and Kachin, while spurning the Burmans, a policy which fostered ethnic loyalties and "...racial antagonism". Disparities in treatment were noted and resented by Burmans, whereas the Karens, their former subject race, felt they had finally received justice and hoped that the sun would never set on the British Empire in Burma.

In the hills, the non-state peoples were left to their own devices to a large extent, not suffering the disintegrative effects of direct rule which led to violently anti-British feelings among the Burmans. The Chins and Kachins, having been militarily subdued by the British, accepted their authority. They were left under their traditional leaders and allowed to retain "...their own laws, customs and

 c.f. Furnivall, The Governance of Modern..., p. 12. Those Karens who had not learned Burmese were able to join the army and military police, but Burmese was the language of the civil service.

130 Furnivall, The Governance of...., p. 22. This followed the practice of artificial separation of ethnic groups practised in civil administration and in the composition of political representation which developed later. This blatant discrimination led to bitter resentment by Burmans.
traditions".¹³¹ The Karenni States were left outside the colonial administrative structure, although they were under the control of the Governor.¹³² Their territory was regarded as a separate feudatory state in a continuation of the legal status it had enjoyed under the Burmese kingdom.¹³³

The Shans were left under the rule of their sawbwas, whose tenure was "conditional on good behaviour". Law enacted in Burma was customarily enforced there and the Governor appointed officers to take part in the States' administration, thus assimilating administrative procedure into that of Burma.¹³⁴ Despite these changes Shan autonomy encountered "...remarkably little interference".¹³⁵ The hill Karens, who lived mainly in the Southern Shan States were governed by

¹³¹ J. Silverstein, Burmese Politics..., pp. 29-30.
They had to give up their traditional slave raiding and war making.


¹³³ Ibid., p. 30.
The British had invaded the Karenni States in 1888 in response to the invasion by one of the Karenni rulers, Sawlawi, of the Shan State of Mokme. They replaced him with his nephew and extracted the huge indemnity of £30,000 plus annual tribute of £500.

After some fine tuning the whole area was placed under a Commissioner of the Federated Shan States. By 1942 there was a Northern Shan State, a Southern Shan State and an Eastern Shan State, consisting of the "wild Was'" Wa states, not administered in any form by the British until 1935.

¹³⁵ M. Smith, Burma, p. 42.
their own chieftains. The separation of administration between the Burmans and minorities cut the hill peoples "...off from the Burmese and from one another" in an unprecedented way, leaving them insulated from political developments in the plains, and inevitably led to a disparity in what groups saw as their political interests, working against the future possibility of a united stance.

Conflicting nationalisms between Burmans and Karens developed after the first political reforms offered by the British to a quiescent Burma in 1917. The Karens, encouraged by their missionary mentors and British supporters, had founded the National Karen Association in 1881, "...representative of all the clans, Christian and heathen, with the avowed object of keeping the nation together in the march of progress" towards their own state within the Indian empire. They had petitioned against any self-government for Burma in 1917 and their eloquent spokesman Dr San Crombie Po (later Sir) stated his case forcefully on several occasions, pleading for

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137 S.C. Po, Burma and the Karens (London: Elliot Stock, 1928), p. 62. c.f. D.M. Smeaton, The Loyal Karens of Burma p. 237. Smeaton put a case for a separate Karen nation out of "justice" for the Karens as well as a perceived "...incalculable advantage for us to have the loyal Karen people occupying points of vantage all over the country. They are at heart true to the British Government: the Burmese are not..."
Tenasserim to be made a Karen state.\textsuperscript{138} It is notable that all Po's political concepts are derived from his Western education, owing nothing to indigenous Karen ideas.\textsuperscript{139} The Karens having staked all on British rule believed their loyalty to the British should and would be rewarded in political terms.

The Burman majority, on the other hand, was determined to gain independence for all of British Burma as a Burmese state. Their nationalist struggle had resulted in some constitutional reforms hedged about with communal safeguards which did not represent progress towards self-government. The dyarchical model which took effect in January, 1923 separated Burma

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., pp. 79-80. Po likens the Karen to the Welsh in Britain. This very nationalist polemic, while attempting to be fair, is a revealingly one-sided analysis of life in Burma under the British. Po tends to base all his analyses of the future in terms of the past in what was perhaps a self-fulfilling prophecy. Po wrote several memorials to British government committees on constitutional reform.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p. 83 is a good example in his discussion of federations, quoting the U.S. and Switzerland as models. c.f. Silverstein, Burmese Politics, pp. 16-7. The Karen supporter D.M. Smeaton wrote of them in 1887 that they had no feeling of nationhood, referring to them as a "...mixed horde of aboriginal savages".
Proper from the Backward Tracts. It instituted a Legislative Council with communal constituencies for elected members, a number of appointed members and a number of vested interest constituencies,\(^{140}\) while leaving power and authority in the hands of the Governor acting with two Ministers, and further isolated the minority peoples in their Backward Tracts.\(^{141}\) The reforms institutionalised the conflict of interest based on ethnic lines into Burmese political life, increasing racial tensions and complicating economic tensions through the 1920s. The Depression which had a devastating effect on Burma exacerbated antagonism.\(^{142}\)

The Burmese nationalist movement developed against a background of "...manoeuvring and intriguing" among the Westernised elite who had entered party politics, which it appeared to treat as an intra-elite game.\(^{143}\) The nationalists tried to move from an initially exclusive Burman-Buddhist identity as agitation flared across the whole community,\(^{144}\)

\(^{140}\) M.M. Gyi, *Burmese Political Values*, p. 93. Of the 103 members 79 were elected. Of these, 8 Indians, 5 Karens, 8 Europeans and Anglo-Indians, 6 special constituencies (e.g. university and various Chambers of Commerce).

\(^{141}\) Furnivall, *The Governance*... p. 10. He nominated these from the non-official elected members.


\(^{143}\) Hall, *A History*..., pp. 782-3

\(^{144}\) The Y.M.B.A. (Young Mens Buddhist Association) changed its name to the G.C.B.A. (General Council of Burmese Associations) in its attempt to become all-embracing.
but attempts to garner minority support were not successful.\textsuperscript{145} The Saya San rebellion of 1930-1932 drew its support from disaffected rural Buddhist Burmans, many of whom were members of wunthanu athins (preserving one's own race societies) and after its savage suppression, in which the Karen police and armed forces took part,\textsuperscript{146} a new type of nationalist group, took centre stage.\textsuperscript{147}

The Dobama Asiayone (We Burmans Association), formed in 1930, was violently anti-British and "revolutionary in its outlook" and was organized chiefly by university students.\textsuperscript{148} Among

\textsuperscript{145} M.W. Shein, Economic and Political Changes, p. 97.

\textsuperscript{146} E. Law-Yone, "Dr Ba Maw of Burma: An Appreciation" J.P. Ferguson, Contributions to Asian Studies: Vol. 16, Essays on Burma (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), p. 6. For the loss of two British lives, a whole division of Indian soldiers were used to put down the rebellion. 3000 Burmans died, 9000 were imprisoned, 350 were convicted and Saya and 77 others were hanged.

\textsuperscript{147} P. Herbert, The Hsaya San Rebellion (1930-1932 Reappraised, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies Working Paper No. 27, Monash University (London: Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books, The British Library, 1982). This is a most informative paper, showing that this was not a last "gasp" of peasant millenarianism. It was a rebellion demanding modern political action but it was cast in traditional terms and used traditional symbols. It is an underestimation of the Hsaya San rebellion to dismiss it as is generally done.

\textsuperscript{148} Tinker, H., The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 7. Its founders were Thakins Ba Sein and Kodaw Hmaing. Thakin Nu became Treasurer and Thakin Aung San became Secretary. They formed their own army and managed to get three members
Dobama's leaders were Thakins Aung San, Nu and Than Tun. Its members defiantly called themselves Thakin (lord/master) and demanded complete independence. Their ideas were an amalgam of Western political philosophies which were eventually to prove incompatible, but until 1947 they were united in their belief that "'There is no more important thing than the independence of Burma'". This group proclaimed its desire to unite all indigenous groups into a Burmese nation and unlike the older generation of Burman politicians, rejected the idea of communal representation. Nonetheless Silverstein observes the Burman-oriented nationalism of the movement, noting a continuation of ancient assumptions of Burman superiority:

For most politically conscious Burmans, self-rule meant... into the legislature. Students had entered politics in 1920 with a students strike and have remained active in politics ever since.

149 L.J. Walinsky, Economic Development..., p. 29. The expulsion of Thakins Nu and Aung San from Rangoon University over a nationwide student strike had transformed their group into one with nationwide support.

150 J. Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 39. The Dobama (We Burmans Association) was organized by university students, but gained a wider support. Their ideas owed much to Marx, Sinn Fein and fascism - an eventually incompatible mix, held together by a desire for independence. c.f. M.W. Shein, Economic, Social and Political Changes..., p. 158. He cites a Dobama "peacock pamphlet".

151 Silverstein, Burmese Politics, pp. 42- 43. Some of them argued that the Shans and the Burmans were one race, (including U Bu and U Pu) and U Pu described the Burmans as being "'...like guests in our house' [and the Karens as]...legally, socially, and morally no other than Burmans as they are one of the chief indigenous races'".
Burman rule, and the minorities were expected either to assimilate or to accept a reduced social and political status.\textsuperscript{152}

Throughout the 1930s party politics in the legislature saw incessant lobbying for the rewards of office, constant collapses of coalitions and no effective political action, while new nationalist parties were formed in competition for Burman support.\textsuperscript{153} These manoeuvrings alienated the minorities and anti-Indian sentiment erupted into riots in 1930 and 1938 as Burmans affected by the Depression vented their frustrations. The Thakins fomented strikes and orchestrated demonstrations,\textsuperscript{154} including a series of strikes called the B.E. 1300 Revolution which pushed them to the acknowledged

\textsuperscript{152} J. Silverstein, Burmese Politics..., p. 40. This had always been expected of minority races within conquered areas throughout the region.

\textsuperscript{153} Silverstein, Burmese Politics..., p. 39. These included Dr Ba Maw's Sinyetha (Poor Man's Party) and U Saw's Myochit (Love of Country Party). c.f. Maung Win Shein, Economic, Social and Political Changes in Burma, p. 151. He describes the bitter personal style of politics in which political foes were gaoled and cabinets pulled down. Dr Ba Maw, U Saw, U Pu and U Ba Pe were major players in this intra-elite game.

c.f. Tinker, The Union of Burma, p. 7. Several parties formed private armies - including the Thakins, Ba Baw and U Saw's parties and the student union.

\textsuperscript{154} W.S. Desai, A Pageant of Burmese History, p. 258. Strikes and unrest were instigated among oil-field labourers and there was a huge demonstration in Mandalay in 1939 in which seventeen people were shot dead by police, including seven pongyis.
leadership of the nationalist movement.\textsuperscript{155}

World War II broke out in Europe in 1939, involving Britain and probably mindful of concessions gained by the Indian Congress as a result of World War I, Thakin Aung San announced that there would be "...no independence without bloodshed".\textsuperscript{156} He secretly left Burma for China to seek arms and contacts with the Chinese Communist Party,\textsuperscript{157} but was quickly contacted by Japanese agents promising "...arms and funds".\textsuperscript{158} The Freedom Bloc was formed in 1939 and demanded recognition of Burma's right to independence and constitutional reform in exchange for support of Britain in the war. Numbers of its members were consequently gaol, hardening opposition to Britain.\textsuperscript{159} In this repressive atmosphere, a group of thirty Thakins spirited themselves out of Burma for military training

\textsuperscript{155} U Maung Maung, From Sangha to Laity: Nationalist Movements of Burma 1920-1940, Australian National University Monographs on South Asia No. 4. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1980) p. 235.

\textsuperscript{156} M.W. Shein, Economic, Social and Political Changes, p. 162. He cites an announcement of Bama Letyone Tup dated 30.5.39 reprinted in Dobama.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid. p. 163.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid. It is unclear if he had had contact with Japanese agents in Burma or not.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., pp. 161, 163. Older politicians involved in the Freedom Bloc, such as Dr Ba Maw, and several others were arrested as well as "...at least two thousands [sic] Thakins". The Freedom Bloc consisted of the Dobama, the Sinyetha Party of Dr Ba Maw and some other groups in a partial coalition.
by the Japanese, hoping that their support of the Japanese Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere which promised "Asia for the Asians" would deliver independence. When the Japanese invaded Burma in January 1942, the Thirty Comrades accompanied them, fighting the fleeing British as they retreated to India and recruiting as they went to form the Burma Independence Army (B.I.A) (later the Burma Defence Army - B.D.A.).

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CHAPTER 5: WORLD WAR II AND ITS AFTERMATH: THE END OF EMPIRE

The ethnic aspirations and interests, so painstakingly separated and institutionalised by the British now reached the logical conclusion of their polarisation. While the Burman majority initially believed that under the Japanese they would achieve independence, the peripheral peoples and the delta Karens, who formed the nucleus of the Burma Army, fought for the British against the Burmans and the Japanese. As the British retreated racial violence, directed at Indians and Chinese, wracked the delta and Arakan, but the worst communal violence, including massacres, occurred between Burmans and Karens. U Maung Maung notes that the two communities were

Excessively sensitive and conscious of their weaknesses, each fearing the other...The Burmans suspected that the British officers had deliberately left these well-trained and well-armed Karen soldiers to organize resistance...The Karens...felt that they were sure to be exterminated by

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As far as the Karens were concerned the massacres reinforced their pro-British stance. The war was a "shattering experience" for the Karens:

They suddenly found that their former patrons, the missionaries and the British, had gone from the scene and that the Burmans, under the tutelage of the Japanese, held political ascendancy.

Chao Tzang Yawngwhe writes that for all peripheral peoples, the war "...demonstrated with terrifying clarity...the danger of putting one's destiny in the hands of others". This was a new political development for peoples whose destiny had for centuries been in the hands of the larger dominant plains civilizations and must have affected their responses to the idea of independence and their places in the new state.

While the Burmans saw their interest lying with the Japanese

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163 Maung Maung, Burmese Nationalist Movements, p. 89. These were the reasons for the intensely violent outbreaks, "particularly in Myaungmya district, during the B.I.A. period". c.f. Selth, The Anti-Fascist Resistance..., p. 7. Tensions continued through 1943.


the peripheral peoples saw their own elsewhere, most fighting with the Allies, although the Shans, in an attempt to remain uninvolved, came to their own arrangement with the Japanese. The sawbwas submitted formally, requesting that in exchange for loyalty to the new regime they be allowed to run their own States as before, and that all troops be withdrawn from their territory, although the Japanese gave two Shan States to Siam.\footnote{Chao Tzang Yawnghwe, \textit{Ibid.} pp.83-4. The author describes the effects of fighting by British and Chinese armies and the Burma Rifles in defence of the Burma Road on the local population up to May 1942 and notes that Allied bombing continued through the war. Kengtung and Maung Pan were given to Siam. c.f. Silverstein, \textit{Burmese Politics}, p. 54. c.f. Ba Maw, \textit{Breakthrough in Burma}, pp. 200-202. He describes the Shans' behaviour as "the good old rule" of accepting fate and negotiating the best terms.} This is a time-honoured way for peripheral peoples caught in powerful states' wars to survive. Burmese troops were kept away for the duration of the Japanese occupation, although the Chinese Kuomintang (K.M.T.) army, which had given way before the Japanese, operated as bandit bands throughout the Shan and Kachin Hills and the Japanese were called in to protect people from them.\footnote{Selth, \textit{The Anti-Fascist Resistance}, pp. 8-9.} The Japanese transferred authority over the Shan States to the Ba Maw puppet government in 1943 after it protested against its separation from the rest of Burma.\footnote{Silverstein, \textit{Burmese Politics}, p. 55.} The Japanese stopped short of the Chin and Kachin Hills in 1942, never attempting to occupy and control these areas, and these regions remained largely free of
Japanese and Burmese troops, while the Chinese army did not reach the Chin Hills.

The Allies used minority guerilla forces to fight the Japanese. The British Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.) had begun to recruit them in 1941 before the outbreak of the Pacific War. They had organized "'left behind'" groups to sabotage the enemy if the colony was lost and had begun recruiting "tribal levies" under British officers before the invasion. The tribal levies and the regular army were told to hide their weapons and wait as the British retreated across the Chindwin River, but the Karens of the 2nd Burma Rifles marched out to the Indian border and re-formed as a fighting unit, retaining their old regimental identity. They were joined by Kachins and Chins on their forays into Burma and

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172 Ibid., p. 12. J. Falla, True Love and Bartholemew: Rebels..... p. 23. Each man was given "...his rifle, fifty rounds and three months pay, told to go to his village, wait for our return".

volunteers who had come through the hills, mainly Karens but also Burmans. On the north and west frontiers the "...Chin and Kachin Levies formed the front line of British arms against the Japanese".174

The Allies organized resistance movements among "...Kachins, Chins, Karens and other hillmen" which grew in strength through the Japanese occupation,175 but confusion and conflict arose which were to have long-term repercussions on the hill peoples. The activities of the Allies were unco-ordinated and although the border areas were officially under the control of the exiled Governor in Simla, they were actually controlled by the military, whose Supreme Commander from 1943 was Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten.176 The term control seems inappropriate, due to competition to recruit partisans among the hill peoples by the clandestine and paramilitary organizations of the Chinese, British and the U.S. regular

Government January 1944 to 31 August 1946 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1983) p. 1060. The 2nd Burma Rifles were later temporarily split up to become reconnaissance patrols for Orde Wingate's Chindits.

174 Ibid., p. 1060. This situation continued until the "frontier war" ended late in 1944 when the Allies launched their offensive into Burma.


176 Selth, The Anti-Fascist Resistance..., p. 14. Mountbatten put those areas which became "liberated" under the control of the Civil Affairs Service (Burma) (C.A.S.(B)), with which Governor Dorman-Smith was then obliged to act in concert.
armies, all of whom were responsible to different offices and had their own separate chains of command and administrations. These groups operated secretly and due to "professional jealousies" their functions overlapped or perhaps worked counter to each other and were the subject of complaint from Generals Slim and Stilwell. S.O.E. was put in command of these groups by Mountbatten in late 1944 but secrecy remained a problem. The resulting fragmentation of effort and aims among peoples recruited specifically as minorities to fight the Burmans brought new forces into the post-war political era, changing the perceptions of the non-state peoples about their relationships with the Burmans and their power to assert themselves politically.

The Allied organizations stirred up racial antagonism in order to use minority groups against the Burmese regime and the S.O.E. guerilla movement was based on this hostility as much

177 Ibid., p. 15. There were at one time "at least twelve" of these organizations operating in Burma, controlled variously from London, Washington or locally.

178 Ibid., pp. 15-16. U.S. General Stilwell was trying to work with the K.M.T. armies. Policies which went counter to government policy were also kept secret.

179 Personal narrative of F.S.V. Donnison in Tinker, Burma: The Struggle for Independence, pp. 999-1012, p. 1000-1. Donnison describes Colin Mackenzie of S.O.E. and his disagreements with the Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Maj. Gen. Pearce, over co-operation with Aung San's B.N.A., the result of which was that Mackenzie became "ever more secretive" and S.O.E. did not let Gen. Pearce know plans until they had been approved from "higher military authority".
as on loyalty to the British. Cruikshank in his official history of S.O.E. records that traditional racial enmity was encouraged, as was the belief that on the Japanese defeat the returning British regime would reward those loyal to it during the War. The Karens, who had been closely identified with the British over their entire occupation of Burma were particularly vulnerable to this kind of blandishment. Their hopes for their own state and their fear of the Burmans were simultaneously raised to a high pitch and then after the war, expected to subside as the British agenda changed.

The Burmans had quickly discovered that the promises of independence by the Japanese were not genuine and that they had exchanged one set of imperial masters for another. A resistance movement was formed, initially by some anti-Japanese communist Thakins and disparate, unconnected groups across Burma. In 1942 communist Thakins Thein Pe and Tin Shwe, with the approval of Aung San and Thakin Than Tun had walked through Arakan to India to offer their assistance to

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181 Thein Pe Myint, Wartime Traveler (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1984), p. 132. Thein Pe was told in 1942 by Aung San that "...he had feigned alliance with the Japanese...and...would turn against [them] one day".

the British in resisting the Japanese.\textsuperscript{183} From 1944 this resistance movement grew rapidly in size and functioned in a unified way, with the Anti-Fascist Organisation (A.F.O., later the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League or A.F.P.F.L.) being formed to assist the Allies.\textsuperscript{184} This group's manifesto, clandestinely circulated, stated among its goals equal opportunity for all races, protection of the economic, social and political interests of minorities and called for unity among various groups and parties in the country.\textsuperscript{185}

In effect there were two resistance movements which finally joined together to fight the Japanese when the B.N.A. rose in rebellion in March, 1945. Selth describes the Japanese and the British as powers using two different ethnic bases to fight a

\textsuperscript{183} Thein Pe Myint, Wartime Traveler is an account of their journey and subsequent attempts to convince Dorman-Smith that they were not Japanese spies, their work with the Chinese broadcasting propaganda into Burma and their acceptance by Mountbatten, who agreed to work with and drop arms to the A.F.P.F.L.

\textsuperscript{184} Steinberg, Burma: A Socialist Nation, p. 32. c.f. Silverstein, Burmese Politics, pp. 60-61. The Resistance really got under way, according to Aung San in August 1944 when he and communist Thakins agreed to form the A.F.P.F.L.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid. pp. 61-62. The A.F.P.F.L. organized guerilla forces to act in concert with the B.N.A. in a future uprising and two Karens were given high office in the organization to demonstrate hoped-for unity and trust. c.f. Thakin Nu, Burma Under the Japanese, pp. 98-99, 101-102. Nu gives accounts of members of the government, including himself, Than Tun, Aung San and others visiting and talking to Karen communities and leaders, such as San C. Po in the interests of Karen and Burman reconciliation.
racial conflict, each promising independence and protection to its own supporters, but equally unwilling to fulfil those promises. In other words, they made use of peoples to further their own interests, with no concern for the future consequences for those groups. This period was one of heightened racial consciousness and arrogance in Europe as well as in Asia, and Dr Ba Maw points out that the Burmese deceived themselves about the Japanese. The fact that both races were Asian "...meant very much emotionally".

The Burman majority had been easily manipulated by the Japanese through this and the increasing desperation of their struggle to gain independence. The peripheral peoples, who had not experienced the same colonisation, fought the Japanese in the expectation that their own interests would be safeguarded after the War.

The experience of guerilla fighting and the new phenomenon of dozens of armed bands led to disorder in those hill areas which had not been administered for years. The problem of turning the activities of guerilla groups, both of hill peoples and Burmans, to reconstruction and achieving a successful transition to "order and security" had already

187 Ibid. As Selth notes, they "...seem to have been betrayed".
188 Dr Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, p. 183. "The Burmese...had their own notions, one of which was that the Japanese were just Asians helping to liberate Asians and nothing more."
become a matter of consideration for the British before the end of the war.\textsuperscript{189} A peaceful transition and disarming of guerillas and B.N.A. forces was not achieved, leaving potential rebels well armed and dissatisfied - a disastrously destabilizing legacy to bequeath the new state. The young nationalists of all the potentially conflicting groups had gained "...first-hand experience of leading their own peoples...[and had learnt]...the potential of armed struggle".\textsuperscript{190}

During the Japanese occupation the A.F.P.F.L. and the Baw Maw government attempted to rebuild bridges of trust and communication with the minority groups and to placate the Karens after the bloodshed of 1942.\textsuperscript{191} Various Ministers were sent to villages to make friendly contact, efforts were made to promote national culture, the Karens and Shans were given Privy Council representation, Shans were recruited to the B.N.A. and some B.I.A. leaders of groups which had committed atrocities were executed.\textsuperscript{192} A Karen battalion was organized

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{189} Tinker, Burma: The Struggle for Independence, p. 226.
  \item \textsuperscript{190} M. Smith, Burma: Insurgency..., p. 64.
  \item \textsuperscript{191} Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 62. The B.N.A. commissioned two Karen officers and they became involved with the highest A.F.P.F.L. councils.
  \item \textsuperscript{192} Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 60. c.f. J.S. Furnivall, "Twilight in Burma: Reconquest and Crisis", Pacific Affairs, XXII, 1 (March 1949),
\end{itemize}
by Aung San, assisted by the Karen Central Organization, and fought alongside Burman battalions in the delta. It is probable that the appeal to race and unity in the propaganda of the Baw Maw government, made minorities distrustful, but Silverstein claims that the experience of working together in the A.F.P.F.L. "...helped eliminate and destroy some of the age-old communal barriers and erect new bridges of unity." With the defeat of the Japanese and the return of the British momentum gathered rapidly in the push to gain full independence. Burman nationalist demands quickly outpaced British control and minority, particularly Karen, aspirations. The first post-war challenge to the A.F.P.F.L., whose leaders had been promoted to positions of national leadership by the Japanese, was to retain their positions in the face of hostility from many returning British civil officers and the Governor Dorman-Smith. The second was to achieve a peace-

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Furnivall claims that the fact that Aung San and Than Tun had married Christian sisters gave them a great deal of influence among Karens.


Ibid., p. 63.

Tinker, *The Union of Burma*, p. 16. It was only by the direct order and unilateral action of Mountbatten that they were not all treated as traitors.

c.f. Personal Narrative of The Ven. George Appleton, Tinker, *Burma: The Struggle for Independence*, p. 986. In 1946 Dorman-Smith was only with difficulty dissuaded from the disastrous move of trying Aung San for the murder of a headman during the War.

c.f. Donnison, pp. 1000-1 (this volume), Dealing with the A.F.P.F.L. could lead them to demand an "unjustifiable share in political power" - this was
time unity of political purpose in its pursuit of independence for all Burma's peoples as well and its own disparate membership. Aung San and his colleagues tried to consolidate the feeling of common victory over the Japanese between Burmans and minorities, but their experiences of the war and understandings of why and on whose side they had fought were not easily reconcilable. A group of Karens began pressing the British for their own state, expecting favourable consideration after loyal service, and refusing to deal with the A.F.P.F.L.

Governor Dorman-Smith was determined to implement the 1945 White Paper, which restored the pre-war political pattern and planned to restore the economy in the same form, dominated by the same foreign firms as before the War. He had special control over the Frontier Areas and was not prepared to include them in plans for a future independent Burma until they "...signified their desire to join their territory to a commonly held belief among the returning British.


197 Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 75. Dorman-Smith actually changed the pattern back to the pre-1925 model, prompting the Shan sawbwas to constitute their own Executive Council as the pre-war one had been abolished.

198 Donnison, Burma, p. 131. c.f. J.S. Furnivall's, "Twilight in Burma" for a discussion of the government's economic plans.
they "...signified their desire to join their territory to Burma proper", priority being on reconstruction not political change. Dorman-Smith's determination to protect the interests of the minorities as he saw them, proved untenable as the protest campaign by the Burmans mounted so rapidly that by the time he was relieved of his commission in June 1946 disorder had spread "...throughout the country and...the likelihood of rebellion increased". The British decided to remove him and to co-operate with the A.F.P.F.L.

The threat of rebellion was real, due to the numbers of arms and ammunition remaining in Burma after the War, and the numbers of armed men unwilling to give up the power of the gun. General Aung San had formed many of his former B.N.A. soldiers into the Peoples Volunteer Organization (P.V.O.), his own private army. Thakin Soe's Red Flag communists had withdrawn from the A.F.P.F.L. and launched attacks against the

199 Silverstein, Burmese Politics, pp. 65, 74-79. Dorman-Smith was determined to keep A.F.P.F.L. participation in his Executive Council to a minimum and managed to detach two members to sit on it, but most members were either pre-war politicians or unknowns. The A.F.P.F.L. refused to participate except on their own terms which were rejected.

200 T.L. Hughes, Personal Narrative, Tinker (ed), Burma: The Struggle for Independence, p. 1021. After his interview in London with the Secretary of State for India and Burma, Pethick-Lawrence, Dorman-Smith told Hughes "'I've been sacked'".

201 Furnivall, "Twilight in Burma", p. 18. These men were Aung San's insurance against British refusal to grant independence, and at his signal would rise to become a "well-armed national rebellion".
organized by Aung San's A.F.P.F.L. At this point, in 1946, a Karen delegation traveled to London to press their opposing case for their own state. It became clear to the British government that despite their policies and Dorman-Smith's preferences the tide of Burman nationalism could neither be pushed back nor held still.202

A new Governor Sir Hubert Rance, who had worked closely with Mountbatten during the War, was appointed in September 1946, and from this point British policy was reversed. Within three weeks he formed a new Executive Council, with a majority of A.F.P.F.L. members. Aung San, who as "...an official counsellor to the Governor, became deputy chairman was given the Department of Defence and External Affairs."203 From this point power was "...in the hands of the A.F.P.F.L."204 and the Burman majority, led by the A.F.P.F.L. seized the running.

202 Donnison, Burma, pp. 132-3. Donnison stresses that Britain's reasons for not co-operating with the organization earlier was that they were not convinced the A.F.P.F.L. spoke for a majority of Burmese. They became convinced that it did and also realized that it had no real organized political opposition.

C.f. Tinker, The Union of Burma, pp. 17,20-1. The police also went on strike over their "derisorily" low pay.

203 Donnison, Ibid., p. 133.

Tinker, Ibid., p. 21. Five days later on 2nd October, the General Strike was called off.

204 Ibid.
For the first time since 1885 the Burmans were in a position to achieve their political goals. In November 1946 the A.F.P.F.L. demanded elections with full independence to be achieved before the end of January 1948, with the inclusion of the Frontier Areas (the hills) in the election.\(^{205}\) Ominously, a serious crack appeared in the A.F.P.F.L., which had been held together by its quest for independence. Aung San, who had distanced himself from the communists in favour of a nationalist approach, passed over Than Tun in his cabinet appointments. He and his communist supporters either resigned or were sacked and withdrew into opposition.\(^{206}\) Members of the Socialist Party, an affiliate of the A.F.P.F.L., moved into positions which had previously been held by the C.P.B.\(^{207}\) A delegation led by Aung San traveled to London to participate in talks with the British Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee, gaining agreement to all their demands except the

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205 Donnison, *Burma*, p. 133. The demands included:
1) elections for a constituent assembly in April 1947
2) elections to include frontier area representatives
3) the British to proclaim before 31/1/47 that full independence would be achieved before 31/1/48.

206 Mya Maung, *The Burma Road to Poverty*, p. 69. Both communist factions were formally expelled from the A.F.P.F.L. in late 1946.
M. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency...*, p. 66. The split was precipitated by decision of the League to take up its positions on the Governor's Executive Council.

Donnison, *Burma*, p. 140. The Socialist Party had been formed in September 1945, including many members who had been members of Dobama and many "intellectuals of the independence movement", including former fellow students of the Thakins.
automatic inclusion of the Frontier Areas in an independent Burma. As Donnison notes, the British found it difficult (although not impossible) to concede this.\textsuperscript{208} They therefore insisted that conditions for the inclusion of the minorities must be "acceptable" to those minorities, although they had devised no alternative plan, assuming that "... unification would take place".\textsuperscript{209} The Attlee-Aung San Agreement signed in January 1947 recognized Aung San's cabinet as the interim government.

Attention now (belatedly) turned to the minority peoples in a bid to gain their co-operation in uniting their areas with Burma proper. Plainly many of the delta Karens were unhappy with the turn of events, but they were not united. The Karen Central Organization (K.C.O.), an A.F.P.F.L. affiliate, split after the death of San C. Po in 1946, forming two opposing organizations, one of which, the Karen Youth Organization (K.Y.O.) remained in Aung San's cabinet, while the other, the K.N.U. demanded "...a separate administration".\textsuperscript{210} While both these organizations had branches throughout the Karen districts the K.N.U. predominantly represented the delta Karens. A third group, supportive of Karen inclusion in an

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., p. 135.

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., pp. 135-6. Joint efforts would be made by the British and the Burmese to gain minorities' consent.

\textsuperscript{210} Tinker, The Union of Burma, pp. 23-4. c.f. Mya Maung, The Burma Road to Poverty, p. 70. c.f. Trager, Burma: From Kingdom..., p. 103.
independent Burma refused to join any Karen faction.\textsuperscript{211} The Karens sent observers, but took no part in the Panglong Conference of February 1947 at which the interim Burmese Government, represented by Aung San, and the British Government were represented.

This was a crucial meeting which led to the mutual trust and confidence between Aung San and the minorities on which the negotiations and agreements leading to the constitutional comprises of the Union of Burma were founded. Shan, Kachin and Chin leaders attended, and according to Mya Maung the Kayah sent a delegation which did not participate until the last day of the conference.\textsuperscript{212} Others attending included A.F.P.F.L. leaders and U Saw. The Shan, Kachin and Chin leaders who had already agreed between themselves on their demands were addressed by Aung San, who

Allayed their fears of potential Burmese dominance by promising that the Executive Council had no intention of interfering in local administration or usurping local autonomy.\textsuperscript{213}

\textsuperscript{211} Trager, \textit{Burma From Kingdom...}, p. 103. Among these were San C. Po’s daughter, Mrs Ba Maung Chain, the first woman member of a Burmese cabinet. This group attempted to mediate with mutinous Karen factions, with notable lack of success.

\textsuperscript{212} Silverstein, \textit{Burmese Politics}, p. 104. The British Undersecretary of State for Dominion Affairs came from England for the occasion. Mya Maung is not totally reliable in this area, citing on p. 70 that Karen demands made elsewhere were made at Panglong. \textit{Burma Road to Poverty}.

\textsuperscript{213} Silverstein, \textit{Burmese Politics}, p. 106. Shan leader Sao Saimong Mangrai later wrote that Aung San’s straightforward talk and specific promises won the Shans’ support.
The pivotal nature of Aung San’s role in winning the support of the leaders cannot be overstated. It was a personal triumph, in that it was his own vision of a united Burma in which all ethnic groups were equally important which they accepted, and the leaders responded to his pragmatic and straightforward manner.214 A Shan leader wrote later that all minority leaders found that he treated them as “equals and colleagues”.215 The Panglong Agreement of 12th February agreed to establish a Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples (S.C.O.U.H.P.) which would appoint a Counsellor to the Governor to deal with the Frontier Areas and who would be appointed to the Governor’s Executive Council.216 Full internal administrative autonomy and the establishment of a Kachin State were agreed to, the citizens of the Frontier Areas were promised equal rights and privileges with other citizens. The Kachin Hills and Chin Hills were promised their financial relationships would be on a similar footing to that of the Shan States.

214 Chao Tzang Yawnghwe, The Shan of Burma, p. 100. The Shan, Kachin and Chin leaders liked Aung San because they trusted him and he could "...get things done". Further, he did not believe in the "...concept of the Burmese as a conquering and superior race". c.f. Mya Maung, The Burma Road to Poverty, p. 71. Agreement was due to "...the personalities and pragmatism of both General Aung San and the minority leaders".

215 Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 106. This leader was Sao Saimong Mangrai.

216 Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 108. The Shan sawbwa Sao Samhtun of Mongpawn was appointed to this position, with a Kachin and a Chin chieftain appointed as his two deputies.
During March and April 1947 the Frontier Areas Committee\(^{217}\) took the evidence of the peoples who had not participated at the Panglong Conference. Its brief was to give equal weight to the opinion of Burma proper and the Frontier Areas and to ascertain "'...the best method of associating the Frontier peoples with the working out of the new constitution for Burma'".\(^{218}\) This key phrase indicated that there was only one possible outcome: minority peoples would be included in Burma and the process was to go ahead according to the timetable agreed between Attlee and Aung San.\(^{219}\) Furnivall notes that the numerous submissions reflected the problems of administration in the frontier areas, which "'...are complicated not only by territorial dispersion but by a diversity of political outlook throughout the whole region".\(^{220}\) It was clearly no easy matter to gain any form of

\(^{217}\) Furnivall, The Governance of Modern Burma, p. 95. The Committee, also known as the Rees-Williams Committee after its chairman, included four "Burma members" and four "Frontier Area Members", two of whom were A.F.P.F.L. members, one a K.Y.O. Karen, a Shan sawbwa, a Kachin and Chin chieftain and a K.N.U. member.

\(^{218}\) Ibid., p. 109. He cites the Aung San-Attlee Agreement, p. 4.

\(^{219}\) Tinker, The Union of Burma, p. 24. The Committee conducted "a whirlwind enquiry".

\(^{220}\) Furnivall, The Governance of Modern Burma, p. 96. This tendency to political fragmentation was reflected in the political fragmentation of the
consensus among the competing interests of those peoples being catapulted from isolation under the British via a bloody World War into a new political arena of which they had no experience or complete understanding.

The Committee signed its report on 24th April, making recommendations regarding the boundaries of component parts of an envisaged new Federal Union of Burma and on appropriate parliamentary representation. The Report noted the desire of all "...Hill States for the fullest possible autonomy with a right to secede from the Union at any time".221

Elections to the Constituent Assembly were held in April 1947, boycotted by the communists and the K.N.U.222 Aung San's coalition won by a large majority, due to wide acceptance and approval, but also due to the lack of cohesive or effective opposition.223 On the 27th May a convention of the A.F.P.F.L.

Burmans.


222 Ibid., p. 97.
Seats were allocated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burma Proper</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federated Shan States</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachin Hills</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chin Hills (incl. Arakan Hill Tract)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salween District</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somra Tract</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homalin Subdivision</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenni</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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</table>

223 Tinker, The Union of Burma, p. 26. The Communist Party boycotted the election, but seven individual communist candidates were returned, while the A.F.P.F.L. won 248 seats.
approved a proposed constitution which defined all the previous components of British Burma and the Karenni States as being included in Burma. It also defined the prerequisites for autonomous status within the Union, although these were only applicable to the Federated Shan States, the Karenni States, the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills District and must be determined by mutual agreement.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 97-8. These, listed in paragraph 3, included a defined geographical area, unity of language different from Burmese, unity of culture community of economic interests, some economic self-sufficiency and the desire to maintain its distinct identity as a separate unit.} This was a clear rebuff to Karen aspirations for their own state and was probably inevitable due to their boycott of the process and their refusal to talk to the A.F.P.F.L. It was also the result of territorial claims which were not deemed realistic by anyone else.\footnote{Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 46. The Karens claims disregarded the fact that they were in the minority in the territory they claimed, the majority were Burmans and/or Mons.} In the proposed constitution Karen interests and those of other national minorities were addressed in guarantees of human, national and cultural rights, freedom of association, cultural autonomy and due representation in the legislature. A national minority was defined as

\begin{quote}
A group of citizens who differ from the majority in race, language, culture and historic traditions, and form at least one-tenth of the population of the Unit concerned.\footnote{Ibid., p. 98. Paragraph 7 of the constitution.}
\end{quote}

In an attempt to placate the Karens a Karen Affairs Council was established "...in order to aid and advise the Union..."
Government on matters relating the Karens".227

The constitution was brought before the Constituent Assembly for debate and passed unanimously on 24th September.228 However, while the Assembly was in recess on 19th July 1947 Aung San and the majority of his cabinet were assassinated.229 Tragically it transpired that Burma had lost the one flexible and pragmatic cross-ethnic leader who could bring unity among its disparate peoples and their fragmented politics. His successor Thakin Nu steered Burma through the final negotiations with the minorities and the British and the Union of Burma became an independent state outside the British Commonwealth on 4th January 1948. The constitutional settlement of the Karen issue was left to be finalised until after independence.230

227 Ibid.
228 Ibid., p. 99
229 Tinker, The Union of Burma, p. 29. While U Saw and several other "henchmen" were convicted of the assassinations, Kin Oung in Who Killed Aung San? (Bangkok: White Lotus Co., 1993), claims that the deaths were traceable to a conspiracy by Generals Ne Win and Aung Gyi who had convinced U Saw that Aung San had been responsible for an attempt on his life which they had masterminded with Aung San's death in mind.

230 Furnivall, The Governance of Modern Burma, pp. 104-6. First steps to create a Karen State were taken in 1951, making the Salween District the nucleus, after which in 1952 more areas adjacent to the Salween were included. The Karen State Council first met in 1952 and took over areas of policy administration, although the Karen rebellion
According to Chao Tzang Yawngwhe the Shan and Frontier leaders were "disorientated" by Aung San's death, bewildered by the process of framing the constitution, but were "...made to understand that ...[the constitution] was only an interim one...implying that whatever changes that were desired could be made after independence". In this they were to be grievously disappointed.

The Union as finally constituted recognized the Shan, Kachin and Karenni (later Kayah) States as "constituent

had not been eliminated. The Karen State was allotted 5 seats in the Chamber of Nationalities.

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232 Smith, Burma, p. 79. c.f. Furnivall, The Governance, pp. 100-01. The Shan State would have a 50 man State Council, and 25 members in each of the Union parliament's chambers. The 33 hereditary sawbwas would retain their traditional powers and could not be removed and the State was guaranteed a right of secession after ten years.

233 Ibid. Smith, p. 79 and Furnivall, p. 104. The Kachin bargained away their right of secession in exchange for the Burman majority areas including Bhamo and Myitkyina being included in their state. The State had a 19 member Kachin Council, half of whom were non-Kachins. Administration was mostly conducted by the local chieftains helped by civil servants acting as Assistant Residents.

234 Smith, Burma, p. 79. The Karenni states were reconstituted as one with same right of secession as the Shan State. c.f. Furnivall, The Governance, pp. 106-7. The constitution had made provision for this state to be merged with the Karen State, but according to Furnivall the "invasion" of their territory by K.N.D.O. rebels caused the Kayah to demand a separate state and have its name changed to Kayah. c.f. F.K. Lehman, "Ethnic Categories in Burma and
units of the Union. The Chins were granted a Special Division, while there was no separate area for Mons or Arakanese (Rakhines), as their areas were regarded as part of Burma proper.

The Union of Burma found itself struggling to hold itself together from its inception as it faced communist and ethnic insurgencies. The ideal of Aung San's vision was not obtainable without the visionary - the rhetoric of national unity remained the same, but the understanding of the means by which it could be achieved had changed in Rangoon. Thakin Nu had no understanding of the agreement between Aung San and the minorities or of the philosophies and approach of Aung San, to which the minority leaders had responded favourably. His character, beliefs, political ideology and Burman-Buddhist nationalism were to make a strong imprint on the state, making it one on which nobody had bargained and in which minorities felt their identities, however fluid they may have been under past circumstances, under threat from nationalising pressures.

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235 Furnivall, p. 107. The Chins had not sought a separate state and although included in Burma proper had their own Division, within which their Minister for Chin Affairs had control of educational and cultural affairs. The system of hereditary chieftains and headmen was abolished and a system of modernised administration was established, including elected councils and headmen.
CHAPTER 6: 1948-1962 - "MULTI-COLOURED INSURGENCIES" AND BURMA'S STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE.

This chapter will examine the vicissitudes of the Union of Burma during the period 1948 to 1962 when power was seized by General Ne Win. The communist rebellions, which broke out first will be outlined as they are an essential element in the near-disintegration of the state they sought to control. The Karen and other smaller ethnic rebellions will be discussed, but the Karen was by far the largest and most dangerous of these during the first years of independence. The development of the state into a Burman-centred centralizing state, contrary to the spirit of Panglong will be discussed, with particular focus on how these policies impinged on the minorities who had remained loyal to the state during the civil war. The government's attacks on their autonomy and their political, religious and cultural identities and diversities were responsible for their rejection of the state.

The communist rebellion severely tested the Union whose economy and infrastructure were still devastated by the War, and all of its resources were diverted to the immediate task of ensuring its survival. Thakin Soe's Red Flag communists were already in rebellion when independence was proclaimed.²³⁶

²³⁶ Smith, Burma, p. 87. By the end of 1947 Arakan faced Red Flags, Rakhine and Mujahid rebellions. The Mujahids were fighting to join the newly formed Islamic State of (East) Pakistan.
Than Tun's C.P.B. rebelled in March 1948.\(^{237}\) The P.V.O. had split in January 1948 into two factions - Yellow Band pro-Socialists and White Band pro-Communists, both calling for C.P.B.-government talks. Significantly, while the C.P.B. refused to talk to the government, Prime Minister Thakin Nu refused to talk to anyone who was in revolt,\(^{238}\) setting the pattern which still continues in Burma. In the absence of talks the P.V.O. White Band went underground in support of the C.P.B. in July 1948 and many of the Union Military Police (U.M.P.) and sections of the Army defected by August.\(^{239}\) Heavy fighting raged between the insurgents and loyal troops, the Union being saved at this point by the loyal Karen, Kachin and Chin battalions, who gradually recaptured lost territory and towns. By December the communist rebellion had been largely checked.\(^{240}\) The insurgents had access to arms and ammunition hidden by Aung San, the war thus providing means

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\(^{238}\) Ibid., p. 108.
\(^{239}\) Ibid., pp. 108-9. The 1st and 3rd Burma Rifles and one battalion of the 6th Burma Rifles went over to join the insurgency, these defections including high ranking and experienced men.
\(^{240}\) Tinker, *The Union of Burma*, pp. 36-8. In December Than Tun and Ghoshal had to flee their headquarters and 3,000 of their troops surrendered, while the Kachin and Karen troops had been ruthlessly raiding communist villages, while many P.V.O.s reverted to dacoity in the countryside. Donnison, *Burma*, pp. 144-5. The insurgency was helped by the outbreak of the Karen rebellion.
and expertise for expressing revolutionary or anarchic tendencies never available in the past.

It should be noted that there are two types of "ethnic rebels" under discussion during this period. The first being those who had decided by 1947 that in the event of the failure of their demands they would rebel against an independent state. The K.N.U. and its armed wing the Karen National Defence Organization (K.N.D.O.) were the largest and proved the most dangerous of this group, although a Mon separatist movement developed which made joint demands with the K.N.U. and in Arakan a group of Rakhines rebelled in support of their own state while Mujahids rebelled in an attempt to be ceded to Pakistan.

As discussed above, the Karens had closely identified with the British against the Burmans, and some had been petitioning for their own state since 1917. They expected the political

241 Smith, Burma, pp. 74, 83. After their failed mission to London in August 1946, they decided they would have to take their own action.

242 Ibid., pp. 85-6. The K.N.U., itself established in February 1947, began arms training in the delta villages in early 1947 and in July inaugurated the K.N.D.O.

243 Ibid., pp. 86, 114. Smith states that the Mon Freedom League and its armed Mon National Defence Organization, established in August 1947 were copied from the K.N.U. The K.N.U. and two Mon groups agreed to claim a joint Mon-Karen Independent State in those parts of Tenasserim they were both claiming.

244 S.C. Po, Burma and the Karens, p. 78. Po cites D.M. Smeaton "We have here a little people—probably under a million in all—who aspire to keep
pay-off for their loyalty and service at independence. The Karen National Union (K.N.U.) refused to accept that the British would let them down and refused to deal with the A.F.P.F.L., sending futile and unanswered demands to London. This stance, the Christianity of their leaders and the K.N.U.'s boycott of the election and negotiations on the constitution heightened communal tensions and "...racial antagonism rose" during 1947. The success of the minority battalions in routing mainly Burman communist insurgents exacerbated racial tensions, confirming to many Burmans perceptions of Karens as anti-Burman British tools.

The embattled government anticipated Karen rebellion and by the end of 1948 had established over a hundred local auxiliary defence groups, or Sitwundans, under General Ne Win, to bolster its armed forces, which had lost numbers of troops to communist rebels. The state only just survived the Karen rebellion which broke out in January 1949, as the Karen...
battalions defected *en masse* with one Kachin battalion*, taking with them all their wartime arms and experience.*

The K.N.U. was not the only Karen organization; Karens were not politically united and were not all antagonistic to the state. The Karen Youth Organization (K.Y.O.) believed that the only future for the delta Karens was inside the Union, although they argued for the right of secession. Their major weakness was their inability to organize in the eastern hills and this, added to the K.N.U.'s determination to be the only Karen political voice and its contacts throughout the Karen army battalions meant that the voice of moderate Karens was drowned out. The K.N.U. refused to recognize the

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*249* Ibid., p. 92. c.f. Donnison, *Burma*, pp. 144-5. The communist rebellion was "largely mastered" by the time the Karens rebelled and some of the P.V.O. switched over to join the government side against the Karens.

*250* Smith, *Burma*, pp. 116-7. At the election boycotted by the K.N.U., twenty Karen Youth Organization members, two independents and two from Karenni were elected to the 26 Karen seats.

*251* Ibid. They were strongly nationalistic, demanding language and cultural protection and were not an A.F.P.F.L. front, despite their affiliation with them.

*252* Ibid., p. 86. The K.N.U. had an extensive network of underground contacts in the armed services. They also killed the "unofficial" Karen representative who had signed the constitution.
legitimacy of the state, preparing for rebellion throughout 1948.\textsuperscript{253} After briefly seizing Moulmein September 1949, the K.N.D.O. (aided by Mon M.N.D.O.) handed it back to Union troops,\textsuperscript{254} but they were almost successful in destroying the state. They did not have a united front strategy with any other rebels, so were not in a position to take over the Union.

Some Karen sub-groups also rebelled. The Kayah (Karenni), became embroiled in a civil war among themselves and when the Karen Rebellion broke out one of these factions, which were split along Baptist-Catholic lines under two opposing sawbwas, supported the K.N.U.\textsuperscript{255} A group of Pao in the Shan State also

\textsuperscript{253} Smith, Burma, p. 111. The K.N.D.O. took over "hundreds of district and village administrations" and distributed arms and raided the Maubin Treasury. Relations were inflamed by dacoity on both sides unrelated to political developments and some Karen militia operated independently.

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., pp. 112-3. The 2nd Kachin Rifles took Moulmein back peacefully from Karens who had probably seized it to take delivery by sea of arms expected from British supporters whose plans had gone awry.

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid., p. 112. Fighting had broken out after the U.M.P. had killed a separatist leader. Rangoon backed one leader while the other went into rebellion. Both these leaders, Smith notes, were Force 106 members during the War.
went into rebellion in 1949, transforming into a rebel movement against Shan sawbwa rule.\textsuperscript{256}

The other category of "ethnic rebels" were those initially loyal to the new state, but who found their autonomy over their own affairs under attack. Interferences from the Burman-dominated state were of an unprecedented and unexpected kind. The government, having narrowly survived a massive onslaught of rebellion, aimed to unite the disparate peoples of Burma into one people within a nation-state and this political goal marked the final disjunction of the traditional patterns of interaction between the hill peoples and the plains civilization. They were for the first time impinged upon by centralizing government, Burmanization programmes, Buddhist missionaries and the demands of the nation-state. The reality was not what they envisaged when the Panglong Agreement was signed. The reservoir of good will created by Aung San dried up during this period and with it went the desire to stay within the Union.

The disparity between the Panglong Agreement and the state which actually developed can be explained by two factors. The first factor is the government's reaction to the near disintegration brought about by the combined rebellions. The

\textsuperscript{256} C.T. Yawngewe, The Shan of Burma, p. 145. The Pao rebels are seen by Shan nationalists as "hand in glove" with the Burmese army. In 1975 the Pao movement joined the C.P.B. There is no political unity among Pao, some of whom are seen to be "in league" with Rangoon.
second factor is Prime Minister U Nu, Aung San's successor, whose vision of the state bore no resemblance to that of his predecessor. He believed in a centralized state and his religious piety and Burman-Buddhist world-view led him to try to impose the Burman-Buddhist culture on the minorities while attacking their constitutional autonomy. He did not comprehend Aung San's vision of a federal style state in which religion was separated from politics. U Nu pursued Buddhism as a means to national harmony and integration, a policy popular with the Burman majority, but threatening to the minority peoples. The centralizing and cultural assimilation policies were the factors which led the minorities to reject the state.

The threat to the state had been so severe that it was only by 1950 that it looked likely to survive.257 As a result of this its imperative had shifted from accommodation of diversity to national integration and nation building, and diversity in such a context is undesirable. Aung San's vision had not survived among Burmans, only among the minority peoples. The government and army saw themselves as the saviours of the state, they saw the state as theirs and as a Burman state. The minorities were not viewed as equal partners in the Union, but as potential or actual threats to Burma. The government's policies were based on grounds of what they regarded as

257 Donnison, Burma, p. 155. c.f. p. 145. Even after gaining the upper hand and forcing the rebels to relinquish much of the territory they had seized, the government only could claim control during daylight. At night robbery, dacoity and sabotage of railways and roads continued uninterrupted.
political necessity, pragmatism and security, although historic notions of Burman racial superiority which had run through the independence movement had not disappeared. This was a doubly insulting line to take towards minorities which had guaranteed the survival of the state by their loyalty and the service of their troops against the rebels.

Silverstein refers to government policy during the fourteen year period under discussion as the politics of contradiction, noting that

It could be argued that the national leaders supported unity in diversity; it could also be argued, and even more forcefully, that they paid lip service to that ideal while working steadily toward political nationalization and cultural Burmanization.\(^{258}\)

Minority peoples found themselves drawn into national issues and political arguments not of their making and were subjected to political pressure to act in particular ways in the national interest. Their constitutional guarantee of autonomy was shown to be a chimera.

Silverstein cites several incidents of what he calls political nationalization, including two instances of foreign invasion from China. The K.M.T.\(^{259}\) invaded the Shan State from 1950 to

\(^{258}\) Silverstein, *Burmese Politics*, p. 207. He notes that these contradictions were evident in all things and at all levels.

\(^{259}\) Silverstein, *Burmese Politics*, p. 209. The K.M.T. were never fully ejected, although the U.N. evacuated many of them to Taiwan in 1954. Many remained and are still there involved in local rebellions, politics and opium trading. *c.f.* A.W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* and *c.f.* Smith, *Burma*, p. 120.
1953 and the forces of the Peoples Republic of China (P.R.C.) in 1956 over a disputed border with the Kachin State. The Burmese army poured into the Shan State to fight the K.M.T., initially welcomed by the Shan government and people, "...but before long it became just another foreign occupation force no better than the K.M.T.", behaving atrociously.\(^{260}\) In December 1952 Rangoon imposed martial law in the Shan State. This was a clear case of national policy over-riding local autonomy and interests, and a sharp lesson for the Shans which they never forgot.

The Kachin government was subjected to enormous pressure from the Burmese government to give up part of its territory to China as a result of the Chinese invasion in 1956, a concession only it was empowered under the constitution to make. Great debate within the Kachin State centred on local versus national interest and the decision to protect the nation was made, entailing the sacrifice of local territory. As Silverstein notes, the line of distinction "...between

\(^{260}\) Yawngwe, The Shan, p. 112. Despite the fact that the Burma Army committed atrocities indiscriminately against non-Shans and Shans alike, their behaviour led them to be regarded "in local eyes [as] a foreign army of occupation, thus giving rise to anti-Burmese feelings". The K.M.T. rarely brutalized villagers and did not exhibit contempt for the Shan as Burmese soldiers did.
Kachin and Union of Burma territory was blurred and obliterated" and national interest took precedence.\textsuperscript{261}

A further incident cited arose from the A.F.P.F.L. split precipitated by U Nu in 1958, after which he demanded support for himself as Prime Minister from all ministers and parliamentary secretaries, "...including the combined ministers and heads of state from the Kachin and Karen states [who]...favoured his opponents".\textsuperscript{262} He sacked all those who would not support him, including the combined ministers and heads of state heads of the Kachin and Karen states, replacing them with politicians who lacked majority support in their state councils.\textsuperscript{263} His actions precipitated splits in the state councils of the Chins, Kachins and Karens between pro- and anti-A.F.P.F.L. factions, showing how easy it was for national leaders to play out their political power struggles in the states, disrupting political life and causing political casualties in the local arena. This crisis

Led to the emergence of an informal centralized political system overlying and displacing the constitutional

\textsuperscript{261} Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 210. c.f. Yawnghwe, The Shan, p. 104. A factor overlooked by most is the nature of the Chinese regime. Yawnghwe relates that Shan and Kachin leaders were opposed to communism due to their conservatism, but particularly because their relatives fleeing from China brought with them "tales of communist barbarities".

\textsuperscript{262} Silverstein, Burmese Politics, p. 211.

\textsuperscript{263} Ibid. He was legally required to consult the state councils before taking this action but did not, acting in a unilateral and high-handed manner.
arrangement...[and]...provoked new revolts among the minorities, especially among those who a decade earlier had stood firm in defense [sic] of the Union of Burma.264

Arbitrary distribution of money and aid and the necessity to pass state budgets in the national legislature also enabled the central government to influence local politics which it ruthlessly did.265

In addition to the politically centralizing pressures described, the Shan and Kayah sawbwas came under sustained attack by the A.F.P.F.L. from 1952 onward as it attempted to make them surrender their powers. Shan political response was not united and while the sawbwas began to call for their state's secession from the Union, forming the Shan State Unity party in 1957, a group against feudal rule formed the Shan States Independence Army, aiming to secede from Burman domination but seeking a "...united, independent and democratic Shan State".266 It was the military caretaker government of Ne Win which forced the sawbwas to surrender feudal rights in 1959 and from this point "anti-state

264 Ibid., p. 212.

265 Ibid., pp. 213-4. These tendencies were further extended under the interim military government and U Nu did not hesitate to play these games. Local A.F.P.F.L. parties were dominated by the national parent.

266 Ibid., pp. 215-6. The A.F.P.F.L. had ideological objections to feudal power as well as viewing it as a threat to the central government.
insurgency under the leadership of...[their]...families and officials" grew in both the Shan and Karenni states.\textsuperscript{267}

The military also moved to bring the border areas of the Shan and Kachin States under close control. Local councils were forced to empower "...the Union government to take direct authority in their states...for an initial period of seven years" which could be extended.\textsuperscript{268} No central government had ever extended control into these regions before.

The Karens experienced political nationalization through A.F.P.F.L. manipulation of their political parties in an effort to counter the K.N.D.O. insurrection, persuading two of their parties, one in the Karen State, the United Karen Organization (U.K.O.) and one outside it, the United Karen League (U.K.L.), to dissolve themselves and become part of the A.F.P.F.L.\textsuperscript{269}

The policies pursued by the government placed increasingly intolerable pressures on the flimsy state structure. The

\textsuperscript{267} R. Taylor, The State in Burma (London: C. Hurst and Co, 1987), p. 270. Traditional powers were handed to the state in April 1959 by Shan and Kayah sawbwas, who nonetheless retained authority among their people.

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid, p. 217.

\textsuperscript{269} Ibid., pp. 218-9. These two parties blocked out a third anti-A.F.P.F.L. party the Karen Congress and were seen by the government as a viable rival to the K.N.U. among Karens.
minorities saw its actions as illegal\textsuperscript{270} and intolerable. As Silverstein notes "...the contradictions between promises and practices kept the nation divided and in turmoil".\textsuperscript{271}

In tandem with this policy went cultural Burmanization programmes which necessarily involved Buddhism due to the inseparable nature of the two identities. This policy reflected U Nu's view that religion was needed in "...the entire political life of the country"\textsuperscript{272} and which led him to rephrase Western political concepts in Burman-Buddhist terms in order to harmonize them with the "'religious beliefs and cultural background and heritage of the people'".\textsuperscript{273} The fact that Buddhism was almost uniformly the religion of the Burman majority made it a natural symbol for U Nu's nationalism but he underestimated the reactions of the minority peoples, many of whom were not Buddhists. His policies of sending Buddhist missionaries into animist areas, the prominent patronage of

\textsuperscript{270} J.S. Furnivall, The Governance of Modern Burma, pp. 99-107 contains a description of the roles and responsibilities of the state councils according to the constitution, which shows how far the Union government had strayed from legality.

\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., p. 219.

\textsuperscript{272} Tinker, The Union of Burma, pp. 166-7. In 1950 a Ministry of Religious Affairs was established to strengthen ties between Buddhism and the state. During his tenure as Prime Minister U Nu on several occasions retreated to a monastery, donning the yellow robe and leaving his colleagues to deal with politics.

Buddhism and allowing Buddhism to be the only religion to be taught in schools angered the minorities.\textsuperscript{274}

The Shans, although Buddhist, feared that their traditionally independent Shan sangha would come under the control of the Burmese Buddhist primate for the first time, a fear strong enough by the time of U Nu's State Religion Act passed after the 1960 election, to be a factor in their final decision to begin secession talks.\textsuperscript{275} The Chin, Kachin and Karen counted among them "...large numbers of Christians"; their political leaders were from the Christian groups in their societies and for them the Buddhist nature of the nation-building rhetoric was unacceptable.\textsuperscript{276}

The promotion of Burman-Buddhism and its elevation to a symbol of the Burmese state excluded minorities on religious and political grounds from the political centre, appearing to demean their religious and political identities. The Chin,

\textsuperscript{274} Silverstein, Burmese Politics, pp. 222-3. c.f. Taylor, The State in Burma, p. 289. The Socialists in government were also angered.

\textsuperscript{275} Lehman, "Ethnic Categories in Burma and the Theory of Social Systems", Kunstadter (ed) Southeast Asian Tribes..., p. 96.

\textsuperscript{276} Ibid., pp. 96-7. Their leaders were Christian and mission influenced. c.f. K. Nawni, The History and Growth of the Churches in the Chin State, Myanmar (Burma), Master of Theology in Missiology Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990. Chapter 4 contains details of large numbers of conversions among Chins between 1945-1965 by Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist and other missionaries.
according to Lehman, felt the religious issue keenly as for them Christianity served the political function of symbolising their part in "...a larger world of civilization via the churches and their missions...the Western world","277 and that only through the education and cultural teachings of the missionaries could they

Appear to the Burmans as something more than mere tribesmen. The missions gave them cultural leverage for asserting themselves as partners equal with the Burmans278

Mya Maung states that U Nu sought legitimacy based "...upon the traditional myth of an ideal Buddhist state, invoking the symbolic image of a benevolent priestly king of Burma",279 gaining mass support "...via the symbolic image of a priestly ruler of benevolence and defender of the Buddhist faith".280 His vision of a socialist Union of Burma (the Pyidawthah Plan) was constantly put in Buddhist terms, which Mya Maung sees as "very unifying" until attacked by "modernized civilian political elites, communists, and minorities, religious minorities in particular".281 On the other hand he notes the

277 Lehman, "Ethnic Categories...", pp. 97-8. This was despite the fact that only 30% were Christian at the time of writing (c.1967).

278 Ibid. The military government exacerbated these feelings after 1962, leading for the first time to serious separatist sentiment.

279 M. Maung, The Burma Road to Poverty, pp. 76-7. In a rather laboured work Maung continually links both U Nu and Ne Win's regimes, claiming they both "resurrected the ancient Burmese Kingdoms... the myth of the priestly ruler and the myth of the mighty hero".

280 Ibid., p. 78. This was a prerequisite of Burmese kingship.

281 Ibid.
minorities in particular". On the other hand he notes the authoritarian tendencies of U Nu, supported by his belief in nats, astrologers and ritual offerings and actions which convinced him of the correctness of his actions.

Other aspects of cultural Burmanization included the institution of the Buddhist lunar calendar, Burmese language and education. Burmese was the language used after the fourth year of school and institutions of higher education were in Burma proper, where students from peripheral areas began to dress and behave like Burmans, often adopting Buddhism, some not returning after their studies. These tendencies tended to complement the Burmans' belief in the superiority of their own language, dress, manners and culture, which they believed should take precedence due to their majority status and their role in the nationalist struggle. The trend was reflected in popular literature, films and the press which spread Burman

281 Ibid.
282 Ibid., p. 82. Taylor, The State in Burma, p. 289. Nat worship was revived by U Nu and after 1960 he made it "almost an official state ceremony". c.f. L.J. Walinsky, "The Rise and Fall of U Nu", Pacific Affairs, Vol 38, Nos 3 & 4, 1965-66. pp. 269-281. Walinsky notes U Nu's authoritarian and unilateral decision-making, his use of the parliament as a rubber stamp in which policies were not discussed - government was by decree, and the nepotism and corruption of his government. He also established of the Bureau of Special Investigation which was under his personal control.
283 Ibid. The army adopted Burmese and its training programmes included a strong Burmanizing component.
useful mainly for arousing Burman curiosity about the remote peoples of the Union". 284

The mass support of U Nu which Mya Maung refers to was Burman support and the politicization of Buddhism which he sees as "unifying" was only so from a Burman-Buddhist perspective. His sentiments regarding Karen and Mon aspirations for separate states or secession are closely allied to those of U Nu and the Burma Army, and like them, far removed from Aung San's. He views their claims as a "...dangerous possibility that the Burmese majority might be subjugated by these ancient minority enemies". 285 The one-sided view, the intransigence and unwillingness to consider alternative possibilities and compromises revealed in this view was met by increasingly extreme reaction from minorities.

The centre had become what Mya Maung calls the sacred Buddhist centre of the state on the traditional model under U Nu's guidance. 286 This in itself was not necessarily intolerable for minorities as all Burmese kingdoms had conformed to this model without causing crises among "satellite" peoples. However, the new state was a new type of entity bent on


285 Mya Maung, The Burma Road to Poverty, p. 75. c.f. Silverstein, Burmese Politics, pp. 150-1. U Nu was fundamentally opposed to separate states for ethnic groups, which he viewed as dismembering the Union. The answer lay in "cementing racial bonds" for him.

286 Maung, The Burma Road to Poverty, p. 75. Maung claims this as one of Nu's legitimizing symbols.
model without causing crises among "satellite" peoples. However, the new state was a new type of entity bent on subsuming the minorities in a unitary state and its presence was far more pervasive and permanent than previous Burmese states.

What was it about the new polity which the initially supportive minorities rejected? As discussed above, there had traditionally been a great deal of flexibility about how the peripheral non-state peoples had reacted to political changes and to other ethnic groups. They had been free to become as linguistically, religiously and politically diverse as their habitat and mode of subsistence had dictated, or had been free to be as homogeneous as it suited them to be. The oscillations between one political and linguistic form described were often extreme and ethnic identity or political or linguistic affiliation could be changed for political convenience. What had changed to prevent the persistence of flexible adaptations rather than a decision to secede?

It is argued that the decision to secede was the only adaptation available to these peoples in the face of sustained political and cultural attack in what was an alien political system. The only adaptation they could make in the circumstances was to opt out. The crucial factor which led the minorities to their decisions was that the freedom to retain their traditional diversity, fragmentation and flexible adaptations to their environments and political circumstances
entire stock of responses to their worlds were deemed undesirable by Rangoon. This was what they could not tolerate.

Ne Win's coup on 2nd March 1962 was precipitated by a number of factors including Federalist Seminars held in Rangoon by leaders of the Chins, Kachins, Shans and Kayahs, during which the idea of secession was raised, in particular by the Shans. They proposed for a federal constitution included more fiscal autonomy and the right to negotiate independently with foreign governments. The appearance of joint minority political action and the nature of their discussions goaded the army into action. U Nu, five of his Ministers, the Shan leader Sao Shwe Thaik and several other leaders were arrested. U Nu's scrabblings to retain power resulted in the divisive election promise to adopt Buddhism as the state religion which became even more divisive when having enacted it he also enacted freedom of religion. His offer to consider creating Mon and Arakanese states and the instability of the

287 Lehman, "Ethnic Categories", p. 94. Lehman was staying at the Kayah State Guest House at this time, as were the members of the Federalist Seminars steering committee.

288 Ibid., p. 95. Ostensibly for the purposes of foreign aid, but a provocation to the very touchy Burman nationalists.

289 Donnison, Burma, pp. 162-3. c.f. Chao Tzang Yawngwhe, The Shan.... Sao Shwe Thaik, the former President of the Union and a prominent Shan sawbwa, was arrested on 2/3/62, his young son was shot in the head at the time of his arrest. Sao Shwe Thaik died in custody soon after. (the author is a son of the sawbwa)
political parties all contributed to the instability which gave the army the excuse to act.

The army felt justified in seizing control, being frustrated with the politicians and their endless waste of energy in political intrigue\textsuperscript{290} and critical of parliamentary democracy and federalism, which they saw as integral to the weakness of the post colonial state.\textsuperscript{291} They believed that unless they did the state would disintegrate.

\textsuperscript{290} Donnison, \textit{Burma}, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{291} Taylor, \textit{The State in Burma}, p. 292.
CONCLUSION

It has been argued that application of the concept of ethnicity, as generally understood in the West, is a misunderstanding of the complex ranges of identities, language groups, religious affiliations, customs, dress, subsistence styles and political structures contained within each of the conventionally labelled "ethnic groups" comprising the minority peoples of Burma.

The extreme fragmentation among these groups has been described, as have the persisting patterns of interaction and interpenetration between them in what can be misunderstood as isolated and remote hill areas. The hills are rugged areas which make communication difficult, but the hill dwellers have not remained isolated and unfamiliar with other groups, be they fellow hill-dwellers or itinerant traders who have always traversed the hills from the Chinese border across to India and back. They have been influenced by each other and the great civilizations of the plains in Burma and their Indian or Chinese neighbors. Their habitats have always straddled what are the modern state borders which cut through the hills and which are consequently meaningless to peoples who have always lived in the peripheral areas between great and often warring states.

The diversity within each of the hill ethnic umbrellas is
an indication of flexibility and tolerance of difference. This thesis has described fluidity of ethnic identity and documented cases of changes of ethnic identity, language or religion. The reasons for these changes of what in Western eyes should be deeply-felt primordial loyalties, are for economic or social advantage, and reveal that ethnicity has not traditionally been a matter of polarisation of rigidly discrete groups with opposing interests and conflicting territorial and political claims.

These characteristics, which can be described as politicized ethnicity, manifested themselves in Burma due to the outside interferences inflicted on Burma's peoples. The outside interferences were subjugation within the British Empire and the differing experiences of colonialism on the basis of ethnicity, the conflicting nationalisms arising during the period to 1942 in which ethnicity was deemed of prime importance, the polarising impact of World War II in which ethnic minorities were specifically recruited to fight Burmans, and the nature of the state which came into being at independence in 1948 and made concerted attacks on minority autonomy in the name of nation-building and integration.

These interferences led to a disjunction between traditional patterns of interaction with the plains, most particularly in the period of World War II and after. The new politicization of ethnicity was first manifested among the Karen and the Burman majority, but the struggles between these groups and
the British during negotiations for self-government and independence led to political issues being identified on ethnic bases, institutionalising politicized ethnicity into Burmese politics permanently.

This does not agree with Taylor's view that ethnicity was "reified" by this process or that ethnicity is a Western construct imposed by outsiders on Burma's peoples and a false problem in Burmese politics. Rather the traditionally loose, flexible and non-confrontational ethnic identities of the holders of the wild, the peripheral peoples of Burma, were transformed by factors outside the control of those peoples into political identities. They became rallying points for resistance to a Burman state regarded by minorities as illegitimate, due to its imposition of itself on them in ways they had never experienced before. The recent politicization of ethnicity was used to focus their rejection of the Burman state which was the result of the reasons discussed above. Thus the role of ethnicity in ethnic rebellion in Burma in the period from the end of the kingdom in 1885 to 1962 was as a focus for, not a cause of political action.

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