

PREFACE

This report was written to follow the earlier report of the Burma Ethnic Research Group, *Forgotten Victims of a Hidden War: Internally Displaced Karen in Burma*, BERG/ Friedrich Naumann Foundation, April 1998.

It seeks to raise the level of awareness in the international community concerning the context of internal displacement of populations in Burma focussing in this instance on Karenni. Acknowledging the difficulties of accessing much of the area, the report highlights the complexity and humanitarian concerns as well as the need for further systematic data collection and broader perspectives. Such information would stimulate analysis of the causes of the massive socio-economic problems apparent in the area, and stimulate debate and dialogue that may lead to a more well founded response to the needs of internally displaced people (IDP).

The methodology adopted for the report included collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from the following sources:

- Focus Group Discussions in Thailand with selected leaders from the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) including politicians, academics, and those active in the fields of social welfare and health care, such as service providers and data collectors of previous studies.
- An examination of refugee statistics of both the Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC) and the Burmese Border Consortium (BBC).
- An examination of secondary sources collected in Thailand and Burma from international organisations, academic libraries and NGOs.
- The Burmese language publication 'Ethnic Culture and Traditions — Kayah' (Rangoon, Burma, 1967), which was translated to English specifically for the report. This is referred to in this report as the Gazette.
- Geographical data which was collected by the KNPP and developed into maps by Saw Pay Leek and Vicky Bamforth.
- Interviews with refugees and former IDPs conducted by Images Asia, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- Population data collected by the KNPP in 1995 and 1996. This includes the geographical locations of villages in most townships, grouped in village clusters. In some villages, primarily in the northern half of the state, the population figures of each village were available based on 1995 and 1996 data collected by the KNPP. Population statistics for Meh Set and Pasaung townships were not available.

- A questionnaire survey carried out in areas of displacement within the state. The questionnaire was translated into Burmese and delivered by local reporters.

The methodology for the report was informed by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. The definition used throughout the report for Internally Displaced Person (IDP) was that adopted by the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for IDPs (1997):

'Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border'—

We would like to acknowledge the consultative and advisory role of the CIDKnP (Committee for Internally Displaced Karenni People) to this report.

Burma Ethnic Research Group

The Burma Ethnic Research Group was formed in 1997 to undertake research on, amongst others, displacement amidst different ethnic communities and peoples in Burma. Working within an applied research environment, BERG focuses on defining the needs of displaced and resettled communities and advocates culturally appropriate, gender sensitive solutions that are implemented in collaboration with local institutions. Drawing on a range of international experience, the group is currently involved in research projects with local partners in the Karen and Karenni areas. This report was written by Vicky Bamforth, Steven Lanjouw and Graham Mortimer with comments from U Teddy Buri, Sandra Dudley and Alan Smith. The responsibility of the report lies solely with the authors.

ACRONYMS

ACIS	All Children in School
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AMW	Auxiliary Midwife
ARI	Acute Respiratory Infections
BERG	Burma Ethnic Research Group
BIA	Burma Independence Army
BBC	Burmese Border Consortium
BRG	Battalion Regiment
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CAPS	Continuous Assessment and Progression System
CHW	Community Health Worker
CIDKnP	Committee for Internally Displaced Karenni People
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
DEP	Distance Education Programme
DOKNU	Democratic Organisation for Kayan National Unity
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRC	International Committee for the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KHG	Kayan Home Guard
KMT	Kuomintang
KNDA	Karenni National Defence Army
KNDO	Karen National Defence Organisation
KNLP	Kayan New Land Party
KNPLF	Karenni National People's Liberation Front
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KnRC	Karenni Refugee Committee
KNU	Karen National Union
LIR	Light Infantry Regiment
Lt. Gen.	Lieutenant General
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MI	Military Intelligence
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MPBANRDA	Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PHC	Primary Health Care
PNO	Pa-O National Organisation
PVO	People's Volunteer Organisation
RS	Relocation Site

SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SNLF	Shan Nationalities Liberation Front
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
sq. km.	square kilometre
SSNLO	Shan State Nationalities Liberation Organisation
Tatmadaw	The Burma Army
UMP	Union Military Police
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
VBDC	Vector Borne Disease Control

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a study on the situation on internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Karenni, this report highlights the need for a greater understanding of the multi-faceted conflict-driven environment. Encouraging further data collection and broader perspectives, the study seeks to underline that responses to the needs of internally displaced should be based on humanitarian imperatives as well as be cognisant of the historic, cultural, economic and political environment.

Karenni had a total population of 207,357 in 1998 and a very low population density. Nevertheless, since 1901 it has had to import rice to feed its population. Much of the rice produced in the state is from shifting cultivation with lower yields. Land ownership is extremely fragmented and a significant proportion of the population is landless. With only limited and poorly paid agricultural work available, few off-farm employment opportunities and a long history of unregistered cross border-trading, logging, mining and cattle smuggling have become the most profitable economic activities in the area. Teak has historically formed a major part of the economic resources of Karenni. Since the 1840s, competition for control of teak forests has been a critical factor in power relations, and this remains relevant today.

Providing an overview of the historic poverty of Karenni, where development patterns have changed little since British rule, the report shows how the increasingly scarce resource base has dwindled during half a century of armed conflict within the state and this has a major impact on how peace can be negotiated and humanitarian needs can be appropriately addressed. At the same time, the number of armed groups has increased and these include the *Tatmadaw*, border based opposition groups, cease-fire groups and small splinter groups. The formation of splinter groups has been assisted by the government and accompanied by a reliance on illegal activities such as smuggling and general violence. Very little is known about points of conflict between the various armed groups. As armed groups rely on local levies or militia that can be called on to fight when needed, the war has been brought directly to the villages where retaliatory campaigns, including relocation have aimed at separating communities from armed groups.

In 1994, three major Karenni groups signed cease-fire agreements with the State. The involvement of Bishop Soetero of Loikaw as a negotiator as well as the Kayah Peace Association suggests some attempt at non-partisan observation in the absence of international mediation. While little is known of the agreements, it is clear that the groups were able to maintain their armies, conduct business and in some cases attend the National Convention. In 1995, the KNPP entered into a verbally agreed cease-fire which broke down within months. In 1999, three small factions of the KNPP signed cease-fire agreements. Further negotiations with other KNPP factions have not been successful and have been surrounded by threats and the death of two negotiators.

Evidence shows that while movements of people has been taking place for over two centuries, currently three forms of displacements predominate within the state; conflict induced

displacements, development induced displacements and displacements arising as a result of resource scarcity. These displacements have given rise to forced and voluntary movements of people into relocation sites, into hiding in the state, into the neighbouring state of Thailand and further into Burma. These movements are fluid and constantly changing and a significant proportion of the population has experienced displacement at least once.

While evidence shows that villagers have been displaced by fighting, it is the government initiated schemes, which are aimed at separating people from non-State groups by forcing them into relocation sites, that has resulted in most displacements since 1960s. These schemes were responsible for the wide-scale displacement of about 25,206 people in 1996. Of these, 11,669 are known to have moved to relocation sites, 4,400 were registered in refugee camps and a further 9,137 unaccounted for. Since 1998, many IDPs have moved out of relocation sites back to their villages or to refugee camps in Thailand, some voluntarily, while others have been ordered back.

The 1996 displacements have been characterised by increased violence and coercion both within and outside relocation sites by State forces. Security, particularly for women is very precarious. For those in relocation sites, and more acutely for those in hiding, there is limited or nearly non-existent access to services, and water, food and land have been scarce. Following the displacement in 1996, much of the rice crop was destroyed. Since then, the amount of agricultural land available has been drastically reduced — in many cases land allocated at relocation sites has been insufficient or unsuitable and in some cases demands for forced labour by the army has meant that IDPs were not able to work elsewhere.

There is very little information about the extent of development induced displacement. Since the 1960s, factors responsible include land nationalisation and distribution campaigns, the construction of hydroelectric power plants and large dams and small scale infrastructure projects. Increasingly in the 1990s, State military development has led to displacement of civilians when cultivable land has been confiscated for construction of garrisons or intensification of agriculture. Most of the evictions have been carried out in military style operations outside the civil-legal framework.

Karenni is facing a serious food production shortfall due in part to structural water scarcity which has been exacerbated by prioritising water requirements for hydroelectric power plants over local needs, and a series of droughts in the last three years. Food scarcity is further exacerbated by military campaigns to ensure that locally produced food is not passed to opposition groups. There is very little information about how displacement has affected paddy production — as few villages from wet-rice growing areas have been relocated the impact is thought to be higher in hilly areas such as Shadaw township where displacements are widespread and there has been a significant reduction in the land area where paddy is permitted to be grown. The food shortages have forced people into relocation sites, refugee camps or areas where shortages are less acute.

The remoteness and civil unrest in Karenni have meant that development efforts in all sectors including health and education have been impeded. The overall health status of the population

is poor with serious malnutrition and food shortages in some areas of the state. Access to public health services is restricted with services primarily limited to urban areas while remote areas are infrequently serviced on an outreach basis. Although records show that the number of health facilities has increased, in reality some of the facilities may well exist only on paper. Government budget constraints and continued insecurity have affected the quality of services. Furthermore, the health system in Karenni is seriously understaffed.

Communicable diseases are the leading causes of morbidity and forced relocations have led to a further increase in these diseases. Karenni has one of the highest figures for malaria morbidity and mortality in Burma. Immunisation rates are significantly lower than national averages as is access to safe drinking water. Little information is available on the status of women's health in Karenni. No data was found on HIV and landmine injuries.

At large relocation sites, there is evidence of intention to provide health care, either at a health facility inside the site or at a nearby health centre. In practice, however, services were inadequate or inaccessible. The large relocation sites have inadequate shelter and sanitation arrangements contributing to high morbidity and mortality during the initial relocation period. In most cases, rice was distributed in the first few months but discontinued.

Malnutrition and food shortages appear to be a major problem for displaced populations. Karenni has a higher rate of malnutrition than most areas in Burma. Limited data on IDPs indicate that malnutrition rates in Karenni may be at a disaster level. It is imperative that these figures be more systematically studied.

Very few agencies are able to respond to health concerns in Karenni. No international NGOs working in Burma have thus far been able to negotiate access and provide humanitarian assistance into the state. Only public health services, a number of local religiously affiliated agencies and UNICEF have developed health care activities. Although the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been able to visit the state, no humanitarian assistance program has been initiated. In areas where non-State armed groups still operate, services are provided by the occasional visit of a mobile health team organised by agencies in Thailand.

The number of schools, teachers and students in Karenni is lower than any other part of Burma; however, without reference to school age population, this is difficult to interpret. Moreover the schools are under-equipped and understaffed and most of the teachers are not adequately trained. Precise literacy levels were not available to this report though the 1983 government census reported a literacy rate of 57% in Karenni, significantly lower than the national average. School enrolment rates are low with high numbers of dropouts and repetitions. While UNICEF has established national programmes for improving the quality and access to education in some parts of the country, it is not known whether these have been extended to Karenni. No information was available to this report on the availability of education programmes run by international humanitarian agencies from inside Burma.

A large part of the KNPP education system is now located in the Thai border refugee camps. This could have implications as to which students and families choose to move to the camps

to avail themselves of education services. Many refugees have said that, following displacement, they were no longer able to send their children to school, either because they had lost access to a stable income or because schooling was no longer available in the area they were relocated to.

Conclusions

There is a long history of conflict in Karenni, the underlying reasons for which are complex and diverse. What started out as a movement to regain independence has developed into a situation of rivalry between a myriad of armed groups vying for control of resources, personal protection and a stake in the balance of power. Control of, and access to civilian populations is critical for building political support bases and extracting resources necessary to finance the conflict.

The deterioration of the formal economy has led to the formation of an extra-legal State economy, focused on the extraction of natural resources, that all groups, including the State rely on. Participation in and control of the extra-legal State economy enables armed groups to continue. Rapid depletion of the resource base is likely to increase competition for control of resources and lead to more intense conflict. This has implications for future population displacements and further fragmentation of armed groups.

The protracted conflict has led to massive displacements. The state, the leading exponent of displacement has displaced civilians since the 1960s to secure decisive military solutions. Such displacements have led to expropriation of land and natural resources shattering the resource base of local communities. Appropriation of land for development projects and military battalions has led to further displacements.

In the absence of lasting and substantive peace agreements, the displacement of civilians is likely to continue. The current cease-fires, however, appear to be ad hoc economic deals rather than a process aimed at political resolution and peaceful reintegration of former armed groups. The cease-fires have allowed armed groups to legitimise their role in the extra-legal State economy and, in fact, appear to have led to further factionalism in the competition for increasingly scarce resources.

The refusal to provide access to non-partisan third party observers and the continuing conflict on the part of warring parties raises questions about the extent of consensus and coercion amongst the groups in agreeing to cease-fires. This has serious implications for future initiatives for conflict resolution as well as for those seeking to further the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The protracted conflict has caused extensive humanitarian concerns. Available data indicates that the food security and nutrition status of the population may be at a very precarious level.

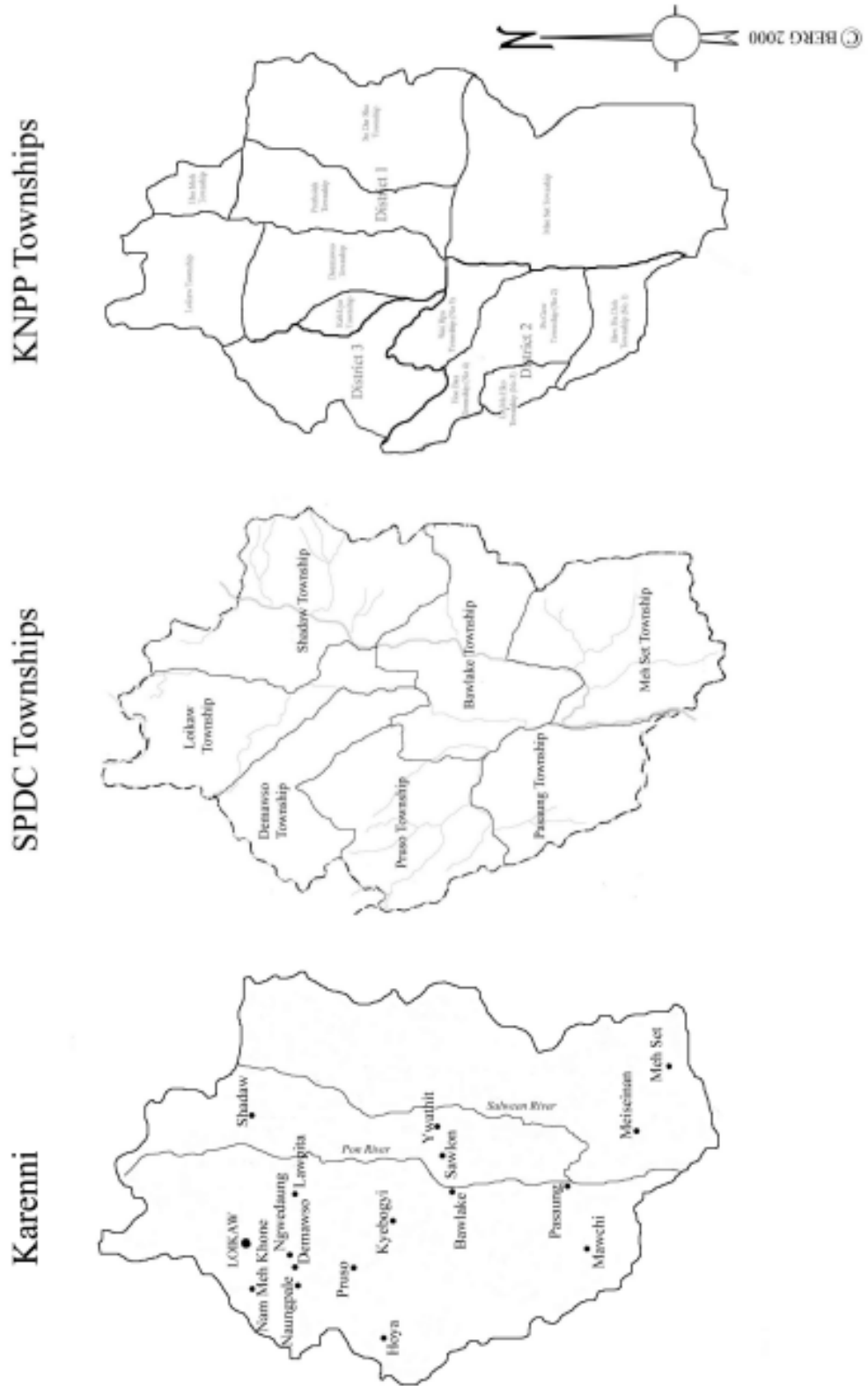
Most humanitarian interventions in Karenni have focussed on meeting emergency needs. In the present situation of protracted and complex conflict, much more needs to be done.

The international community needs to make a serious commitment to conflict reduction and resolution rather than a focus on containment.

Assistance should be carried out in accordance with the principles of humanity and impartiality and without discrimination. Assistance has thus far been targeted through one or more groups without necessarily benefitting the most vulnerable or reaching all those with needs. Both assistance through government structures and cross-border assistance rely on partisans to the conflict to deliver aid. In such situations it is difficult to avoid diversion of resources. An approach which seeks to assess both the humanitarian needs and the political impact of the delivery of such assistance is needed.

The State should facilitate free passage of humanitarian assistance and allow those engaged in the provision of assistance rapid and unimpeded access, as pointed out in Principles 25, 26 and 27 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. International agencies, organisations and all other appropriate actors need to respect the relevant international standards and codes of conduct concerned with delivery of assistance to displaced people. Displaced people have a right to be involved in the design and implementation of all these activities, and protection issues need to be prioritised and acted on.

Figure 1: Karenni and township maps



1. OVERVIEW

1.1 Boundaries

Karenni¹ is the smallest state in Burma² with a total population of 207,357³ and a total surface area of 11,731.5 sq. km. While land-linked Karenni has a similar surface area to the island of Jamaica, its population of 2.5 million in 1997 is less than one-tenth that of Jamaica. Karenni shares an international border with Thailand's Mae Hong Son province to the east and state boundaries with Shan state in the north-west and Karen state in the south-west. It is generally regarded as one of the least accessible and poorest areas in the country. From Loikaw, the state capital and largest town (50,000 population), it is about 180 kilometres to the Thai border. The state is divided into seven townships — Loikaw, Demawso, Pruso, Pasaung, Bawlake, Meh Set and Shadaw, although in the past Pasaung and Bawlake were sometimes considered as one. Some of the townships are sparsely populated and have very poor communication infrastructure particularly in the rainy season.

The area of Pekon township known as Mongpai (now known as Moby), which lies directly to the north-west of Loikaw, was recognised by the British as part of the Shan states even though the majority of its inhabitants are ethnically Kayan⁴. It has a long history of revolt against the Shan Sawbwa system and it has been closely identified with Karenni and particularly Kayan politics. The area is presently included as a township of Shan state but it will be referred to in this report since it has suffered many of the same problems of displacement and is the location of two cease-fire groups who claim to represent Karenni constituencies.

1.2 Climate

The average temperature at Loikaw is 21.9°C⁵ — considerably cooler than other towns in Burma situated on the same latitude. Average rainfall throughout the state varies from 101 to 127 centimetres per year, but it is often wetter around Loikaw (124 to 149 centimetres). The climate is mainly temperate except along river valleys where it is considered tropical. During the rainy season, which usually starts in May or June and lasts until September or October, access to remote areas is restricted and travel across the Salween River is difficult.

¹The area was known originally known as Karenni or the Karenni States until it joined the union in 1947 when it was renamed Karenni state. On 5 October 1951, Article 3 of the Investigation Act renamed the area Kayah. This was seen as a clumsy attempt to deal simultaneously with the unresolved issue of the Karenni Saophya's historical claim to independence, and sever the link between the Karenni and their more numerous cousins, the Karen. The KNPP still refer to it as Karenni. For reasons of simplicity we will refer to it as Karenni. This is not a recognition or denial of any claims.

² The name Burma rather than Myanmar has been used in this report because of its common usage.

³ Proposal for Myanmar-Japan Multi-Bilateral Cooperation on the Health of Mothers and Children in Myanmar, UNICEF, Yangon, September 1998, Annex 3.

⁴ The Kayan, together with the Kayaw and Kayah, are commonly known as the three major sub-groups of the Karenni, although the situation is much more complicated as illustrated in this report.

⁵ Gazette, 1967, Chapter 1.

Figure 2: Map of Karenni and Pekon Township



Mapped using information from Defence Mapping Agency Aerospace Center, St. Louis, Missouri, 1983 (TPC J-10C) and Ministry of Health State and Division Township Maps

1.3 Physical Features

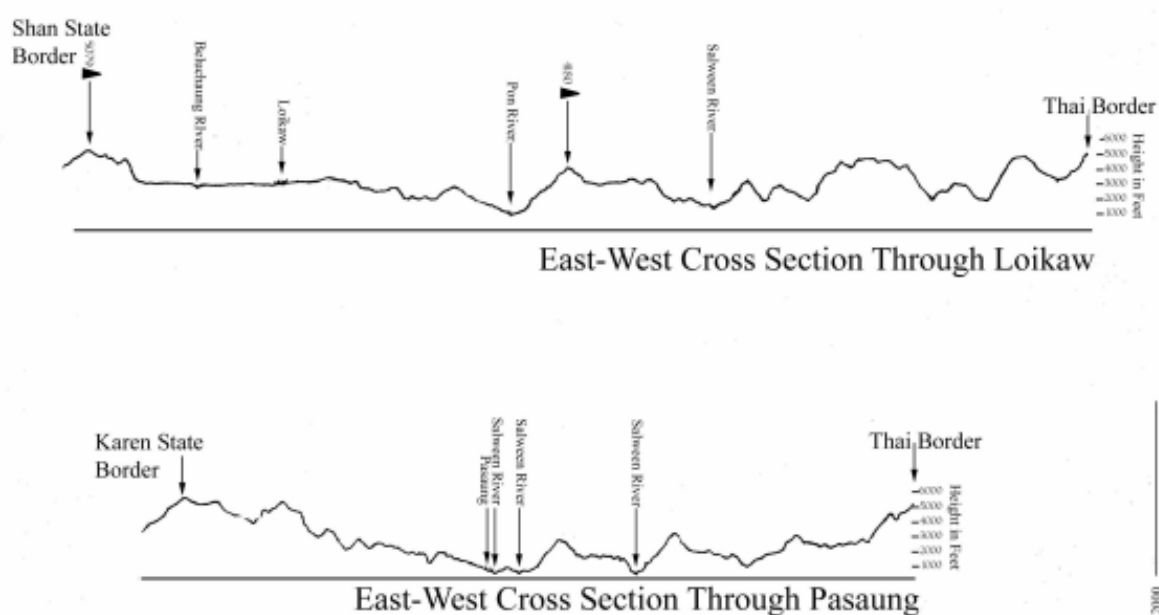
Most of Karenni lies on the southernmost point of the Shan plateau except for strips of lowland areas which lie along river valleys in the north-east of the state. The plateau rises to about 1,000 metres above sea level and stretches approximately 30 kilometres north to south and about 20 kilometres east to west. The highest peaks are in the western half of the state, in ranges running north-west to south-east, rising to between 1,219 metres and 1,676 metres. In the eastern half of the state, where the mountain ranges run north to south, peaks rise to an average altitude of 914 to 1,219 metres. Loilaung, the highest peak, measures 1,684 metres in height.

Two main rivers flow through Karenni. The Salween is a major waterway which runs north to south in the eastern part of the state. With its source in the northern reaches of Yunnan province in China, the Salween traverses Burma through Shan state to the north and then Karenni and Karen state, before flowing into the Andaman Sea at Moulmein in the south.

The other is the Pon River which also runs north to south but in the western part of the state, and joins the Salween slightly north of Pasaung town. A major tributary of the Pon River is the Belauchaung River, whose source is Inle Lake in Shan state. The Pon River is not navigable but the Salween is deep enough to accommodate large boats in all seasons.

Despite its small size, the Loikaw plateau is part of an important watershed area, feeding the Moby dam that is just north of the northern border of the Loikaw plateau. The predominantly calcareous soil of the plateau is very fertile, although currently over-utilised by subsistence rice farming. Travel throughout the state is difficult, particularly east to west travel, as the cross-sections in Figure 3 show, since the mountain ranges and rivers primarily run north to south.

Figure 3: East-west Cross Sections of Karenni



Mapped using information from the Defence Mapping Agency Aerospace Center, St Louis, Missouri, 1983 (TPC J-10C)

1.4 Population

The first estimated population figures for the Karenni States were published in 1901. They show a total estimated population of 37,150 with an extremely low population density of 3.16 inhabitants per square kilometre. By contrast, the population density of Mongpai at that time was much greater. With an area of 1,056 sq. km. — about a tenth of the size of Karenni — Mongpai's population in 1898 was 16,772⁶ with a population density of 15.8 inhabitants per sq. km. This figure is close to the current population density of Karenni which is 17.6 inhabitants per sq. km.⁷

⁶ 55.2% of which was ethnically Karenni.

⁷ UNICEF, 1998, Annex 3.

Table 1: Population Figures for Karenni in 1967, 1983 and 1998

Township	Population 1967⁸	Population 1983⁹	Population 1998¹⁰
Loikaw	21,899	70,143	93,760
Demawso	18,714	41,645	58,450
Pruso	16,149	18,487	22,691
Shadaw	10,435	9,161	1,644
Bawlake		4,066	10,447
Pasaung	11,154	16,159	11,019
Meh Set			9,346
Meisainan	4,695		
Total	83,046	159,661	207,357

The significant difference between the 1983 and 1998 data in Shadaw township would indicate a population outflow of 7,517 consistent with the widespread relocations which took place in 1996.

In 1998, a new township, Meh Set, appeared in UNICEF's population data. It is unclear when boundary lines were redrawn. The township consists of the south-east section (east of the Salween River) of what used to be part of Pasaung township.

Of the total population in Karenni in 1983, 26% are described as living in urban areas, while the remaining 74% live in areas classified as rural. The state included seven townships and 647 villages in 1998. In 1995, there were slightly more males than females in the state with a total of 119,053 and 115,150 respectively. Ministry of Health data for 1991 suggests that there were approximately 33,000 under-fives and that the birth rate in Karenni was 45.6 per 1,000, which was well above the national average of 28.4 per 1,000.

Table 2: Urban and Rural Populations by Township in 1983

Township	Urban	Urban %	Rural	Rural %
Loikaw	33,665	47.9	36,478	52.1
Demawso	1,983	4.7	39,662	95.2
Pruso	1,918	10.4	16,569	89.7
Shadaw	1,338	14.6	7,823	85.3
Bawlake	1,127	27.7	2,939	72.3
Pasaung	1,491	9.2	14,668	90.8
Total	41,522	26.1	118,139	73.9

Source: 1983 Census

⁸ Sourced from the Handbook of Biological Data on Burma, U Khin Maung Lwin and M Mya Tu, Burma Medical Research Institute, Rangoon, 1967, p49. This data was enumerated from 6 townships Loikaw, Demawso, Pruso, Shadaw, Pasaung and Meisainan.

⁹ Sourced from the 1983 population census which was conducted by the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs. Six townships were identified — Loikaw, Demawso, Pruso, Shadaw, Bawlake and Pasaung.

¹⁰ In 1995, a Ministry of Labour/UNFPA census enumerated a total of 234,203 in Karenni and in 1997, a Ministry of Immigration and Population census enumerated a total of 246,000 in the state. The reason for the discrepancies between these and the much lower 1998 UNICEF data is not clear. These figures do not include an additional ten percent of the population that is estimated to be in the border areas.

Due to its geographic inaccessibility, poor transportation, long-term conflict and sparse population, Karenni has lagged behind in terms of economic and social development. Most of the state is remote and under-served with high levels of poverty. The health status of the population is poor with high malaria morbidity and mortality. There is a high illiteracy rate among the population, particularly among women, a large proportion of who are able to speak only in their own ethnic languages.

However, since cease-fire agreements with various armed groups in 1994, the Burmese government has recognised three cease-fire regions of the Karenni as constituting border area regions which are '*isolated from other regions of the country and lagging behind in all areas of development including economic and social.*' These regions are a Padaung¹¹ region, Pekon, encompassing one township of 808 sq. km. with a population of 50,000 and two Kayah¹² regions, including parts of Loikaw, Demawso, Bawlake and Meh Set townships.¹³ UNICEF, despite working since 1950 on a national support programme in Burma, has only effectively expanded into Karenni since 1994-95 recognising the challenges of programming in border areas. The Ministry of Health, Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (1997) recognises two of the state's seven townships – Shadaw and Meh Set as border area townships.

1.5 Ethnic Groups in Karenni

Most anthropologists in Southeast Asia have defined ethnicity using an ethno-linguistic model. According to this, there are four main language groups in Burma — Tibeto-Burman, Mon-Khmer, Karen and Tai. The ethnic groups in Karenni have been classified as belonging to the Karen language group.

Within the state, there is a great diversity of identifications and languages and this makes definitions extremely difficult. No consensus has emerged on how the groups should be classified or indeed what exactly is the relationship ethnically between the Karenni and Karen groups. This would appear to depend on which sub-group one belonged to as some, such as the Paku are considered to be closely related linguistically to the Sgaw Karen, while others are considered less so. This is considerably complicated by the fact that some Paku consider themselves more Karenni than Karen.¹⁴

Politically, the relationship with the Karen has been close — and strengthened by a range of actors. These include missionaries who sought to extend their boundaries, politicians who

¹¹ The name Padaung refers to the Burmese and Shan term for a sub-group of the Karenni who themselves refer to the Padaung as Kayan.

¹² The name Kayah here refers to areas which the largest sub-group of the Karenni ethnic group, the Kayah, inhabit rather than the whole of Karenni.

¹³ Concise of Master Plan for the Development of Border Areas and National Races, Ministry of Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs, June 1994.

¹⁴ The relationship between the Paku Karen and other Karenni groups in one refugee camp is documented in the following paper: Celebration, affirmation, and transformation: a 'traditional' festival in a refugee camp in Thailand, S. Dudley, Unpublished paper presented at Institute of Social & Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, 1999.

sought to align their Karen constituencies with the stronger case for Karenni independence and armed groups such as the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) who helped build armed resistance in Karenni. During the early years following independence, this close political relationship was perceived to be extremely damaging and during this time the government appointed chairman of Karenni, Sao Wunna invited anthropologist F.K. Lehman¹⁵ to the area to investigate ethnicity in Karenni.¹⁶

Lehman's work remains the only published academic study of Karenni ethnicity based on fieldwork conducted in the state, although more recently another anthropologist has investigated Karenni ethnicity based on fieldwork amongst refugees (this thesis is forthcoming).¹⁷ There have been at least two government sponsored attempts to classify the different ethnic groups, one published in the 1960s and another more recently through the Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs (MPBANRDA). In addition, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)¹⁸ has published data on ethnic groups in Karenni on their website.¹⁹

There is however, no definitive interpretation and in most cases each sub-group or sub-division appears to have a variety of names depending on which ethnic group is doing the naming. To illustrate this complexity three classifications are described here, each of which interprets the various sub-groups and sub-divisions in a different way, although as Figure 4 shows, none of these have been able to completely classify Karenni groups both within the state and along its borders.

Lehman classifies seven main sub-groups: the Kekhu, the Bre, the Kayah,²⁰ the Yangtalai,²¹ the Geba,²² the Zayein²³ and the Paku.²⁴ Within two of these groups there are further

¹⁵ 'Burma: Kayah Society as a Function of the Shan-Burma-Karen Conflict,' F.K. Lehman in *Contemporary Change in Traditional Societies*, J. Steward ed., University of Illinois, Urbana, 1967.

¹⁶ Some Karennis still view this invitation as an attempt to separate the Karen and Karenni groups thereby weakening the armed opposition groups and support for an independent Karenni.

¹⁷ *Displacement and Identity: Karenni Refugees in Thailand*, Sandra Dudley, PhD thesis, University of Oxford, forthcoming.

¹⁸ The SIL documents unwritten languages, promotes literacy skills and translates texts such as the Bible into local languages.

¹⁹ <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/myanm.html>

²⁰ Lehman notes: known as Karenni, Yang Daeng by the Thai, Bwe by the Sgaw Karen and Eastern Bwe by Karens in Taungoo and refer to themselves as Kaya Liy Phuw.

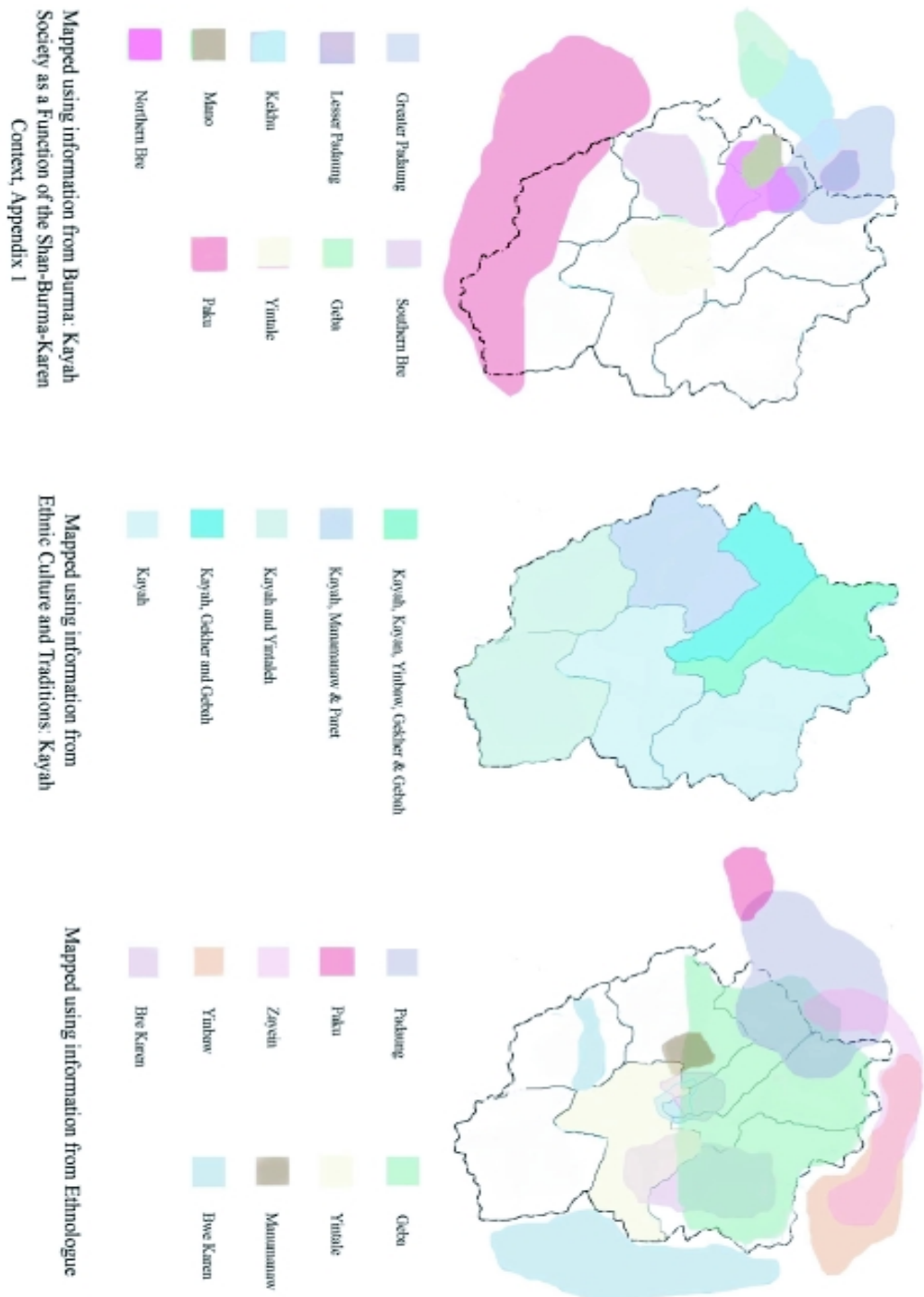
²¹ Lehman notes: known as Talya by the Kayah, Yangtalai by the Shan and Yintale by the Burmese.

²² Lehman notes: known as Paku Da Ne by the Kayah, Bwe by the Paku Sgaw, Kayin Byu by the Burmese and refer to themselves as Ke Pa.

²³ Lehman notes: known as Gaung Tou and Zayein by the Burmese, Tha Ruw La Khu by the Kayah and Sawngtung by colonial writers Scott and Hardiman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States, Part II Volume I*, J.G. Scott and J.P. Hardiman, Superintendent, Government Printing, Rangoon, 1901

²⁴ Lehman notes: Paku is the Kayah name for the Karen; they refer to themselves as Pakenyo.

Figure 4: Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Karenni and Borders



sub-divisions: the Kekhu which comprise three sub-divisions (the Greater Padaung,²⁵ Lesser Padaung²⁶ and the Kekhu²⁷) and the Bre which comprise three sub-divisions (the Northern Bre,²⁸ Southern Bre²⁹ and the Mano³⁰).

The Gazette classifies eight sub-groups: the Kayah,³¹ the Gekher, the Gebah, the Kayan, the Pre, the Manumanaw,³² the Yinbaw³³ and the Yintaleh.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics classifies nine sub-groups: the Bre Karen (16,600), the Bwe Karen (17,200), the Geba (40,100), the Manumanaw (3,000), the Padaung (40,900), the Paku (5,300), the Yinbaw (7,300), the Yintale (no data available) and the Zayein (9,300).³⁴

Many of the sub-groups and sub-divisions speak related dialects although most of these have no written form³⁵ and Burmese is increasingly spoken amongst much of the male population of the Karenni hills. In addition to the Karenni, there are significant numbers of Shan, Burman and Karen as well as smaller numbers of Chin, Mon and Rakhine, Indian and Intha who are currently living in Karenni.

Burman migration into Karenni appears to have occurred relatively recently. At least some of this is related to the inflow of migrant labour in land redistribution projects during the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) government and in state-organised infrastructure projects. Shan migration to lowland areas in Karenni appears to have been taking place for at least two centuries, and there are Shan settlements in Pasaung, Bawlake, Loilim Le, and the Shadaw valley. Most Karen settlements are located in the south in Pasaung township except for another Karen related group, the Pa-O³⁶ who live primarily in areas around southern

²⁵ Lehman notes: known as La Khi by the Kayah and refer to themselves as Kekhong Duw.

²⁶ Lehman notes: known as Yinbaw by the Burmese, La Khi Phuw by the Kayah and refer to themselves as Ke Phow.

²⁷ Lehman notes: known as Key Khuw, Kekhong and La Khi Phuw by the Kayah and Bwe Karen by the Paku Sgaw Karen and refer to themselves as Kekhu.

²⁸ Lehman notes: also known as Pre Ha Shuiy.

²⁹ Lehman notes: known as Pre Ka Tolo, Prja by the Kyebogyi Kayah and refer to themselves as Laku Pre.

³⁰ Lehman notes: known as Manu Manaw by the Burmese, Punu by the Kayah and refer to themselves as Munu.

³¹ Previously known as Karenni.

³² Also known as Anu and Monu.

³³ According to the Gazette, the Yinbaw speak a language close to the Rowan, a sub-group of the Kachin.

³⁴ Numbers in brackets refer to estimated population in 1983. The source of this is not clear but is probably the 1983 census.

³⁵ Some alphabets have been developed; these include two Romanised alphabets, one developed for one of the Kayan groups by Italian missionaries, and a Bwe Karen dictionary which was published by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 1997. A Kayah alphabet, based on the Kyebogyi dialect was created by Hte Bupeh (now Prime Minister of the KNPP), and this is taught in those schools administered by the KNPP; for those who speak a different Kayah dialect it is reportedly difficult to learn.

³⁶ The Pa-O are also known by the Karen as Taungthoo.

Shan state. Mawchi town itself is home to a wide range of different ethnic groups, such as the Chin and Rakhine, most of who migrated to work in the Mawchi tin mines.

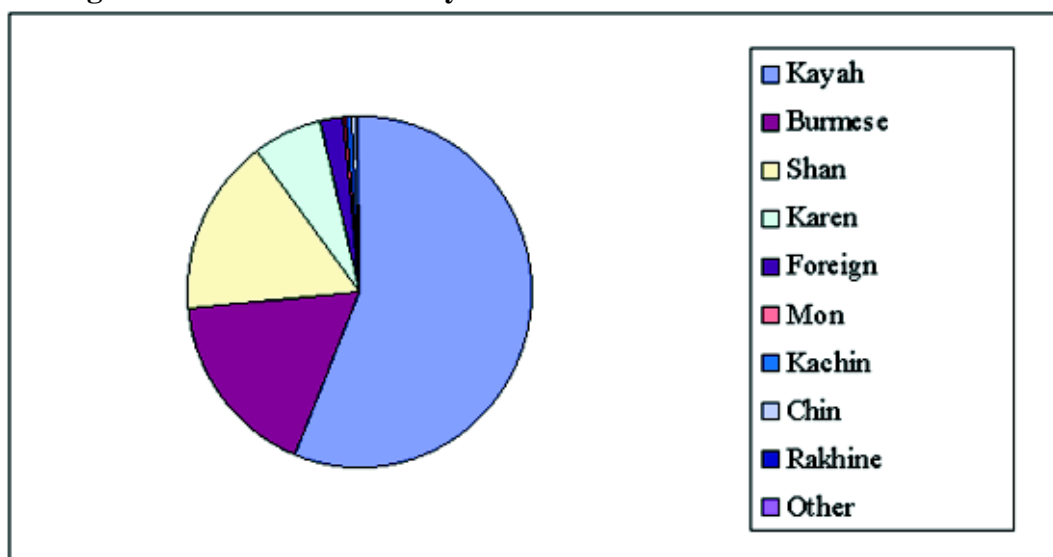
Karenni-speaking related groups can also be found in areas outside the state: in Taungoo (where many Karenni are said to have migrated) and Pyinmana in Central Burma, in Pekon township as well as other southern townships of Shan state, and in Thailand. Population figures are unavailable, but a recent survey of Kayan-speaking villages³⁷ showed that there were 35,651 Kayans in Karenni, 60,045 in Shan state, 8,890 in Karen state, 4,550 in Pyinmana and 1,050 in refugee camps in Thailand.

Table No 3 : Population Distribution by Ethnicity in Karenni

Ethnic Group	Number	Percentage
Kayah	89287	56.12
Burmese	27975	17.58
Shan	26515	16.66
Karen	10272	6.45
Foreign Races (including mixed foreign and Burmese)	3313	2.08
Mon	668	0.41
Kachin	593	0.37
Chin	537	0.33
Rakhine	435	0.27
Other	30	Less than 0.1
Total	15,9088	100

Source: 1983 census

Percentage Distribution of Ethnicity in Karenni



Source: 1983 Census

³⁷ The survey was based on information compiled by Kayans in the KNPP.

1.6 Gender Roles in Karenni

There is very little gender disaggregated data and information regarding gender roles in Karenni. Much of the current documentation on the situation of women in Karenni has focussed on them as recipients or victims of state sponsored human rights abuses.³⁸ Little is known about the conditions for women generally in the area, and how their traditional roles have been either undermined or enforced by conflict and displacement. The larger numbers of males in the state may be a result of out-migration of women, most likely as refugees into Thailand or in search of employment, although this is undocumented.

1.7 Agriculture, Land Distribution and Patterns of Recourse

Since much of Karenni consists of upland areas, wet paddy farming is limited largely to the plains around Loikaw and Ngwe Daung. In these areas there are estimated cultivation areas of between 100,000 and 120,000³⁹ acres of lowland farmland; 80,000 acres in Demawso and 40,000 acres in Loikaw.⁴⁰ Elsewhere small areas of no more than 200 continuous acres are scattered throughout the state, such as at Ywathit, Shadaw and Sawlon. Much of the rice grown in Karenni is upland shifting cultivation of paddy with significantly lower yields per acre than wet paddy. As far back as 1901, rice had to be imported in some areas, as the amount grown was insufficient for feeding the population.⁴¹

The 1993 Agriculture Census, which in Karenni used a sampling method only,⁴² calculated a total of 11,781 holdings in a total area of 43,589.7 acres which was defined as agricultural land. The results show that land ownership is extremely fragmented; 70.81 % of holdings are less than five acres. Indeed the average size of land holding in Karenni was 3.70 acres, with three acres roughly the minimum sized holding to allow for subsistence. The census does not make clear what type of land holding was included in the census, and it is likely that upland holdings, characterised by annual fluidity were not fully reported. These upland holdings are more typical of Karenni topography.

Moreover, it has been stated that a significant percentage of the population have no land holdings at all, and are thus landless and face many difficult prospects. Agricultural work is poorly paid and not always available. There are few off-farm employment opportunities

³⁸ One exception to this is a paper on perceptions about women's dress in the refugee camps, 'Aspects of research with Karenni refugees in Thailand,' Sandra Dudley, Bulletin of the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research, UNESCO.

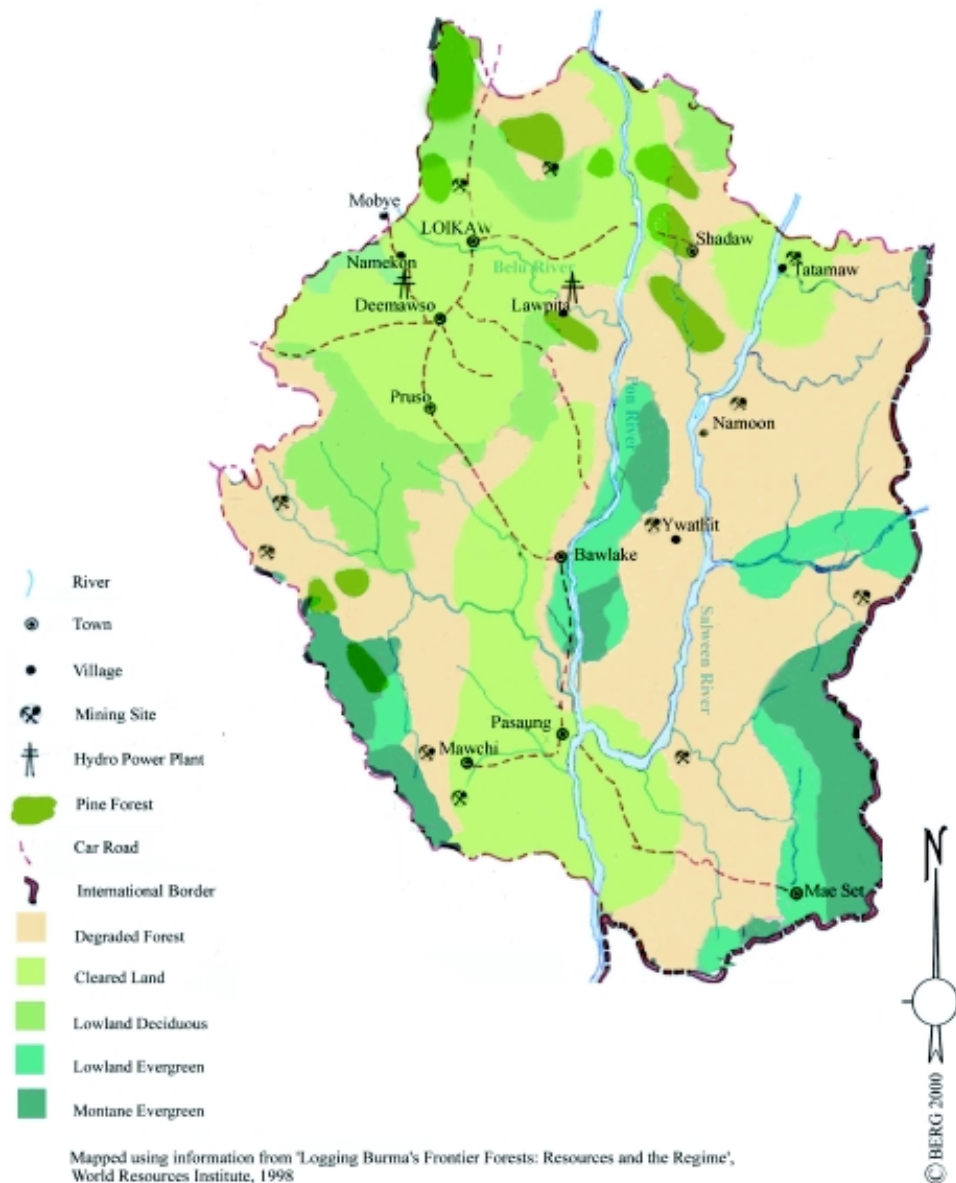
³⁹ Estimations of the size of cultivatable land vary between 43,000 acres as enumerated in the 1993 Census of Agriculture and 200,000 acres which was estimated in the Karenni Farmers' Union 03/98 statement.

⁴⁰ 'Summer Rice and the Difficulties of Karenni Farmers,' Thu Ray, in Burma Issues, Vol. 8 No. 10, October 1998.

⁴¹ Scott and Hardiman, 1901, p277.

⁴² The 1993 Agriculture Census, which was carried out by the Settlement and Land Records Department used a dual reporting technique, which combined census enumeration for land holdings of over 50 acres and two stage sampling in each township for holdings of less than 50 acres. There are no holdings of over 50 acres in Karenni and the census did not include townships that were not under State control.

Figure 5: Resources in Karenni



throughout the state. Only 2.16% of holdings employ labour on a permanent basis, while 24.16% of holdings employ agricultural labour on an occasional basis. The census does not detail whether occasional labour includes reciprocal intra-village arrangements between farm households. However, the extent of such land fragmentation and the lack of opportunities for permanent rural employment may have significant implications for migration and displacement for both men and women.

In addition to paddy, sesame, ground nut and sunflower are cultivated on a commercial basis on farms around Bawlake and Shadaw, while maize, millet, and wheat are grown in the low-lying areas around Demawso and Loikaw. In upland areas mainly north of Loikaw,

which includes the highest peaks in Karenni — there are large mountainous areas covered with two types of pine tree (see Figure 5). Sap is collected from these trees, refined, then sold for a variety of uses, including making of balm and machine-belt lubricant. A wide range of other crops such as coffee, potatoes, leeks, pumpkins and cucumbers are grown in upland areas. They are mainly grown on a non-commercial and individual basis. In recent years the government has also encouraged villagers to start long-term plantation farming, particularly coffee, oranges, lychees, limes and other fruit crops.

Recent changes to land use have had a visible impact on the traditional small-scale farming methods that still predominate in the plains area. Since the introduction of chemical fertilisers and synthetic pesticides in late-1995, intensive usage has had adverse impact on this important watershed area. In other areas of the state, the search for more arable land and firewood has resulted in deforestation and soil erosion.

There are two main farming systems in Karenni, lowland farming and upland shifting cultivation. Some permanent upland farming is also practised in those areas with relatively high population density and better than average soil for farming. Lowland farming, which is of relatively minor importance in Karenni is characterised by seasonal wet paddy rice farming with some double-cropping given water availability after the rainy season. Buffalo are integrated into the farming system, cattle are used for transport and sale, and pigs and poultry as cash commodities. Upland shifting cultivation which predominates in Karenni is practised on hill slopes, the main crops being upland rice and maize.

Although shifting cultivation, or as it is often called ‘slash and burn,’ is perceived to be the most common form of agriculture in the highlands, and as such destructive to upland forests, it is in fact only practised by a small minority of upland farmers. Far more common in upland areas are land rotational practises and crop rotational practises, often grouped together under the banner of ‘shifting cultivation.’ The oft-made assumption that highland communities (particularly ethnic minorities) are responsible for the destruction of forests because of their shifting cultivation practices has been challenged. Some would suggest that this is as much the responsibility of lowland settlers and commercial timber interests.⁴³

Forest products have always provided alternative income for the local people; indeed some of these provide an important source of income for the internally displaced people hiding in the forests. Shellac, beeswax, honey, orchids and ‘*tanakha*’ (the bark of the sandalwood tree used as a cosmetic) are all much sought after. In addition, the hunting of wild game and the collecting of medicinal herbs and plants and forest products from Karenni yield products which have been in high demand in the traditional markets of northern Thailand. The smuggling of forest animals has been a long-recognised practice between Karenni and Mae Hong Son in Thailand and cattle smuggling has been the third most lucrative economic activity, coming after mining and logging. It has been estimated that in the early-1990s tens of thousands of cattle entered annually through these border regions.

⁴³ See amongst others Hill Tribes Today, John McKinnon and Bernard Vienne ed., 1989.

1.8 Resources

Teak has historically formed a major part of the economic resources of Karenni. In addition to teak, there have also been stands of ironwood and other tropical hardwoods. Teak was being extracted and traded prior to the British annexation of Upper Burma. Following the annexation of Tenasserim and Arakan states in the 1824-26 First Anglo-Burmese War when the size of the revenues for the export of teak became apparent, the '*availability of lucrative stands of timber on both sides of the Salween changed how Kayahs and Thais viewed territory in this region.*'⁴⁴ Since the 1840s, competition for control of teak forests has been a critical factor in power relations and the development of inter-group conflict, and this remains relevant today. In 1889, it was reported that in Kantarawaddy sub-state, each log floated on the Salween was subject to a tax of four rupees. An estimated 8,000 logs were floated annually from the eastern bank of the Salween, another 2,000 from the Pon River. While the Saophya⁴⁵ of Kantarawaddy gained much of this revenue, a system of concessions ensured that other prominent individuals also benefited including the Saophya's nephew Sawlawi, who was granted all timber duties from the Maipa and Me Ti streams.⁴⁶ At this time it was estimated that there was an annual output of 20,000 logs from the state.⁴⁷ It has been suggested by some that teak reserves became depleted at about the same time as the British arrival in the Karenni States. However, it is known that teak continued to be felled throughout the colonial period and after independence and a recent widespread felling of timber in the state took place in the early 1990s which wiped out large areas of forests.

During the period of British colonial rule the logging of Karenni States was regulated according to the 'Burma Selection System' which was put in practice in 1891.⁴⁸ This system is alleged to have controlled the amount of logs extracted by imposing 30-year felling cycles, setting strict girth limits and accounting for every tree cut down, as well as those set aside, in 'girdling notebooks.' Following the end of colonialism, when most of the teak forests were in the second felling cycle, the teak trade was nationalised under the State Timber Board in close cooperation with the Forest Department.

In 1962, the State Timber Board was renamed the Timber Corporation and freed from control of the Forest Department. The Burma Selection System was discarded and extraction rates in central areas increased sharply.⁴⁹ Extraction rates in those areas of Karenni under control of non-State armed groups were much lower until the late 1980s when the Thai government imposed a logging ban throughout Thailand. At that point Thai logging companies began to seek concessions to log in the border areas of Burma.

⁴⁴ The Delineation of the Karenni Frontiers with Thailand: 1809-1894, Ronald D. Renard in the Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, Singapore University Press, March 1987, p88.

⁴⁵ Saophyas were local leaders who ruled over areas in the Karenni States prior to and during the colonial period. These institutions were similar to and modelled on the Shan system of Sawbwas, from which the name is taken.

⁴⁶ Lehman, 1967, p29.

⁴⁷ Scott and Hardiman, 1901, p269.

⁴⁸ 'Cash Starved Regime Courts Disaster,' Roger Matthews, Financial Times, 21 June 1990.

⁴⁹ Brief History of Teak Management in Burma, 'Rhino,' unpublished manuscript, 1989.

Logging has been one of the most lucrative illegal activities between Karenni and Mae Hong Son Province in Thailand. Several important factors contributed to this — the proximity of the forests to the Thai border, the high demand for teakwood, a good marketing system for illegally-sawn timber and the remoteness of the environment.⁵⁰ Concessions agreed between State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)⁵¹ and the Thai logging companies provided much needed income to both the SLORC as well as the non-State armed groups operating along the border. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the forests of Karenni were logged at an unprecedented rate. Since then, the SPDC has imposed a ban on cross-border logging agreements in an effort to stop revenues falling into the hands of armed groups, such as the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). In Karenni though it is believed that substantial logging has continued deeper inside Burma in the Shan-Karenni borderlands.

It is not clear just how much forest cover or what quantity of extractable timber remains. However, it appears that the nature of the industry has changed and small-scale privatised teak extraction is increasing as other opportunities for earning a livelihood diminish as a result of relocations, low rainfall and a stagnant economy. In such cases individuals are reported to be earning 600 kyats per day, paid to them by commercial logging companies and traders.⁵²

Deposits of tin and tungsten are also significant resources in Karenni. These are concentrated around Mawchi. The tin mine at Mawchi is the largest of its kind in Burma and the largest single source of off-farm employment in Karenni.

This mine was exploited by the Saophya of Kantarawaddy before the British period, was expanded during the colonial times and provided significant income for both the state and the Saophya. Mawchi became known as ‘Little England,’ and resembled a wealthy hill station. In 1947, 75% of the people working in the mines were Gurkhas.⁵³

In 1949, Mawchi was captured and held for four years by Karenni nationalist forces. In November 1953, the area was brought under control by the *Tatmadaw*, and the mines came under the jurisdiction of the government. One large pit mine was owned and operated by the government, and about fifty smaller pits owned by private prospectors sold their ore to the State. Following production decreases, the mines were nationalised in 1983; since then production has fallen further. The 1983 census enumerated a total of 5,324 people employed in the metal mining sector.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ ‘Malaria and Mobility in Thailand,’ Anchalee Singhanetra-Renard, *Social Science Medicine*, Vol. 37 No. 9, 1993, p1152.

⁵¹ The SLORC was reorganised and renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in November 1997.

⁵² Conversation with a member of Karenni Evergreen, August 1999.

⁵³ This was reported to the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry, Part II, Appendices, Rangoon Superintendent Government Printing and Stationary, 1947, p114.

⁵⁴ 1983 Population Census, Karenni, Immigration and Manpower Department, October 1987.

The location of other minerals, including antimony, gold, galena, tourmaline and sapphire have been documented by the KNPP.

Another major resource is a marble extraction plant set up in Loikaw in 1962 with the help of Italian technicians. Using marble mined at Lawpita Kyauk Taung, the plant manufactures marble furniture and household goods. However, as a local employer, the quarries appear to be insignificant; in the 1983 census, only sixteen people were employed in the non-metallic mining and quarrying sector.⁵⁵

1.9 Water

The landscape in Karenni is mountainous. Lowland or plains areas exist mainly along the valleys of the Salween and Pon Rivers. Plains in the valleys of the remaining rivers and streams are narrow and scattered. There are numerous lakes in the state near Loikaw and around the valley of the Belauchaung River. With the exception of these areas, water is difficult to find. In valleys situated at higher altitudes, water may only be seasonally available. The further afield one goes from these valleys to the hilltops results in a corresponding increase in water scarcity in both absolute as well as in seasonal terms. Groundwater resources are relatively limited in upland villages and most people are dependent on rain-fed agriculture. In the valleys, irrigation of paddy fields is often done by means of water diversion structures which are usually temporary.

As a result of the limited water sources in the state, the central government has attempted to develop more effective water systems. These include the construction of a dam in 1967 on the Belauchaung River just above the Lawpita falls (19 miles north of Loikaw); the site of the dam is close to Pekon in Shan state. Known as the Moby dam, it was constructed to regulate and increase the amount of water used by the Lawpita hydroelectric plant (Belauchaung I), which was built in 1961 to provide electricity across Burma. Construction of the dam was delayed for five years to ensure that sufficient amounts of water were made available for local farmers as well as the hydroelectric plant. A second hydroelectric plant (Belauchaung II) was installed at the site and completed in 1992 with foreign assistance from Japan. There are plans for a third plant, to be built at the same site, although the present low levels of water in the Moby dam plus turbine maintenance problems at the plant appear to present significant obstacles to financing this project.

Another dam sited at Ngwe Daung, 12 miles south of Loikaw, is responsible for irrigating plains paddy fields in Demawso.

1.10 Communication, Trade and Transport

Two car roads provide access into Karenni, both from Shan state. The major trade route into the state runs from Aung Ban to Loikaw, and the other road from Taunggyi to Loikaw. In the south there used to be a road running from Mawchi to the Taungoo road in Karen state

⁵⁵ Ibid.

but despite efforts in the early 1990s to rebuild this road, it is no longer open. Within the state there is only one car road running north to south from Loikaw to Bawlake, Pasaung and Mawchi. There is one car road running east to west between Meh Set and Mawchi in the south. Yet another road connects Loikaw with Lawpita. A railway completed in 1993 connects Loikaw with Aung Ban.

Recent attempts to build more roads throughout the state have had poor results. Built in most cases either with conscripted labour or labour provided by army recruits, these roads have not lasted through a rainy season. Examples of these include the Mawchi-Taungoo road which was rebuilt using labour from Mawchi relocation site in 1996, but is now no longer operational. In April 1998, a road was reportedly constructed between Nokoh and Yeyon villages using labour from Nokoh village. In 1997, villagers living along the Demawso-Daw Tama Gyi road were ordered to rebuild an old logging road from Htee Thanga to Daw Pet and Daw Tama Gyi and people in Shadaw relocation site were ordered to build a road between Ponchaung and Shadaw.⁵⁶

The major exports from Karenni to other parts of Burma are tin and tungsten, while imports are mainly salt and rice. As well as the crossing of migrant labourers, there is a long history of irregular trading between Karenni and Thailand, mainly in cattle and vegetables. This now appears to be somewhat regulated,⁵⁷ and the border trade is concentrated at Border Patrol Gate 14 in Meh Set township. The position of this gate, as well as the mines at Mawchi, mean that most trade travels along the main north to south car road, where there are reportedly numerous checkpoints. The checkpoints are operated by the *Tatmadaw*,⁵⁸ military intelligence (MI), police, as well as members of cease-fire groups, all of whom are said to earn money from taxation of goods passing along the road.⁵⁹ In the past, workers at Mawchi reported that convoys of trucks carrying ore were frequently attacked along this road although it is not clear who was responsible for these.

⁵⁶ Images Asia Interview No. 42.

⁵⁷ Cross border violence erupted at Border Patrol Gate 14 between 28 April and 1 May 1999 when boats were stolen, a pick-up truck was bombed and Ban Nam Pieng Din police station was attacked with mortars. It is not clear who made the attack, but trade disagreements between local border authorities are believed to be a contributory factor. 'Burma told to pay compensation,' Bangkok Post, 21 May 1999.

⁵⁸ According to Mary Callahan, the Burmese name *Tatmadaw* means armed forces of the state. The Origins of Military Rule in Burma, Mary P. Callahan, PhD thesis, 1996, pxxi.

⁵⁹ Images Asia Interview Nos. 34, 67.

2. CONFLICT IN KARENNI

2.1 A History of Conflict

2.1.1 The Pre-Colonial Period

Prior to the colonial period, Karenni had been divided up into five sub-states or administrative areas,⁶⁰ most of which had been established between the mid-18th and 19th centuries. These were Bawlake, Kantarawaddy, Kyebogyi, which included the city of Ngwe Daung, Naungpale and Nam Meh Khone. The most powerful of these was Kantarawaddy which comprised most of the eastern half of the state. Shortly before World War Two, Nam Meh Khone and Naungpale discontinued as separate states and were combined under the administration of the Saophya of Bawlake.

In each state, the administrative heads styled themselves on the Shan Sawbwas, becoming known as ‘*Saophyas*.’ The founders of Kyebogyi, Kantarawaddy and possibly Naungpale, were also recognised by the Burmese monarchy as town chiefs or ‘*myosas*.’ With relatively undeveloped taxation and administrative systems,⁶¹ the Saophyas competed with other local rulers (including Thai, Shan and Karenni) to control local resources, primarily local populations who could be compelled to join defence groups and perform corvee labour. Movements of people from one area to another represented the loss or gain of valuable manpower resources that were critical to the survival of these local elite power bases. Like elsewhere in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, populations were seen as currency by warring parties to be moved in and out of areas during conflicts as if they were spoils of war.

In the 1840s, territorial based conceptions of power came into force following the realisation that the considerable stands of teak in Karenni represented a means to real wealth for anyone who could claim to own them.⁶² From this point until the annexation of Kantarawaddy by the British in 1889, records show a sharply increased level of conflict as all parties in the region — Karenni, Shan, Burman, Thai and British — laid claims. In at least one case this included an effort to establish and populate villages on the sparsely inhabited but richly forested east banks of the Salween and Mae Sariang Rivers.⁶³

Accounts written at this time show that the states were beset by chronic levels of conflict as armed groups raided villages throughout the area:

‘Village feuds were so common, especially between Eastern and Western Karen-ni, that the completion of the harvest was usually the signal for every man to arm himself and join in more or less organized

⁶⁰ Further information about the administrative areas prior to the colonial period can be found in the Scott and Hardiman, 1901.

⁶¹ Lehman, 1967, p22.

⁶² Renard, 1987, p88.

⁶³ Ibid, p89.

raids. In the northern villages if no other feud was pressing, raids were habitually made on the Shans of Mawk Mai, Mong Pai, Sa Koi and even Sam Ka'.⁶⁴

One particular casualty of constant raiding was the town of Ngwe Daung which is thought to have been founded at some point before 1820 when Shan craftsmen were brought to the stockaded town to cast bronze drums.⁶⁵ The town was a major trading location with people coming from the plains areas of Burma as well as Laos and Thailand to buy drums. Two trading routes led to the city — one through Mawk Mai and Shadaw from the north and the other through Ywathit and Sawlon from the south. Production of drums declined when Ngwe Daung was burnt down during conflict in 1889. The town was burnt again in 1929, 1933 and 1949 when its residents finally moved away.⁶⁶

Elsewhere in the states, '*the population of Karenni largely decreased*'⁶⁷ during the late 19th century. This was partly attributed to water shortages and drought in the Belauchaung River valley, and the difficulty of making a livelihood in the states resulted in many people migrating to Toungoo and Moulmein. Fighting also appears to have played a role, and in 1888, the Saophyas of Naungpale and Kantarawaddy are said to have encouraged migration of Pa-O people into their respective areas to make up their depleted fighting forces. At the same time the superintendent of the Shan states, who also expressed anxiety over the declining numbers of Karenni is reported to have said, '*...immigration of Shans and Taungthus [Pa-O] into Karenni is to be encouraged. The Karenni is undoubtedly dying out fast.*'⁶⁸

2.1.2 The Colonial Period

It appears that the Saophyas did not pay regular tribute to the Burmese monarchy, which seems to have had no institutional presence in the area. Both this and the existence of treaties demarcating between Kantarawaddy and the principality of Chiang Mai, forms the basis for continuing claims for Karenni independence. Counter-claims have described the sub-states as '*tenuous and unstable,*' at the most '*quasi states*' for which there existed '*compelling arguments for recognizing the Karennis as Burman tributaries*'.⁶⁹ However evidence elsewhere, suggests that the offices of the Saophya were extensive, with offices

⁶⁴ Scott and Hardiman, 1901, p274. Scott also notes on the same page that '*slavery existed all over Karen-ni. Shan women and children were habitually captured and sold as slaves and so were Karenni of villages at feud with each other.*'

⁶⁵ According to Richard Cooler, the colony was known by its Karenni language name '*Phrey la ve*' which means Shan forced colony. 'The Karen Bronze Drums of Burma - And Use,' Richard M. Cooler, *Studies in Asian Art and Archaeology*, Volume XVI, Die Deutsche Bibliothek CIP Einheitsaufnahme, 1994, p52.

⁶⁶ The present settlement of Ngwe Daung was re-established in the old site in 1955. *Ibid*, p56.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p55.

⁶⁸ Report on the Administration of the Shan States for the Year 1895-96 quoted in *On the Development of Kayah and Kayan National Identity, A Study and a Bibliography*, Jean Marc Rasthofer, Southeast Asian Publishing House, 1994, p18.

⁶⁹ Renard, 1987, p90.

throughout the state, and departments for health, education, forestry and tax revenue.⁷⁰

In recognition of this, in 1875 an agreement was signed between the Burmese and British governments recognising the independence of the four western Karenni states. The eastern state of Kantarawaddy, which had initially been seen as a tributary to the Burmese court was annexed by the British in 1888 after years of conflict between its Saophya and the British. Four years later the western states were established as feudatories although neither eastern nor western states were included within the borders of the colonial state of Burma.

During the colonial period, the Government of India administered the plains and lowland areas separately as ministerial Burma, leaving largely untouched the local administration systems in hill areas and leaving the Saophyas to administer the Karenni States. These areas were included in the frontier areas administration which came directly under the Governor. However, there were inevitable changes in the relationship between the new centre administration and the peripheries which led to significant but largely undocumented changes on the ground.

By recognising local rulers, the Government of India reinterpreted them as the representatives of offices, or as leaders with hereditary rights to rule⁷¹ over a fixed administrative boundary, rather than charismatic individuals with personal support systems that had little territorial cohesion.⁷² The consolidation and recognition of villages as local territorial units rather than charismatic porous units prevented villagers from exercising multiple allegiances to a range of local leaders as they had done previously. Together with the arbitrary boundary demarcations and the institutionalisation of the Saophya system, these changes undermined historic patterns of social mobility and plural political expression. This was demonstrated when eight Kayan villages in Mongpai, who had previously sworn allegiance to Bawlake, found themselves incorporated into the Shan states in 1895-6.⁷³

Other changes in local administration have been also been noted: local Gekhher administrators and tax collectors (known as '*Mountain Lords*'/'*Ywa Oak*') found themselves redesignated as regional officers and village headmen by the colonial administration.⁷⁴

The real impact of British rule in the Karenni States was limited to trade, specifically timber felling and tin-tungsten extraction at the Mawchi mines which were at one stage the world's largest. This pattern of maintaining the areas in a chronic state of under-development whilst

⁷⁰ Gazette, 1967, Chapter 4.

⁷¹ Karenni Saophyas are reported to have been invited to durbahs in Delhi and Rangoon, and their sons were educated in special schools for the sons of local rulers, Rastofer, 1994, p23.

⁷² The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology, H.I. Marshall, Columbus University, 1922, p306.

⁷³ Some village elders are reported to have said they would rather die than breach their oath of allegiance. Rastofer, 1994, p17.

⁷⁴ The Burmese term for mountain commissioners is '*taung paing*' or '*taung sar*' (awmi ၵၢၼ် ၵၢၼ် ၵၢၼ်) Gazette, 1967, Chapter 4.

extracting its natural resources has hardly changed today.

Equally significant was the social impact of missionary activity in the hill areas. Different mission stations, which were organised and divided up according to ethnic and linguistic boundaries, scoured the area in order to examine, categorise and claim their congregations. The stakes were high because of early successes amongst Karen communities, particularly in Tenasserim. Two Baptist missions competed for the Karenni States — the Shan Mission based in Taungoo and the Karen Mission in Rangoon, who won the battle to evangelise amongst the Karenni population in the states by emphasising the ‘Karen-ness’ of the population.⁷⁵

This mission is reported to have converted large numbers, often in group or village conversions throughout parts of Karen state and the Karenni States. Christian schools were set up so that the numbers of Karen children receiving primary education rose sharply to reach almost 50% of those receiving education in monasteries. With a printing press at Taungoo, Sgaw Karen language publications were distributed throughout the Karenni States.⁷⁶

The Karenni States were also divided up between two Catholic missions. The first from Paris, who evangelised in southern Karenni; the other, from Milan, was based in Taungoo where an Anglican mission station was also set up in 1871. Like for the Karen, certain missions working with Karenni groups developed written Karenni scripts although in this case in romanized forms. Indeed, some areas of Karenni were so strongly Christian that travel through those areas was difficult on a Sunday.⁷⁷

2.1.3 Independence in Burma and the Outbreak of Civil War in the Karenni States

During the latter half of the 19th century, the Government of India appeared to guarantee varying levels of independence for ethnic political structures in the Karenni States, but in the years leading up to independence it was clear that their policy had shifted dramatically in favour of integrating the Karenni States with lowland Burma. Pan Karen efforts to establish an independent Karenni state were rejected by both the British and the major pro-independence party in lowland Burma, the Burman dominated Anti Fascist Peoples’ Freedom League (AFPFL). As a result the Karenni States were incorporated into independent Burma and, according to the 1947 constitution, was to be reconstituted into one state with an extraordinary right of succession after a ten year period.⁷⁸

Within the states themselves, a nationalist organisation, the United Karenni Independent States Council, had been established in 1946.⁷⁹ But in December 1947, against the background of increasing tensions over how independent Burma was to be constituted, the

⁷⁵ Rasthofer, 1994, p20.

⁷⁶ Karenni and the World: From Missionaries to Mail Art, Pierre Leopold, Ilis Day, 1996, p3.

⁷⁷ Races of Burma: Handbook For The Indian Army, C.M. Enriquez, Government of India Publications, Delhi, 1933, p77.

⁷⁸ Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity, Martin Smith, Zed Books, 1999, p79.

⁷⁹ Rasthofer, 1994, p25.

movement split and in 1948 fighting broke out between the two factions.

One faction was led by Sao Wunna, son of the Saophya of Kantarawaddy, who supported the integration of the Karenni States with Burma, together with the right to secession. He was backed by the AFPFL and a unit from the Union Military Police (UMP). The other faction, known as the Karenni National Organisation was led by the administrator of Bawlake, U Bee Tu Re, who advanced a separatist cause and formed a parallel government, the Karenni National Resistance Government. They received support from the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO).

At the same time, there was also fighting amongst Catholics and Baptists, mainly in Bawlake and Kyebogyi. While the outbreak of fighting was certainly spurred by the number of weapons left in Karenni after World War Two, there is no doubt that it prevented the emergence of a consensus either behind separation from, or union with, Burma.⁸⁰ In 1957, the separatist forces, helped by the KNU, formed a new political organisation with its own military wing, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP).

From independence in 1948 until 1962, Karenni interests were represented underground by the KNPP and, particularly after the Saophyas conceded their powers in 1958-9, by Sao Wunna, Karenni chairman and cabinet minister in the government of U Nu, until he was imprisoned in 1962 following Ne Win's military coup.⁸¹

While underground resistance has continued since then, participation in politics was restricted to the BSPP apparatus which was set up in 1974. Following the 1988 coup which brought an end to the BSPP, there was a brief expression of Karenni political activity, which was institutionalised during the early 1990s when two Karenni parties registered, stood for, and won election seats. Since then, however, the tiny space for political participation that was opened up has been swiftly and firmly denied by the Burmese government in Yangon.

In 1988, residents in Loikaw demonstrated support for the democracy uprising. During the 1991 elections, there were eight constituencies in Karenni, and Members of Parliament (MPs) from three different parties were elected: the National League for Democracy (4 seats), the Karenni All Nationalities League for Democracy (2 seats) and the National Unity Party (2 seats). In addition, the Democratic Organisation for Kayan National Unity (DOKNU) won the seats in Pekon township in Shan state and Thandaung township in Karen state.⁸² None of the parties contested the elections on a separatist platform; their aims were to broadly represent all nationalities of Karenni in a national democratic forum and to promote peace and development within the state. However, the parties were later de-registered, have

⁸⁰ Two of the first four leaders of the separatist movement were captured and killed by forces allied to Sao Wunna — U Bee Tu Ree in 1948, and Mee Ee in 1957.

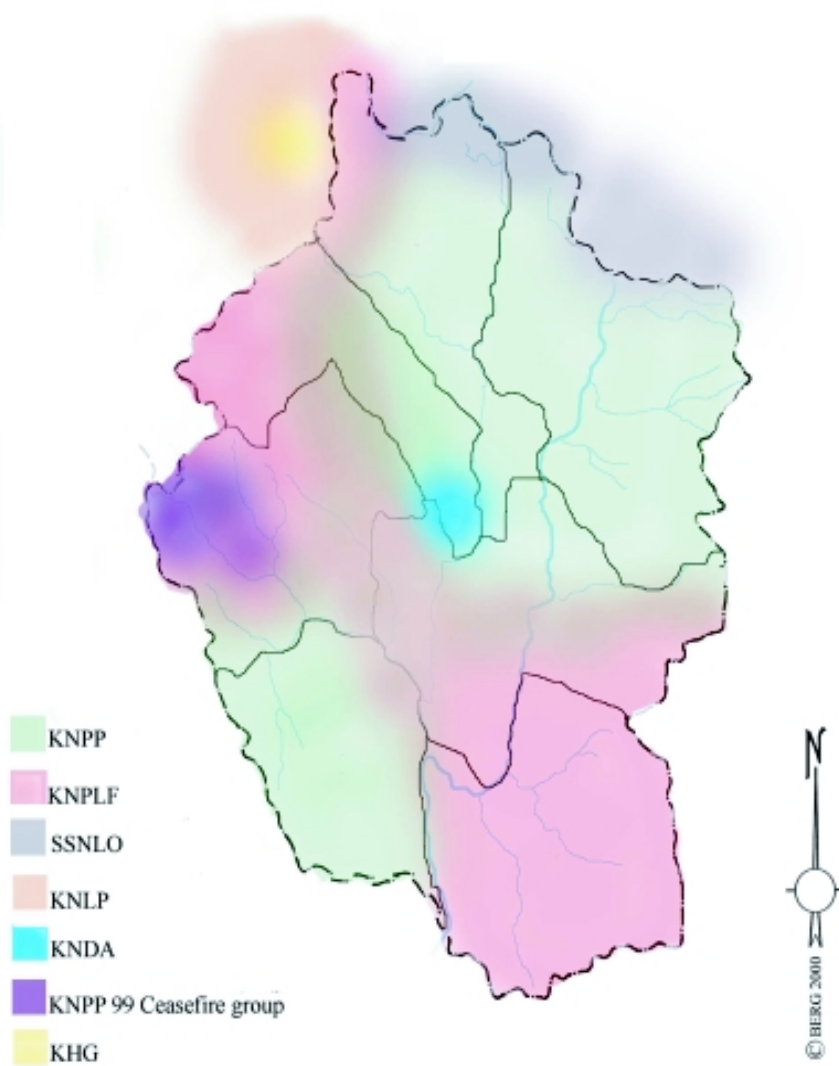
⁸¹ At this point, even the local Karenni government office was situated in Rangoon, where it remained until it was moved to Loikaw in 1960. Rastofer, 1994, p26.

⁸² To Stand and Be Counted: The Suppression of Burma's Members of Parliament, All Burma Students Democratic Front Documentation and Research Centre, June 1998, p108-113 and p252.

stopped attending the National Convention and some of their MPs are in voluntary exile and others are imprisoned in Loikaw.

2.2 State and Non-State Actors including Armed Groups and Political Parties

Figure 6: Areas Non-State Actors Claim to Access



Mapped using information from Ministry of Health State and Division Township Maps

2.2.1 The Role of the *Tatmadaw*

The roots of the *Tatmadaw* stretch back to anti-British pro-independence armed groups in the 1930s. Formed in 1941 as a pro-independence army, its links with the Burman political elite both prior to and following independence have always been close. This relationship was institutionalised in 1962 following Ne Win's military coup, and since then the *Tatmadaw* has commanded a pivotal position in Burmese politics. Since 1988, it has dominated national as well as local administrative bodies, and through a judicious mixture of military operations and cease-fires, expanded its reach into virtually all areas of the nation.⁸³ Widely assumed to enjoy unprecedented access to State coffers, it now fields a well-armed force of over 350,000 men, although wages are known to be insufficient, some recruits are reported to be under-age⁸⁴ and refugees testify that the problem of levying and looting is widespread. As one academic has observed, the rebuilding of the *Tatmadaw* has not resulted in increased professionalism or the adoption of standard practices nationwide, rather the reverse as illicit activities amongst *Tatmadaw* members appears to have increased.⁸⁵

The first *Tatmadaw* battalion was sent to Karenni in 1948. Between 1948 and 1961, several battalions were posted there on a rotational basis although there was only one battalion in the area at any one time. However, this changed in 1961 when Battalion Regiment (BRG) 54 was brought into Loikaw where it remains today. In 1974, BRG 72 was stationed in Lawpita where it guards the hydropower plants and in 1983 BRG 102 was stationed in Ngwe Daung. In 1991 there was a large influx of troops when BRG 250, 261 and Artillery Company 077 were added at Loikaw and Light Infantry Regiments (LIR) 337 and 430 were stationed at Bawlake. The following year LIR 427 was added at Ngwe Daung, LIR 428 was stationed in Pruso and LIR 429 was added in Bawlake.⁸⁶ In 1993, LIR 530 was stationed in Mickann, LIR 531 was added at Pruso, Military Intelligence Section No. 27 and a Supplies and Transport Company (722) were stationed in Loikaw. These regiments are living in fixed military bases in the western half of the state from which they send mobile patrols to the eastern half of the state.

In addition to the battalions within the state, there is a heavy deployment of troops in the southern townships of Shan state. These include one in Moby town (LIR 422), two in Pekon town (LIR 336 and 421), 25 miles north of Loikaw, and another two in Pinlaung township (BRG 4 and 249), which is north of Pekon. A further four are located at Hsi Hseng (LIR 423 and 424) and Bann Yin (LIR 425 and 426). These battalions have on previous occasions joined the Karenni battalions on campaigns and offensives.

⁸³ In 1988, a new regional administrative command was established at Loikaw, although it is not clear how this deployment has altered the situation on the ground. Smith, 1999, p426.

⁸⁴ One refugee who had served the *Tatmadaw* as a porter said that some soldiers were so young they could not lift their guns. Images Asia Interview No. 42.

⁸⁵ 'Cracks in the Edifice? Changes in Military-Society Relations in Burma since 1988,' Mary P. Callahan, in *Burma / Myanmar, Strong Regime, Weak State?*, Morten B. Pedersen, Emily Rudland and R.J. May, eds., Bathurst: Crawford House Publishing, 1999, p22-51.

⁸⁶ According to one observer the land occupied by the battalions is bigger than Bawlake town itself.

Each battalion comprises five companies and between 350 and 500 men if at full strength.⁸⁷ The battalions in Karenni are all concentrated in major towns and along the main roads in the western half of the state. These companies may be temporarily circulated in the eastern half of the state, although one company from Infantry Brigade 72 is permanently stationed in Shadaw. There are no battalions permanently stationed in the eastern half of the state where displacement into relocation sites are most widespread and KNPP troops based at the border are most easily able to access. Prior to the late 1980s, it was customary for *Tatmadaw* battalions to launch attacks on armed groups during the dry season (from October to May) and retreat to their barracks in lowland areas during the rains. In the last decade however, battalions have moved permanently into Karenni. This has resulted in the displacement of villagers and the appropriation of arable land where battalion headquarters have been situated.

Not all battalions are paid for by the Ministry of Defence. The battalion at Lawpita is subsidised by the Ministry of Industry, and a prior deployment of '*Babagyis*' (an oldster battalion) at the Mawchi mines was subsidised by the mining industry.

Since 1988, *Tatmadaw* Regional Commanders have enjoyed great political and economic independence from Yangon and they are the highest authority in their designated areas. In some cases this has led to the formation of individual power bases, widespread corruption and cronyism. The formation of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) a nation-wide people's party whose members receive military training is seen by some to be a check on these personal powers or an attempt to strengthen centre-periphery relations.⁸⁸

2.2.2 The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)

The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) was formed in 1957 out of a loose alliance of village militia and armed volunteer groups. Focussing on re-establishing the right of independence which had been written into the 1947 constitution but thrown out in 1962, the group had an estimated force of 1,000 men who were active throughout Karenni. In 1978, a faction, which later became known as the Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), broke away from the KNPP in an ideological split, specifically over the issue of whether the KNPP should approach the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), which at that time was the most powerful opposition force in Burma, for assistance. In any case, together with the formation of the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP), it seems that during this time there were increasing numbers of Karenni who appeared to embrace a socialist, rather than nationalist platform.

Like elsewhere in Burma where armed splinter groups have broken away from larger armies over issues of political direction and leadership, it seems that there was little accommodation between the groups and the split quickly grew violent when one of the KNPLF leaders was killed. Possibly because the KNPLF were active in Hoya on the south-western border with

⁸⁷ Often battalions are not up to full strength, even though they may seem so on paper. See Callahan, 1999.

⁸⁸ Other institutions such as the Office of Strategic Studies and the Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence may also serve the same purpose. See Callahan, 1999.

Karen state, for a brief time they agreed to an alliance with the Karen National Union which then led to difficult relations between the KNPP and the KNU.

The split much weakened opposition in Karenni and restricted the KNPP's access to villages which were controlled by the KNPLF. In renewed hostilities following the 1995 cease-fire breakdown that had been verbally agreed between KNPP and SLORC leaders earlier in the year, the KNPP lost much of the territory in areas east of the Salween River. It was further weakened by more splits in 1999, when groups separated from the party and formed splinter groups. Today the KNPP remains the only force with troops in Karenni that still fights for self determination with the semblance of a parallel administration running in the refugee camps. As a member of the Un-represented Nations and Peoples Organisation, it has petitioned the United Nations for recognition as a separate state.

The effect of being situated close to the Thai border, and more recently in Thailand itself has had a major impact on the conflict. For the KNPP this has facilitated the delivery of arms, funds and support, including humanitarian aid and revenue from cross border trade. Maintaining these links and keeping the border open has become increasingly important to the survival of the KNPP's activities. Thailand also benefits from these relationships, and scholars have documented the close ties between Thailand's security apparatus and border based armed groups.⁸⁹ The existence of such a back door has had a significant effect on how border based armed groups and the SPDC approach cease-fire considerations.

2.2.3 The Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF)

The KNPLF⁹⁰ was formed out of the split in the KNPP in 1978. Made up of approximately 150 armed men, it is led by ex-KNPP member Nya Maung Me. The KNPLF formed close alliances with the KNLP and Shan States National Liberation Organisation (SSNLO), and received supplies, training, and on occasion, even armed support from the Communist Party of Burma. While active in areas around Loikaw and Pekon in the mid-1980s, particularly in 1983 when battles were fought between an alliance of KNPLF, SSNLO, KNLP and CPB and the *Tatmadaw*,⁹¹ the group suffered following the collapse of the CPB in 1989. Together with the KNLP and the SSNLO they agreed to a cease-fire in 1994. Over time the KNPLF has improved relations with the KNPP; however tensions between the two groups still exist, more so since the KNPLF's cease-fire agreement.

2.2.4 The Shan State Nationalities Liberation Organisation (SSNLO)

The SSNLO was formed in 1966 in south-western Shan state out of the remnants of the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO) who had laid down their arms in 1958 and former members of the KNU who had helped to organise the Pa-Os in 1949. Increasingly the movement

⁸⁹ Smith, 1999, p153, 297 and 299.

⁹⁰ The KNPLF are also known by two other names, the Karenni State Nationalities Liberation Front (KSNLF) and the *Ka La La Ta*.

⁹¹ Smith, 1999, p357.

came under the influence of the CPB, and as a result split into two and another group, the Shan Nationalities Liberation Front (SNLF), emerged in 1974. While the SSNLO was supported by the CPB, the SNLF (which later reverted to becoming the PNO once more) became a member of the NDF, and the two groups fought each other frequently, on one occasion necessitating the SSNLO to take refuge with the KNPP.

Now based in south-west Shan state, the SSNLO's strong alliance with the KNPLF and KNLP means it that has operated in areas of Karenni. Led by Tha Kalei, its 500 members include Kayan, Shan and Pa-O. Like the KNPLF and KNLP, the SSNLO agreed to a cease-fire in 1994.

The PNO split again in 1991 when one faction agreed to a cease-fire with the government. Both factions are based in southern Shan state.

2.2.5 The Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)

The KNLP, which was founded in 1964 by Bo Pyan, a village headman in Pekon township, is currently based in areas around Pekon township. Originally a peasant-style uprising, it gained strength and political direction in the late 1970s when Kayan students from Yangon swelled its numbers and established a relationship with the CPB, from whom it received support and training. Siding with the KNPLF after it split away from the KNPP, the group formed close links with the KNPLF and SSNLO. Active in Loikaw during the 1988 uprisings, the group also suffered in the years following the collapse of the CPB. During this time, there was an internal split within the group, and another faction, a group of about 60 known as the Kayan Home Guard (KHG) emerged, agreed to a cease-fire and opened an office in Loikaw. Led by former Kayan student Shwe Aye, the KNLP itself agreed to a cease-fire in 1994.

2.2.6 The NDF and CPB Alliances and their Impact in Karenni

The state's geographical position has in the past made it an important link between armed groups in the north in Shan and Kachin states, and armed groups in the south in Mon and Karen states. It has also been an important link route for the CPB and northern wing of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). Perhaps because of this strategic position and the relative weakness of the Karenni armed groups in comparison to others such as the CPB or the KNU, in the 1970s there were a number of splits in the Karenni groups over whether to ally with the communist movement in Burma and receive arms from China, or to join the National Democratic Front (NDF) and secure access to external support and tax gates via the Thai border. While these decisions have been portrayed as political ones, they were also informed by access to weapons and sources of funding.

Those groups based in the northern half of the state, the KNLP⁹² and one faction of the SSNLO eventually joined forces with the CPB, while the KNPP split into two factions. The remaining members of the KNPP became founding members of the NDF in 1976⁹³ and the other, the KNPLF joined the KNLP and SSNLO in supporting the CPB and forming the All

Nationalities People's Democratic Front. Despite this, the groups have managed to accommodate each other and the situation between them has remained surprisingly stable.

As a result of these alliances, a wide range of other armed groups have either based themselves within or sought access through Karenni. Some of the groups who are known to have stayed for longer periods include troops from the:

- Chin Democracy Party, when a group of 100 soldiers were based on the Karen-Karenni border;
- Zomi National Front who were for a time based in the Pai River area;
- 140 ethnic Was from the Communist Party of Burma who maintained a base on the Salween River prior to the KNPP-KNPLF split and accessed the Communist Party of Thailand at Mae Hong Son through KNPLF held areas in Meisainan after the split;
- Muslim Liberation Organisation of Burma;
- Remnant forces of the Kuomintang (KMT) who were allied with the KNU in the early 1950s;
- Remnant forces of Khun Sa's Mong Tai army who have settled into a former crop substitution zone in Pekon township;

With the exception of this last armed group which is known to have displaced villages in Karenni, there is no information on what impact these groups had in terms of development of the war, or the effect on either the local economy or population.

2.3 War in the Villages

In Karenni, like elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the agricultural off-season was an opportunity for men to fight. Today the heaviest fighting still takes place in the hot season when villagers, farmers and schoolboys have been pressed into service as porters, labourers and fighters; and while there are few job openings and almost no opportunities for further study, joining a military group has become one of the few viable options for young men.

Like the KNU, the armed groups in Karenni are known to rely on a network of local levies, village irregulars or militias that can be called on to fight when there are enough weapons or whenever the situation demands it. Some observers have viewed this type of military organisation as a flexible way of overcoming communication difficulties in remote areas and a successful way of working without exposing an opposition group's structure. However, it has brought the war directly to the villages,⁹⁴ resulting in increased militarisation and

⁹² According to Martin Smith the KNLP initially joined the NDF in 1976 but left one year later to join the CPB. Smith, 1999, p354.

⁹³ Described as one of the most powerful ethnic alliances in the history of Burma's insurgency, the KNPP reportedly joined the alliance because of its fears of communist expansion in Karenni. Smith, 1999, p345.

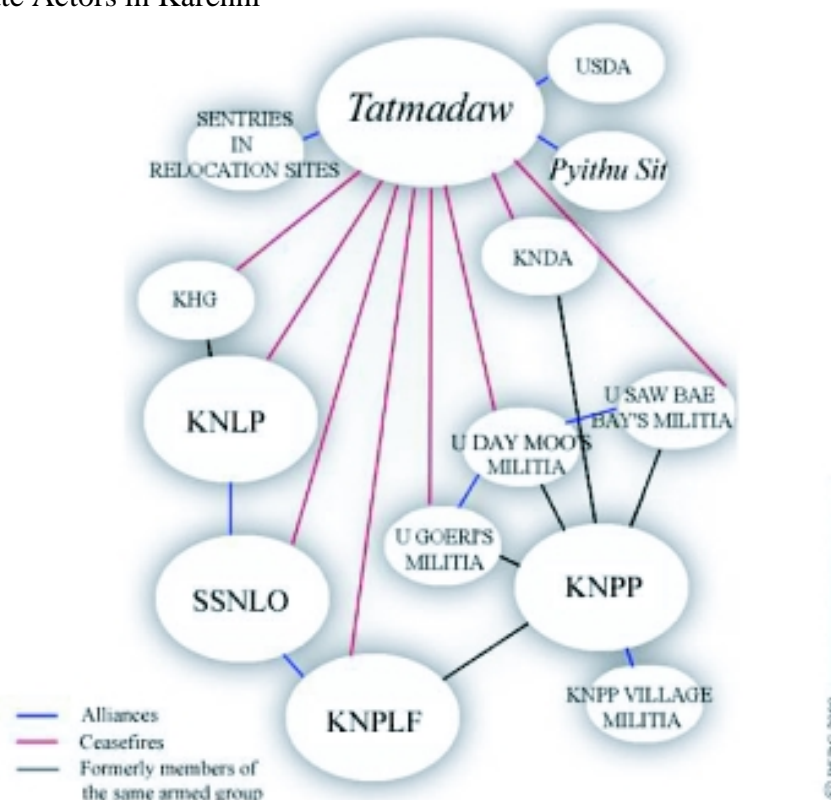
⁹⁴ The role of village chairman, previously either a hereditary or a long term role has in many villages been shortened to six months duration on a rotational basis because no one wants to take responsibility for representing the village. Images Asia Interview Nos. 45, 81, 82. In one case a woman was assigned the role because the men in the village did not want to be elected chairman. Interview No. 101.

retaliatory campaigns (including relocation) aimed at separating communities from armed groups.⁹⁵

In the 1990s, some villagers appear to have been co-opted by the *Tatmadaw* and have formed small groupings that are apparently authorised to carry and use arms in the state. These include groups of refugees who were ordered to be sentries to guard relocation sites with home-made and old weapons and reports of ‘*pyithu sit*’ (village militias) in villages around Pasaung township. The extent of the involvement of these militias and their military capability is unclear, but it appears that they were raised and armed by the *Tatmadaw*. This would appear to undermine the aims of the cease-fire agreements in the state.

The extension of the war to the villages has also had an impact on women. In many cases, while men have become fighters, women have become recipients of violence. Attacks on women in Karenni, including rapes have been documented. However, it is not clear how widespread the problem is or whether the proliferation and splintering of armed groups that characterises this conflict has resulted in increased violence against women. Much more research on this issue is needed.

Figure 7: Relations between the *Tatmadaw* and Non-State Actors in Karenni



⁹⁵ Refugees said that when *Tatmadaw* soldiers entered the village men (and sometimes single women) left the village because they were afraid of accusations that they were members of an armed group. Images Asia Interview Nos. 42, 43, 68, 70, 81, 82, 88.

2.4 The Formation of Splinter Groups in the 1990s

The 1990s have seen a second wave of splits and formation of factions, this time almost exclusively from the KNPP. The Karenni National Defence Army (KNDA) which was formed in 1995⁹⁶ was made up of approximately 150 loosely allied ex-KNPP members. Led by Lee Reh, an ex-KNPP soldier, the group agreed to a cease-fire like agreement in 1996. The political aims and objectives of this group are not known, although their orientation appears to be anti-KNPP. At present they have a military base in Daw Tama Gyi

During 1999, three more groups broke away from the KNPP, formed their own factions and signed cease-fires with the SPDC. The first faction, led by U Goeri, was from the Hoya region and agreed to a cease-fire on 23 July 1999. The second one, led by U Day Moo, agreed a cease-fire on 7 August 1999. The final cease-fire group led by ex-KNPP secretary of No. 4 Township, U Saw Bae Bay, signed a cease-fire on 21 November 1999.⁹⁷ One negotiator estimated that the total number of former KNPP troops who have allied under these three splinter groups is about 200.

In some cases, splinter groups have become ‘hired-guns’ or ‘lost commands’ who might switch allegiances according to the situation. It would appear that the formation of these groups has been accompanied by a reliance on illegal activities — smuggling, racketeering and general violence⁹⁸ — as groups jostle to consolidate their positions and gain access to income.⁹⁹ While some people blame the government for engineering splits in opposition groups, the reality is a bewildering number of armed groups whose allegiances may not always be transparent. Moreover, the cease-fire arrangements have not addressed this issue at all; rather they appear to have exacerbated the problem.

2.5 The Economics of War

There is very little information about who has borne the financial cost of the war in Karenni which has now been running for over 50 years. When it started in 1947, there was a large surplus of weapons in Burma left over from the Second World War. In addition, one observer maintains that in the first few years following the outbreak of war, Sao Wunna’s army was well equipped with communications equipment, imported uniforms and even helicopters. Moreover until 1953, the lucrative Mawchi mines were in the hands of the non-State armed groups.

⁹⁶ The KNDA are also known amongst Karennis as ‘*Nagas*’ (dragons).

⁹⁷ ‘Sixteen Members of KNPP Exchange Arms for Peace,’ Information Sheet No.B-1159 (I), Yangon, Myanmar, 23 November 1999.

⁹⁸ Images Asia Interview Nos. 19, 101.

⁹⁹ Examples of general violence include the following incidents: on 24 December, two people were killed when an armed group fired on a crowd in Pruso. The KNPP were blamed but denied involvement. During the attack at Border Patrol Gate 14 in May 1999, two uniforms were deliberately left at the site to suggest that the KNU were responsible for the attack, something they publicly denied. The Thai National Security Council are reported to have placed the blame on ‘*leftist Kayah with connections with Burmese troops.*’

Following this, there was a period when the cost of fighting was sustained by cold war ideologies, and for aligned parties, external funding and weaponry were made available.¹⁰⁰ The KNPP and the KNPLF also had access to an international border which provided revenue from the taxation of international trade — a black market economy whose impact increased in inverse proportion to the isolationist policies of the government in Yangon.

These arrangements changed abruptly in the mid-1980s when much of the cross-border trade moved to the Burma - China border, depriving the armed groups of their tax revenue.¹⁰¹ For a brief period in the early 1990s, the war was fuelled and determined by access to and control of resources, particularly the teak trade. During this time, arms sales increased and the conflict between the KNPP and the government escalated.¹⁰²

The collapse of the CPB in 1989 meant that the northern groups were also significantly weakened. Five years later, these groups agreed to cease-fires which enabled them to maintain their weapons and gave them the legitimate right to taxation, as well as extraction rights.¹⁰³

Meanwhile the KNPP has lost territory and its cross-border funding base. In addition, access to constituents has been cut off through government displacement initiatives which represents a further loss in support although they have access to humanitarian aid and support in the refugee camps.

Finally, in addition to the economic arrangements for each armed group in Karenni, there has been a long running contraction in the government's ability to provide services throughout the state. This has been accompanied by an increasing reliance on the burgeoning extra-legal economy, including unregistered cross-border trade, resource extraction, an expanding black market sector and illegal taxation.

In 1989, four Thai logging companies were granted concessions by the SLORC to extract teak in areas controlled by non-State armed groups adjacent to the Karenni border with Thailand.¹⁰⁴ The companies were forced to negotiate access, 'passage fees' and safety guarantees with the KNPP so that they could transport the logs across the border to Mae Hong Son province in Thailand where officials from the Burma Timber Enterprise registered them. Like similar deals that were set up at the same time in areas controlled by Shan, Karen and Mon armed groups, it became a situation in which each party swiftly sought to realise benefits. For a brief period of five years, the sale of teak stands determined the course of the war. Teak and other tropical hardwoods were cut down at an unprecedented

¹⁰⁰ See Smith, 1999, p338 for evidence of communist support to the SSNLO.

¹⁰¹ The revenue at some KNU outposts was down by about 60 percent by 1988. See *Forgotten Victims of a Hidden War: Internally Displaced Karen in Burma*, Burma Ethnic Research Group, April 1988, p24.

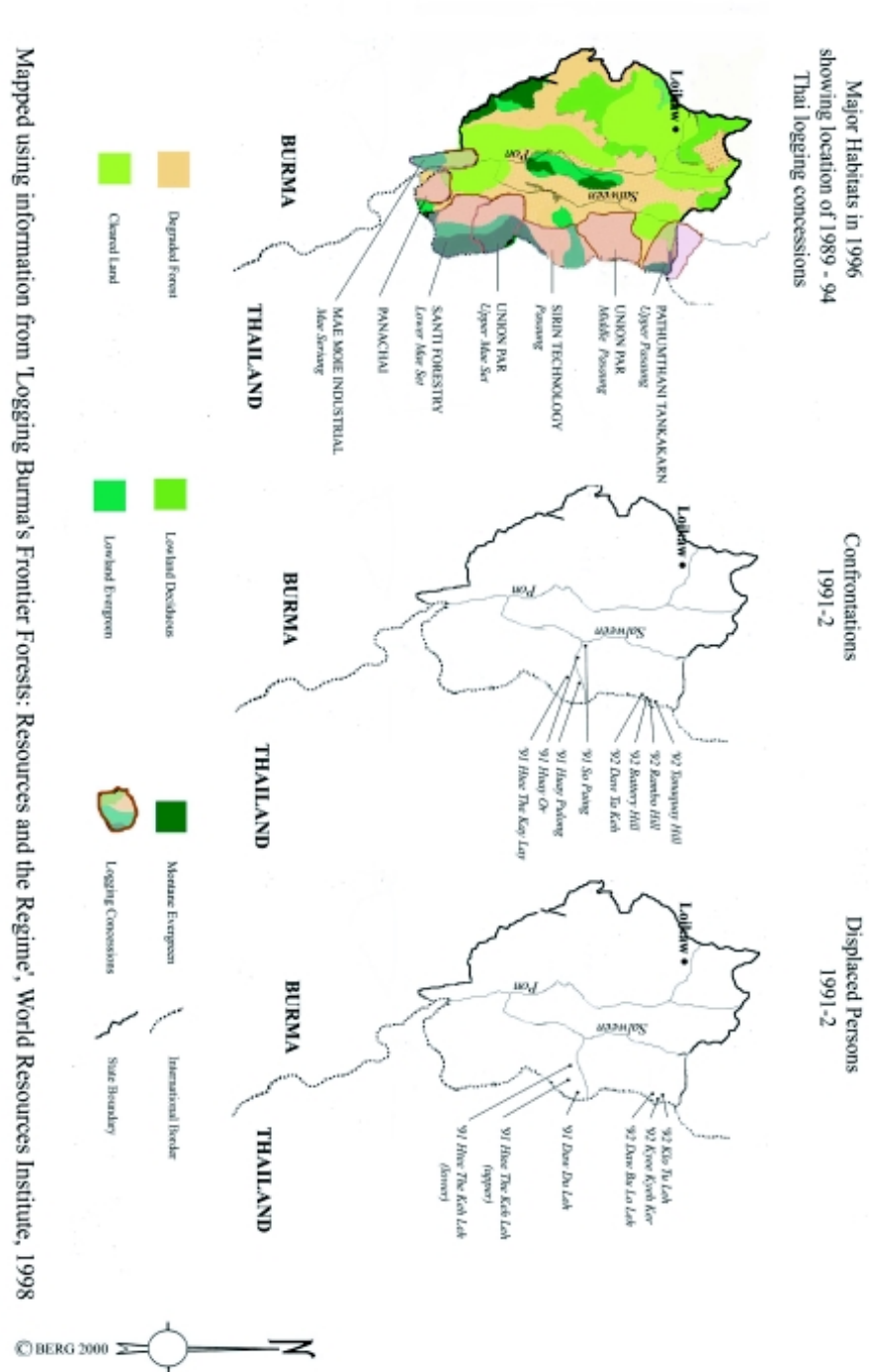
¹⁰² See section on Conflict and Resources below.

¹⁰³ Observers maintain that in addition to logging rights, each cease-fire group was granted a concession at the Mongshue sapphire mines in Shan state.

¹⁰⁴ The timber companies and concession areas were: Pathumthani Sawmill Co (Upper Pasaung), Union Par Co (Middle Pasaung and Upper Meh Set), Sirin Technology Co (Pasaung) and Santi Forestry Co (Lower Meh Set). 'Partners in Plunder,' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 February 1990.

2.5.1 The Relationship between Financing the War and Exploitation of Natural Resources

Figure 8 The Relationship between Resources and Displacement in Karenni



rate, without regard to sustainable management. In some cases, trees were clear-felled even as battles were fought. Territory changed hands, cash and arms flowed in, and the prospect of further gains intensified the war.

With foreign debts of US\$5 billion, foreign exchange reserves of US\$12 million, and little prospect of foreign aid, SLORC was reported to have earned a life-saving US\$200 million from the deals in the first year alone.¹⁰⁵ From the perspective of the government, it was hoped the deals would benefit in other ways — by putting a stop to the prospect of further logging arrangements between Thai companies and the armed groups and providing military access to impenetrable forested areas.

Faced with a situation that they could do little to stop, the KNPP were offered transport fees of 1,500 baht per tang,¹⁰⁶ a figure that they renegotiated to 3,000 baht in November 1989. Moreover, illegal logging arrangements continued in forests in and around the concession areas, earning the KNPP enormous sums of money.

The situation was brought to a halt in 1993 when the SLORC, upset by over-cutting and illegal deals (including the reported delivery of weapons) between logging companies and armed groups, refused to renew the concessions. However, illegal cross-border logging in Karenni continued. It was this issue that was partly responsible for the breakdown in the cease-fire that was verbally agreed between the KNPP and SLORC in 1995. In the months following the cease-fire, SLORC became increasingly frustrated about the number of unregistered logs which were being sold by the KNPP to Thai companies across the border. State-wide SLORC policy dictates that the State-owned Burma Timber Enterprise has a monopoly on all trade in teak. However, the KNPP also state that they have a right to extract and sell any resources in areas they control. By the time the cease-fire broke down at the end of June 1995, SLORC was understood to be planning to award a logging concession in Karenni to a Singaporean company. Such an agreement was to try to ensure revenues did not end up in the hands of armed and cease-fire groups, but were instead realised in Yangon.¹⁰⁷

2.6 The Course of the War

Between 1947 and 1953, the towns of Loikaw, Demawso, Pruso, Bawlake and Mawchi were all under control of the *Tatmadaw* and the forces allied to them led by Sao Wunna, while the nationalist forces were active in the rural areas especially south-east of Mawchi. During this time, the Karenni armed opposition had been substantially weakened by the deaths of a succession of top leaders in fighting between Sao Wunna's troops, and by 1962, following two years of intense fighting, government forces had gained control of what is now known as Meh Set township. It was not until 1964 that the KNPP, now led by Saw Maw Reh, were able to liberate and hold the border area east of Mawchi. The formation of the KNLP in Moby in 1964 and the SSNLO on the north-east border of Karenni and Shan

¹⁰⁵ B.U.R.M.A., January 1993, p4.

¹⁰⁶ 1 tang = 1.6 tonnes.

¹⁰⁷ 'All's not Fair in Trade and War in Burma,' James Fahn, *The Nation*, 8 July 1995.

states in 1966 meant that there were now three armed groups claiming to represent various Karen, Karenni and Shan interests in the area.

In 1971, the KNPP set up headquarters on the Pai River area, which became a KNPP heartland. The split with the KNPLF in 1978 meant that the KNPP lost access to two areas; one around Hoya in Pruso township and the other north-east of Loikaw township. In 1972, the government implemented the Four-Cuts policy although accounts suggest that the operation was initially neither widespread nor successful in draining the resource bases of the armed groups.

The pro-democracy uprisings in Burma in August 1988 gave the KNPP the opportunity to retake the Meh Set area as *Tatmadaw* troops were hurriedly withdrawn. However, by 1990 they had returned to take the area again. This area is now jointly in the hands of the KNPLF and the *Tatmadaw*

The collapse of the CBP in 1989 and the relocation of cross-border trade to the Burma - Chinese border coincided with the first recorded accounts of refugee movements as fighting between the KNPP and the *Tatmadaw* along the eastern banks of the Salween River intensified. In 1991, fierce fighting around the Pai River resulted in the displacement of three villages when four KNPP military camps, including the headquarters at Huay Orr were overrun.¹⁰⁸

The following year saw some of the heaviest fighting ever witnessed when fifteen *Tatmadaw* battalions (reportedly over 4,000 troops) overran the area. By the end of the year, three villages had been displaced, four KNPP bases had been overrun (Taw Ta Keh, Battery Hill, Rambo Hill and Tanaquay Hill) and over 2,000 refugees had arrived at the Thai border. However, following the offensive, *Tatmadaw* troops retreated, villagers returned and the three KNPP bases were set up again.

Elsewhere in the state, in the same year, relocations in Demawso and Pruso were undermining both the KNPP and KNPLF's ability to move around in these areas. The large increase in refugee arrivals in 1992 included 1,200 people from Pruso township.¹⁰⁹

In 1993, cease-fire discussions started between the KNPP and the SLORC.¹¹⁰ The following year the KHG, KNPLF, KNLP and SSNLO all agreed to cease-fires with the government.¹¹¹ The breakdown in 1995 of the cease-fire between SLORC and KNPP led to new offensives on the eastern bank of the Salween and in 1996 relocation orders were distributed throughout

¹⁰⁸ The other three camps were Htee The Kay Lay, So Paing and Huay Pu Long.

¹⁰⁹ Myanmar, No Law At All: Human Rights Violations under Military Rule, Amnesty International, October 1992, p24.

¹¹⁰ A KNPP leader acknowledged that the cease-fire negotiations came about in part as a response to the 1992 displacements.

¹¹¹ In March 1994, 956 people moved out of the refugee camp and returned to Burma . It is not clear why they left or indeed if they left voluntarily although the move is believed to be connected with the KNPLF cease-fire.

the state. In January 1996, the three KNPP bases that had been taken in 1992 were overrun again — Tanaquay Hill, Daw Ta Keh and Tee Kye Ker. In January 1997, one of the refugee camps was attacked and refugees were killed.¹¹² Since then there has been a consistent rise in the new number of refugees, many of whom are reported to come from relocation sites.

With a range of armed groups operating in the area, there have been several focal points in the war. However, because much of the international focus has been on the conflict between the *Tatmadaw* and non-State (largely KNPP) armies, very little is known about points of conflict among the armed groups. These include:

- The early conflict between nationalist forces and Sao Wunna's armed group known as the military police;
- The formation and activities of the KNLP in Moby township;
- Frequent confrontations between the SSNLO and the PNO; one account suggests that these groups fought each other far more frequently than either of them fought the *Tatmadaw*;
- The split and subsequent conflict between the KNPP and KNPLF;
- The alliance between the KNPLF, KNLP and SSNLO;
- The formation of the KNDA and the subsequent KNPP cease-fire parties in 1999.

There is a broad range of non-State armed groups, each with their associated alliance-partners, splinter factions and cease-fire agreements operating in a very small and impoverished physical area. What started as a bi-partisan struggle between State forces and a single separatist movement, has become multi faceted, with different groups forming and splintering leading to a situation of generalised violence. Since the *Tatmadaw* control most areas in the state right up to the Thai border, the space available for opposition (armed or otherwise) has become extremely limited. Two factors appear to have lessened the conflict, at least temporarily — alliances between groups operating in the state,¹¹³ and cease-fire agreements with the *Tatmadaw*. It should be pointed out, however, that apart from the KNPLF-SSNLO-KNLP alliance, alliances or agreements between the other armed groups appear to be ad hoc, temporary and precarious. Moreover, cease-fire agreements themselves only appear to relate to a cease-fire between one particular group and the SPDC, and do not necessarily extend to cease-fires with other armed groups.

While the appearance of so many different armed groups might appear chaotic and unworkable, the history of conflict in Burma shows a clear tolerance for, and ability to work in partnership with, local armed groupings who ally themselves to State forces. The origins of these groups can be traced at least as far back as the formation of '*tats*' (armed groups) formed around pro-independence politicians, interest and business groups prior to World War Two. During World War Two, many of them were incorporated into the Burma Independence Army (BIA) and following that, also into the '*pyithu yebaw tat*' (People's

¹¹² Images Asia Interview No. 39.

¹¹³ Since the KNPLF, KNLP and SSNLO share strong alliances which date from the formation of the KNPLF, no inter-group conflicts have been reported.

Comrades Army) also known by its official name, People's Volunteer Organisation (PVO).¹¹⁴ Indeed it has been commented that *'the proclivity of party politicians throughout the twentieth century to form "private", "pocket", or "party" armies may be a result of the successful operation of the tats in the 1930s.'*¹¹⁵

2.7 Cease-fires

In late 1993, SLORC Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt broadcast an invitation to discuss cease-fires with groups in Karenni. The involvement of Bishop Soetero of Loikaw as a negotiator as well as a locally formed Peace Association appeared to suggest some attempt at non-partisan observation in the absence of international mediation.¹¹⁶ The first group to take advantage of this was the small Kayan National Guard who agreed to a cease-fire in 1994. They were swiftly followed by the KNPLF (9 May 1994), KNLP (26 July 1994) and SSNLO (9 October 1994). Very little is known about these agreements although one person involved has commented that they were very easy to broker as both sides agreed to terms almost instantly. What is clear is that the groups were able to maintain their standing armies, police their areas, conduct business¹¹⁷ and in some cases attend the National Convention. Perhaps these cease-fires could be more accurately described as business deals within a predatory economy for there appear to have been few further negotiations of any significance since the initial agreement, which raises serious questions about the stability of the cease-fires and power sharing relations in any future regime.

On 21 March 1995, the KNPP entered into what has been described as a *'ceremony to symbolise agreement between honourable gentlemen'*¹¹⁸ with SLORC. In this case the deal was much more difficult to broker with serious differences between the two parties. Terms of the agreement, some of which were later made public, included 16 points put forward by the KNPP. These covered issues such as the end to internal displacement of villages, laying of landmines, taking porters, restrictions on movement and the establishment of new villages for Burman migrants. There was also an attempt to rationalise and demarcate areas controlled by each side and restrict any further military build up and the KNPP received an undisclosed sum of money from the SLORC.

However, within months the cease-fire had broken down, with both sides citing grievances. The KNPP stated that SLORC had violated the agreement by collecting porters and launching a major new offensive, moving three battalions into areas under KNPP control. Meanwhile, SLORC made known that it was doing this for four reasons: to provide an alternative route

¹¹⁴ More than 200 local armed groups are reported to have been incorporated into the PVO. Callahan, 1996, p307.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p119.

¹¹⁶ During an interview with one Peace Association member, the person maintained that the group disbanded immediately after the cease-fires because it was certain the cease-fires would break down.

¹¹⁷ As part of the cease-fire, armed groups were given concessions to ruby mines, timber and trade gates.

¹¹⁸ Explanation on KNPP's Stand Regarding its Cease-fire Agreement with SLORC, Party Central Committee, Karenni National Progressive Party, 29 April 1995.

to the military bases of Khun Sa,¹¹⁹ to prevent rapacious logging in KNPP areas, to secure the border area in the event of troubles it foresaw following a national election in Thailand and to build garrisons at three border passes.¹²⁰ Following this breakdown, there was a swift escalation of the conflict and further discussions between the two sides have not been forthcoming.

In 1999, three other cease-fires were agreed between the government and three factions of the KNPP from Pruso and Demawso areas. These were again brokered by Bishop Soetero, and another local group known as the Kayah Peace Association which consisted of business people who had links with both the SPDC and KNPP, and township and village elders from Hoya, Kay Lya, Pruso and Mar Kraw Shay. According to a member of that group, three regional KNPP members who broke away from the KNPP with a number of men¹²¹ individually signed cease-fires. A fourth series of negotiations with Papa Gyi, a local KNPP commander in Pruso township broke down when two of the negotiators, Daw Phraemoe and U Hla Din were first threatened and then subsequently murdered on 31 July 1999 in a cave near Mar Kraw Shay in Pruso township.¹²² The government blamed the KNPP, local observers held Papa Gyi responsible and the KNPP have not denied involvement. Subsequently Bishop Soetero was threatened and the cathedral in Loikaw was guarded by SPDC troops until January 2000. On 6 February 2000, Papa Gyi himself was captured by the SPDC.¹²³

Moreover, because at least one of the 1999 cease-fire breakaway groups was led by U Goeri who is a Kayaw,¹²⁴ and since Bishop Soetero is himself a Kayaw, observers have noted that the recent cease-fires may have intensified ethnic tensions between the sub-groups. It is also thought that the SPDC is trying to undermine the power of the KNPLF¹²⁵ by exacerbating these tensions, since in this particular cease-fire agreement, the group was given territory in an area which is inhabited by Kayaw, even though it was recognised as KNPLF territory in 1994.

These events demonstrate how difficult and dangerous¹²⁶ the negotiations have been, especially since non-partisan facilitation was not encouraged by the government. In such a situation there is little recourse for the armed groups except accommodation with the

¹¹⁹ Bangkok Post, 30 June 1995.

¹²⁰ Statement Regarding SLORC's Military Activities in Karenni Following the Cease-fire Agreement, The Government of Karenni, 28 June 1995.

¹²¹ The KNPP claim that U Goeri acted by himself; and that those named with him in the cease-fire were not KNPP soldiers but local villagers.

¹²² Some people maintain that the deaths were a result of a business deal that failed rather than cease-fire negotiations, although if this was the case it is likely that the two deals were related.

¹²³ One observer maintained that Papa Gyi had himself been killed, although this has not yet been confirmed.

¹²⁴ The top leaders of the KNPP are mainly, although not exclusively Kayah.

¹²⁵ Most KNPLF members are Kayan.

¹²⁶ Daw Phraemoe was also involved in brokering the 1995 cease-fire between the KNPP and government. Following the breakdown of that cease-fire she went into hiding to avoid reprisals.

Tatmadaw, which in some cases has drawn them further into the conflict as they have been mobilised to assist the *Tatmadaw*'s efforts to weaken others that are still in opposition. Moreover, a cease-fire agreement with one group does not extend to other groups as well¹²⁷ and there have been incidents of fighting between cease-fire armed groups and non cease-fire armed groups.

The issue of future participation in national elections for national political bodies raises important issues about the fragmentation of armed groups in Karenni. None of the armed groups transformed themselves into political parties to contest the 1990 elections. Given the oppressive environment within which political groups are forced to operate, this is not surprising, but it impacts sharply on the viability of the cease-fire process, especially since all attempts at reconciliation or any form of non-partisan facilitation to broker the process has not been encouraged in any way. This process appears not only to have stagnated, but also to have failed to build up any local bureaucracy or civilian institutions of any kind. Instead, as Mary Callahan has observed, '*the agreements have provided ethnic groups with the authority to hold on to their arms, police their own territory, and to use their former rebel armies as private security forces to protect both legal and illegal business operations.*'¹²⁸

In essence this has enabled military groups, including the *Tatmadaw*, to acquire an administrative legitimacy within an agreed territory which can be defended by force from other armed groups. This situation relates somewhat to the initial stages of cease-fire agreements when armed groups and their territories are identified and military activities are contained and regulated. At a future point, parties involved would be expected to negotiate on disarmament, normalisation, and future political participation. In Karenni, it is now over five years since the process started — time enough to allow these militarised positions to become firmly entrenched. Indeed, no significant steps have been taken on the decommissioning of weapons, and the situation looks even more fragile since the *Tatmadaw* has embarked on its ambitious military build up.

¹²⁷ As a case in point, during the KNLP cease-fire in 1994, its leader Shway Aye was imprisoned by the KNPP at the Thai border over a breach of understanding when 14 KNPP troops were killed by the KNPLF and KNLP.

¹²⁸ Democracy in Burma: The Lessons of History, Mary P. Callahan, National Bureau of Asian Research, 1998, p17.