

Mandy Sadan (ed.): War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar - The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994-2011; Copenhagen: NIAS Press 2016, ISBN 978-87-7694-189-5

Hellmann-Rajanayagam, Dagmar

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Rezension / review

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Hellmann-Rajanayagam, D. (2017). Mandy Sadan (ed.): War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar - The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994-2011; Copenhagen: NIAS Press 2016, ISBN 978-87-7694-189-5. *International Quarterly for Asian Studies (IQAS)*, 48(3-4), 294-297. <https://doi.org/10.11588/iqas.2017.3-4.8649>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

MANDY SADAN (ed.), *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar. The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994–2011*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016. Xxii, 517 pages, £25.00. ISBN 978-87-7694-189-5

This volume is in some ways the counterpart to the book by Marie Lall reviewed earlier in this journal (see Marie Lall, *Understanding Reform in Myanmar. People and Society in the Wake of Military Rule*. Reviewed by Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam in *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 47(3/4), 2016, pp. 311–313). Both studies voice considerable doubt and criticism about the path Myanmar has taken since 2012, but whereas Lall appears to retain a basic optimism, the contributions by Sadan are much more pessimistic. This certainly derives not least from the different points of departure from which the two texts look at the country: Lall takes a “Burmese-centric” view, whereas the volume under review looks at the situation from the periphery/ies. All contributions in Sadan’s volume maintain high academic standards, though some are more persuasive than others.

In the introduction the editor discusses the breakdown of the ceasefire in Kachin State and the possible reasons for this beyond the alleged “bloody-mindedness” of the Kachin, who allegedly obstructed the transition in Myanmar when it had just got into its stride. Sadan argues that the renewed fighting occurred after a long period of disappointed and unfulfilled expectations, in which the Myitsone dam and the government’s demand to join the Border Guard Forces were only the last straws.

The first chapter, by Mandy Sadan and Robert Anderson, expands on this and discusses what they call the First Kachin Ceasefire (1944–1961), which was characterised by high expectations and bitter disappointments after the end of WWII and independence. These disappointments, they argue, eventually led to a loss of trust that was and will be extremely difficult to rebuild.

Martin Smith draws a similarly bleak picture continuing the discussion into the ceasefire from 1994 to 2011. He also describes the high hopes for peace and autonomy, which again were shattered by Burmese military intransigence. A ceasefire was not enough to secure a durable peace; what the Kachin wanted was what in another context the Sri Lankan Tamils had demanded: peace with justice. Especially remarkable in Smith’s account is his emphasis on the role of the Kachin in setting up Civil Society Organisations after the ceasefire, which made them relative trailblazers in this regard. He argues that they were able to do so due to their designation as faith-based groups doing “religious” work. It might be worthwhile investigating why similar Buddhist networks were not tolerated by the government. Also worth noting is the much more equivocal view of Khin Nyunt and his attitudes towards the minority concerns taken by Smith and other authors in the volume, compared to Lall who criticises Khin Nyunt severely.

The articles by Lee Jones and Kevin Woods discuss some of the ceasefire's economic consequences. As Karin Dean has also argued, they point out that the ceasefire has not brought any benefits for the ethnic groups beyond the silencing of arms. Economic development, on the contrary, has become a means for the army and the government to extend their control and relocate the local population in such a way as to lessen any future resistance. "Ceasefire capitalism" robbed the minority armies and populations of means of income they could rely on before, so that "development" became a hated word (p. 121). Jones argues that the current wide-spread support for the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) among the population may be attributed in some measure to this ceasefire capitalism. Wood puts the point even more starkly by defining development, particularly material development, as counterinsurgency. He illustrates this with the cases of timber logging and agribusiness: once concessions have been granted – typically to Chinese businesspeople – they are privately secured and guarded and the local population banned from access to their own resources. Local elites may be co-opted in order to keep them quiet. Even though state control in these areas might not yet be total, the "privatisation of counterinsurgency" lessens the pressure on the military and even brings economic profits. The methods to secure the area bear a striking resemblance to those employed in Northern Sri Lanka.

Laur Kiik looks at Kachin perceptions of the ceasefire, discrimination and suffering, and at their assumptions about Burmese intentions. He emphasises that these perceptions, whether or not they are based on facts, contribute to a breakdown of trust. He voices some doubts about a perceived "Burman conspiracy" to deprive the Kachin of their economic resources. Intentions, he states, might be honourable or based on profit-oriented stupidity, but are not necessarily driven by malice against the Kachin. While the adage that one should not attribute to malice what might be simple stupidity is always worth considering, the evidence adduced by the other contributors and the fact that very similar processes are observable elsewhere (e.g. in Sri Lanka) make one question this assessment. The measures look too much like a continuation of "four cuts", "strategic hamlets" and "new village" to be coincidental.

Myanmar's relations with China, and their impact on Kachin State and people-to-people relations in the border region, are discussed by Enze Han and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, respectively. Han presents changing Chinese approaches to the issues in the border region due to shifting priorities and policy approaches in Burma itself. One clear sign for a changed approach that he sees is China's engagement in the peace discussions in the Kachin conflict. Ho illustrates the developing relations between Kachin in Myanmar and Jingpo (Kachin) in China with the example of the *manau* ceremonies and festivals conducted in very different ways in both countries, but nonetheless leading to a perception of belonging in both cases.

Extending the conversation beyond Myanmar's borders as well are Reshmi Bannerjee, and Joy L. K. Pachuau together with Mandy Sadan with their discussion of ethnic conflict from the Northeast Indian side. Both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have a small Singhpo (Kachin) community, but whereas in Arunachal Pradesh they have the status of a Scheduled Tribe (ST), they do not in Assam, which has led to problems there. Bannerjee shows how the ST status carries both privileges and disadvantages, leading to segregation and exclusion. Land, she says, is a source of conflict in the area, because land rights are often customary and not fixed, presenting an opportunity for "outsiders" like low-landers and Muslims to enter the region and grab land and resources. Northeastern "tribes", she argues, are often considered not "truly Indian" and real devolution of powers has been neglected in favour of a particularly brutal military solution.

Helen Mears extends the discussion further to the international environment, showing how, through the distribution of illustrated calendars throughout the world, both an "imagined community" and a message of resistance and a counter-narrative to the dominant Burmese one is conveyed to the Kachin community in Burma and beyond.

Two chapters relay the experiences of other ethnic groups involved in the conflict. Patrick Meehan and Mikael Gravers present the experiences of cease-fires and betrayed hopes among the Palaung and the Karen. Though their initial situation and the course of the war are quite different, the basic similarities both in the shaping of the ceasefire and the process of ceasefire capitalism are striking and contradict Kiik's assumption of unintentionality. Joy L. K. Pachuau and Sadan describe the Mizo culture of memory of the time of *buai* (calamity). The Mizo were treated particularly harshly before a ceasefire and a political solution eventually bound them as stakeholders to the Indian polity. Significant here is the ambivalence of memory, because the Mizo were attacked not only by the army, but also by hostile Mizo groups. How to deal with these memories and live together with the perpetrators is a problem not easily dealt with, and often only by silence. Teresa Colomba-Beck has described comparable developments in Angola and Mozambique.

Jenny Hedström relates how the conflict affected women. Their role in the struggle was long a limited and seldom acknowledged one, though they often bore the brunt of the suffering. Eventually women got involved in the fight beyond messenger and nursing services, leading to new perceptions of their role. Some of the processes here again resemble those of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), such as the interdiction against marrying, all-women regiments, or the KIA demand for "one child from every family". Hedström paints a rather gloomy picture of the status and power of women, which is in some ways contradicted by the facts: women are very prominent nowadays as

teachers, headmasters, directors of NGOs and even, like Seng Raw, as secretaries to the leaders of the movement.

These theoretical chapters are enriched by three field cases of individual Kachin directly affected by fighting and suffering and/or actively involved in the fight. Nhkum Bu Lu, the wife of a Kachin lawyer and politician, describes her family life from childhood to becoming wife and mother. Particularly poignant is her sober description of the struggle to hold her family together after her husband's arrest and jailing and to provide her children a measure of education and security in the midst of daily danger.

Nhkum Bu Lu's husband Duwa Mahkaw Hkun relates his political activity in setting up an overseas and diaspora network of Kachin activists in South-east Asia and beyond. He takes pains to emphasise that the existence of different organisations and views should not be construed as disunity. Differences of opinion and discussions do not indicate splits, even if the government would like to portray them as such.

Hkanhpa Tu Sadan narrates his experiences as a Kachin student at Yangon University in the 1990s. Striking here is the Burman students' near complete ignorance of the ethnic groups at the periphery of the country as well as the gradual drifting together of ethnic cliques because of state supervision and suppression. Similarly intriguing is the perception of the Kachin students of having more room to manoeuvre due to feeling secure in their language and church community, which is not as easily penetrated by spies.

Finally, Matthew Walton's conclusion draws together the many topics that surface and resurface in the articles and highlights what I have once called "risks and side-effects of ceasefires". Ceasefires might stop actual physical violence, but they are no substitute for peace. This requires the building of trust as well as mutual respect. Especially the latter often seems to be lacking on the side of the Burmans.

This volume draws together multiple aspects and facets of the ethnic issues on the borders of Myanmar. It highlights the difficulties of both defining war and peace and finding solutions to armed conflict. At the same time it illustrates the connections and repercussions these conflicts have in neighbouring countries with related ethnic groups. For anyone wanting to get a thorough overview of the problems in Myanmar's borderlands, this volume is mandatory.

Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam