

# **The Ethnopolitics of Democratisation**

*Democratisation, nationality policy and ethnic relations in Burma,  
1948-1962*

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### *Foreword:*

This thesis is the outcome of an interest for Burma and its people that began in 1994, when I joined the Burma Support Group/Norway, which was then in the process of being formed by students at the University of Oslo. Since then activities carried out by a community of Burma solidarity groups in Norway as well as abroad have played a key role in keeping my fascination for Burma alive and in deepening my knowledge of the country. I remain deeply appreciative of the friendships that have been forged in the course of these years.

In the autumn of 1998, I moved to Mae Sot, a border in Thailand adjacent to Burma, where I stayed with Burmese political dissidents in exile until late winter 2000. During my stay, I had the privilege of meeting with political dissidents, migrant workers and refugees from Burma. I was able to interview several of them and to discuss with many more. They always showed me the outmost grace in telling me their stories and introducing me to their country's politics, history and culture. The stay in Thailand thus added new dimensions to my knowledge of Burma.

I am grateful to my academic supervisors, Harald Bøckman and professor Anton Steen, for their suggestions and their patience in guiding me through the working process leading up to the thesis. I also would like to thank Tom Kramer for lending me valuable source material. Thank you to David Arnott for the Online Burma Library, which has greatly facilitated the search for documents on Burma, and to the staff at the University Library in Oslo for all their assistance in locating various materials. Many friends - I will not mention all of them here - have provided their contributions in different ways. Dennis (a) Mun Awng and my family have remained very supportive.

*Camilla Buzzi*

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## *Abstract*

This thesis is a study of the ethnopolitics of democratisation in Burma. I analyse the consequences of democratisation for ethnic relations from the country's independence in 1948 until the military coup d'état in 1962. As Burma has been under military rule since 1962, these fourteen years represent modern Burma's sole experience with democratic rule.

The thesis is a historical case study. However, it also provides a background for assessing the future prospects of democracy in Burma. Indeed, ethnic identity has played a key role in Burmese politics since the colonial era, and it remains a significant factor for the understanding of current Burmese politics and the lack of democratic development in this country. Ethnicity continues to shape Burmese politics, together with the impact of Burma's colonial past, the emergence of the armed forces as the dominant political and economic actor in the country as well as the ongoing civil war.

The first part of the analysis follows a thematic and chronological path. It begins with an examination of the development of a modern state in Burma, followed by a study of the emergence of Burmese nationalism and changes in ethnic relations during the colonial era. This section of the thesis provides a framework for the core of the analysis, which centres on political, economic and social developments after 1948.

There are three foci to the main analysis. Firstly, I examine to what extent ethnic fragmentation in Burma was an impediment to decolonisation and the transition to democracy after World War II. Secondly, I engage in a critical analysis of how the Panglong agreement and the constitution drafted in 1947 sought to address issues concerning Burma's ethnic minorities and the integration of various ethnic groups. I also examine how democratic processes, such as elections and party formations, affected ethnic relations after 1948. Finally, I identify which nationality policy strategies (political, economic and cultural) were applied after independence and what consequences these strategies had for the consolidation of democracy and for ethnic relations in this country. The analysis ends with a study of the outbreak of the

civil war, which occurred in two phases - first in Burma Proper in 1948-1949, and then in the former Frontier Areas from 1959 onwards. I analyse the causes of this pattern as well as the consequences of the failure to manage ethnic diversity after 1948, until the collapse of democracy in 1962. The thesis concludes with a mixed record for democracy in Burma. While there was progress in the process of democratisation before 1962, there were also impediments to the consolidation of democracy.

While recognising that much has changed in Burma since 1962, I argue that the case of Burma remains an example of how ethnic fragmentation complicates democratisation in a multiethnic society. Burma's history shows that while it remains possible to design democracy in order to deal with fragmentation, such design ought to be done with great care. Still, constitutional design remains insufficient for the consolidation of democracy in a multiethnic state. Burma's history is testimony to the need to devise a comprehensive solution to deal with ethnic diversity and to include all relevant actors in this process. It also shows that ethnic diversity cannot be addressed solely by constitutional design at a given point in time, because ethnic relations are also shaped by the dynamics of everyday politics. The full impact of democratisation on ethnic relations cannot be regarded solely as the result of various political processes. Democratic consolidation hinges on policies that seek to address ethnic fragmentation in the political, as well as in the economic and in the cultural arenas. A country's political elite plays a key role in advancing integration or bringing about further fragmentation through its activities in each of these arenas.

## 1. Chapter one: Introducing the topic

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the consequences of democratisation for ethnic relations in Burma between 1948 and 1962. One concept underlying the choice of topic is “ethnopolitics”, which refers to “all types of politics between and among ethnic entities (...) that impinges on the relative power or position of ethnic groups” (*Karklins 1994: p.4*). While studies of ethnopolitics may cover the causes, consequences and means by which ethnicity is introduced into the political arena, this thesis focuses on the ethnopolitics of democratisation, that is, the impact of democratisation for the distribution of power between ethnic groups and the application of nationality policy strategies. Burma is a country fragmented along ethnic cleavages. I seek to determine to what extent democratisation has served to integrate the country’s ethnic groups and to what extent it has brought further fragmentation. There are three foci in the analysis. Firstly, I will examine to what extent ethnic fragmentation acted as an impediment to the transition to democracy before 1948. Secondly, I will determine how the democratic regime was designed in 1945-1947 to integrate ethnic groups and how democratic processes impacted on ethnic relations after 1948. Finally, I will identify nationality policy strategies applied after 1948 and determine their consequences for the consolidation of democracy and for ethnic relations. I will argue that ethnic fragmentation complicates the process of democratisation, but that it is possible to design democracy in order to deal with a fragmented society. I will also argue that a proper design is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition to consolidate democracy in a multiethnic state, and I will point to the importance of political leadership. Finally, I will argue that democratisation cannot be regarded solely as a political process in a multiethnic state, but that the consolidation of democracy hinges on policies that seek to address ethnic fragmentation in politics as well as in economics and in the cultural arena. Ultimately, the consolidation of democracy failed in Burma, and I will examine whether ethnic fragmentation contributed to this failure.

## 1.1 Ethnic relations as a political factor in Burma

Ethnic identity has played a significant role in Burmese politics since the colonial era, and particularly since 1948, when the country achieved independence. Indeed, some scholars regard the quest for national unity as the paramount issue of concern in the country for the past fifty years (cf. below).

Colonialism created the present state boundaries of Burma after Arakan and Tenasserim were brought under British control in 1824-1826, Lower Burma in 1852 and Upper Burma in 1885-1886. Shan and Karenni areas came under the British sphere of influence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of colonial rivalries between France and Great Britain for control over Southeast-Asia. Burmese society underwent radical changes during colonial rule. The country developed into a society where ethnic identity gained increasing social, economic and political significance. Burma was described as a plural society where ethnic groups live side by side and "mix but do not combine" (Furnivall quoted in Adas 1974: p.103).

Ethnic identity became politicised in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of colonial rule. The first nationalist movements in Burma emerged among Burmans and Karen. The Burman nationalist movement later developed into the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), which led the anticolonial movement in the 1940s, and subsequently dominated the various governments of independent Burma until 1962.

In 1922, pressure from Karen nationalists led to the creation of communal seats for Karen, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and Indians in the country's first elected legislative assembly. These electoral reforms were part of a broader set of political reforms intended to prepare the country for self-rule. Communal representation remained a controversial issue during the 1930s and 1940s. When decolonisation began in 1945, the question of ethnic relations was again topical. The constitution that was drafted in 1947 sought to combine socialism in the economic arena with the tenets of liberal democracy in the political arena as well as autonomy for ethnic groups in the border areas and special representation rights for the Karen (Silverstein 1964: p.113; M. Smith 1991: p.82).

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Burma's colonial past, tensions between the country's various ethnic groups - in particular between the Burman majority and various minority groups, the military's influence in politics, economics and social affairs and the civil war are four factors that remain vital to grasp the nature of modern-day Burmese politics. In 1962, the process of democratisation failed in Burma, and the armed forces have since become the dominant political force in the country.

Civil war erupted in Burma less than a year after the country gained its independence and had a strong impact on the democratisation process. Until 1962, the democratic government faced groups seeking to overthrow democracy – chiefly the Burma Communist Party (CPB) – as well as a number of ethnically based organisations fighting for self-determination<sup>1</sup>. The war disrupted political, social and economic life during the first decade of independence and contributed to alienate ethnic and religious minorities. It also brought the armed forces to the forefront of the country's politics.

The military has been a significant political actor in Burma since it was established during the anticolonial struggle. After 1948, the civil war served to legitimise military intervention in political, social and economic affairs. Organisational reforms within the armed forces created a stronger military during the 1950s. Finally, a number of political and economic crises during the first decade of independence - including a split in the ruling AFPFL in 1958 - contributed to discredit the civilian government and civilian politicians. Increasingly, the military appeared to hold a solution to the country's problems. As result of the split in the AFPFL, Prime Minister U Nu lost his backing in parliament and a parliamentary crisis followed. U Nu handed over power to a caretaker government led by the commander of the armed forces, General Ne Win, in a move that was sanctioned by parliament. In 1960, Ne Win handed power back to a civilian government after an election which U Nu's faction of the AFPFL had won by a landslide. The caretaker government became the armed forces' first experience with governing the country,

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<sup>1</sup> In the thesis I will use the terms insurgency and insurgent to talk about armed conflicts and participants in armed conflicts. The choice of terms should not be construed as a value judgment about armed conflicts.

but in March 1962, the military again seized power. Since then, Burma has been under military rule.

Disagreement over how to deal with ethnic diversity was one reason for the coup d'état in 1962. The coup coincided with a meeting in Rangoon between the AFPFL government and representatives of the country's non-Burman ethnic groups to discuss federalism and autonomy for ethnic minorities. This meeting is often regarded as the factor that precipitated the coup d'état. Burma's military has historically been opposed to federalism, which it regards as the first step towards the disintegration of the union. General Ne Win, who directed the coup d'état, argued in 1962 that the union was about to break up as a result of ethnic discontent and that the military had to step in. But he also pointed out that Burma's economy was in shambles, and that the country's economic policies had deviated from the socialist path followed since independence in order to justify the coup (Lintner 1999: pp. 16-17; M. Smith 1991: pp. 195-196; Steinberg 1981: pp.21-.23). I will discuss the significance of the Rangoon meeting, as well as causes of the breakdown of democracy in 1962 in the course of the thesis.

## 1.2 Burma – a patchwork of ethnic groups

Burma represents a society deeply fragmented along ethnic lines. The population is made up of a large number of ethnic groups with distinct cultures as well as economic, social and political organisation. The eight main indigenous groups in the country are Burman, Karen, Shan, Mon, Arakanese, Kachin, Chin and Karenni. Burmans constitute about two-thirds of the population, while the other ethnic groups number less than ten percent each (table 1.1, map<sup>2</sup>)<sup>3</sup>. Indians and Chinese are the largest immigrant groups. The majority of the population lives in the plains along the Irrawaddy River. The mountainous border areas make up half the territory and constitute a horseshoe around the plains. They are inhabited by less than a fifth of the

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<sup>2</sup> This is a reference to map 2 in Smith, Martin (1991): *Burma – insurgency and the politics of ethnicity*. London: Zed books Ltd.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term Burman to refer to the largest ethnic group, while Burmeses refers to any person from Burma regardless of ethnicity. In 1989, the name of the country was changed to Myanmar. I retain the old name, which was in use during 1948-1962.

population (Silverstein 1993a p.27). In Burma – as elsewhere in Southeast Asia - the distinction between valley and hills is of prime importance for ethnic relations (Scott 2002). The valley economy is based on irrigated rice cultivation. The valley as well as Shan and Karenni areas were centres for a number of precolonial states. The hill economy, on the other hand, is based on slash-and -burn cultivation. No state formation occurred in precolonial times among Kachin, Chin and Karen. The inhabitants of the hills and valleys also represent distinct cultures. Although there has been extensive contact between the two populations, they continue to stand in “radical opposition” to each other with “remarkably few” cultural similarities (Leach 1960: pp. 64-65). Most valley people belong to one of four ethnic groups – Burman, Arakanese, Mon and Shan. These groups are in majority Buddhists, which is the religion of the vast majority of the population in the country. Hill people belong to a variety of ethnic groups who speak several different languages. The traditional religion among hill people was Animism, while Christianity has been spreading since the arrival of Western missionaries during the 19<sup>th</sup> century - particularly among Kachin, Karen, Chin and Karenni. In 1948, Christianity, Islam, Animism and Hinduism constituted the largest minority religions in Burma and were more frequently found among non-Burmans. Ethnic and religious cleavages thus tend to coincide. A sense of inferiority vis-à-vis valley people also plays a role in the identity of many hill dwellers (Corlin 1994).

*Table 1.1: Population by ethnic group and religion, 1931 census*

	Total (figures)	Buddhist	Animist	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Total (percentage)
Burma group	9,627,196	9,574,053	35,645	...	...	14,596	65,7
Kuki-Chin	348,994	67,712	269,101	...	...	7,821	2,38
Kachin	153,345	...	136,731	...	...	15,532	1,05
Shan (Tai)	1,037,406	1,030,686	...	...	...		7,08
Karen	1,367,673	1,049,613	98,873	...	...	218,700	9,34
Indian	1,017,825	12,600	...	565,609	369,504	30,135	6,95
Chinese	193,594	43,399	...	...	1,474	1,466	1,32
European, Anglo-Indian	30,851	...	...	...	...	30,851	0,21
Other	870,613	569,974	222,893	5,344	186,861	11,915	5,94
TOTAL	14,647,613		763,243	570,953	584,839	331,106	
Percentage	100	84,30	5,21	3,90	3,99	2,26	100

**Source:** Chambers 1950. Slight defects are due to ordinary errors in census operations; Burma Group comprises Burmans, Arakanese, Tavoyans and other smaller minorities

## 1.3 Subject, structure and scope of thesis

### 1.3.1 *Subject*

This thesis will focus on efforts to consolidate Burma's democracy in the political, cultural and economic arenas. I will show that democratic consolidation in a multiethnic society like Burma cannot be regarded as a mere political process without taking into account how the democratic government's engagement in the economic and cultural arenas affect ethnic groups and these groups' perceptions of democracy. I seek an answer to the following questions:

- 1. What characterised the democratic regime that was established in Burma in 1948, and what foundation did this framework lay for ethnic relations?**
- 2. What nationality policies did the government formulate and carry out after 1948 in the political, cultural and economic fields to address ethnic demands?**
- 3. What were the ethnopolitical consequences of these policies and other efforts to consolidate democracy after 1948?**

I will begin by a critical examination of the constitution that was drafted in Burma in 1947. Political institutions set a framework for ethnic relations by orienting the polity towards accepting and managing ethnic diversity or rejecting and eliminating it. A democratic regime provides opportunities and determines the limitations to the orientation of the polity and to the manner in which ethnic demands are to be addressed. I will argue that the 1947 constitution set a course for dealing with ethnic differences in Burma, but that this course was hampered by lacunas in the drafting process and key provisions regarding the relationship between ethnic groups.

Although a constitution creates a framework for ethnic relations, it is also necessary to interpret the law in order to address new issues. I will therefore continue by examining policies aimed at consolidating democracy in Burma after 1948. These policies can be grouped into two categories. On the one hand, political reforms were carried out with the aim of improving the quality of the democratic regime, some of which also had a bearing on ethnic relations. Examples of such reforms include the promotion of electoral reforms in Burma's Shan State. On the other hand, nationality policies were formulated in order to address ethnic demands. I will examine whether such policies also contributed to enhance the legitimacy of Burma's democracy and

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develop a common sense of national solidarity. As Bakke (1996: p.5) explains, a nationality policy consists of a political programme for dealing with the political, cultural and economic demands of ethnic groups as well as of measures to carry out this programme. In Burma, government goals included finding a solution to the insurgency through constitutional reforms and by promoting a common national culture. However, the government did not succeed in its endeavours. Instead, it alienated religious and linguistic minorities. I will argue that one reason was inconsistencies in terms of how similar demands by different ethnic groups were addressed as well as in terms of the strategies with which the same ethnic group was met in response to different demands. These inconsistencies laid the basis for future disagreements between the state and ethnic groups, and contributed to the breakdown of democracy in 1962.

### *1.3.2 Structure, time horizons and levels of analysis*

#### Structure

The thesis is divided into ten chapters. The theoretical framework for the analysis is introduced in chapter two. In chapter three, I discuss the use of case studies as research method. I discuss advantages and drawbacks of using case studies. I also discuss some challenges linked to the data material that I have collected as well as to the choice of Burma as a case for research. In the subsequent two chapters, I present two factors regarded as significant premises for the prospects for democratic consolidation, namely national identity (chapter four) and the transition from colonial rule to democracy (chapter five). The analysis is developed in three chapters. I distinguish between efforts of democratic consolidation in the political, the cultural and the economic arenas (chapters six-eight), and I examine changes in ethnic relations in each arena. In chapter nine, I engage in a short study of the civil war as I sum up the findings of the three previous chapters. Indeed, the war is the main indication that the consolidation of democracy failed in Burma, and I seek to argue why this is the case. In chapter ten, I seek to draw some conclusions about the future

prospects for democracy and ethnic relations in Burma based on the country's past experience.

### Time boundaries

Democratisation is a long-term process. For the purpose of the analysis, it is therefore necessary to determine when the case study should begin and end, in other words to fix time boundaries. The roots of democracy in Burma date back to the first elections in the 1920s. During World War II, the country was occupied by Japan. The occupation brought an end to the political regime that had existed in the country before the war. The main political parties and key political actors of the pre-war era were marginalised (Silverstein 1964: p.101). Instead, a new generation of politicians emerged that came to dominate Burmese politics after the war. The focus of the present thesis is thus the transition to democracy after 1945 and the consolidation of democracy after 1948.

### Levels of analysis

It is also necessary to decide upon the level of analysis that will be applied because this decision determines the selection of data material. Democratisation can be initiated at two levels – the national and the local level. The two levels are interdependent. As Sørensen (1993: p.23) argues, democratisation at the local and the national levels tends to reinforce each other, but there may be discrepancies between the degree of democracy at either level prior to the consolidation of democracy. I have chosen to limit the thesis to an analysis of the development of democracy in Burma at a national level. There are two reasons for this choice. Firstly, national-level democracy preceded reforms at the local level in Burma, because the transition took place within the larger framework of decolonisation. Reforms to develop local democracy were only initiated after 1948, including a Local Democracy Act in 1949 and the organisation of local elections. Secondly, the purpose of this thesis is to examine changes in ethnic relations. Due to the hill-valley aspect of ethnic cleavages in Burma, ethnic relations tend to follow geographical boundaries. Although a study of local politics (if enough data material were available to support such a study)

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would be interesting in terms of the relationship between ethnic groups within a region, the most significant results can be found in an inter-regional analysis of ethnic relations.

## 1.4 Academic literature on ethnic relations in Burma

Studies of the political aspects of ethnic relations in Burma since 1948 are relatively sparse and focus primarily on the civil war. One reason is the present political situation in Burma: The country has been largely closed to the outside world since 1962, and academic freedom within the country is severely curtailed. This isolation has hampered academic research and media interest in Burmese affairs. Contributions on Burma published in the 1980s and 1990s include Martin Smith's (1991) monograph on ethnicity and insurgency in Burma as well as writings by Lintner (1994), who has published a large number of articles and books dealing with Burma and with the civil war. I have selected four examples of contemporary scholarship on Burma, which I will examine critically in the course of the thesis, namely Silverstein (1980), Fistié (1985), Brown (1994) and Gravers (1999). Silverstein and Smith trace the evolution of ethnic relations in Burma since World War II, while Fistié and Brown argue that the roots of present-day ethnic relations in Burma can be found in the precolonial and colonial era respectively. In the following section, I will provide a presentation of the arguments of Silverstein, Fistié, Brown and Smith concerning the period between 1948 and 1962.

### Silverstein – the quest for national unity

According to Silverstein (1980), the search for national unity has been the main concern for Burma's leaders since 1948. Silverstein argues that the failure to develop national unity stems from a disruption in leadership at a crucial stage in Burma's political history. The pattern of ethnic relations that was set in the country's constitution from 1947 was largely inspired by Aung San, who led the AFPFL in the struggle for independence after World War II. Aung San played a key role in negotiating the transfer of independence from the British and setting the premises for

constitutional negotiations in 1947. Aung San was assassinated in July 1947, shortly before independence in January 1948. His death broke the continuity in the anticolonial movement's strategy for dealing with ethnic diversity. Aung San was succeeded by a fellow nationalist leader, U Nu, who later served as Burma's first Prime Minister. Silverstein argues that Aung San and U Nu differed in their ideas about how to achieve national unity. While Aung San's ideas shaped the constitution that was drafted in 1947, U Nu's ideas shaped the government's nationality policies after 1948, which grew increasingly distant from the terms set by Aung San. But due to Aung San's unique position in Burmese political history, the government's policies continued to be presented publicly as a heritage from Aung San. The outcome was ethnic discontent and civil war.

Silverstein's monograph is based on his doctoral dissertation from 1960 and a long-time acquaintance with the country. It constitutes a basis for my thesis. However, I examine the consequences of the government's policies for ethnic relations, rather than their causes. In addition, Silverstein focuses primarily on the contradiction between political and cultural politics. I will include the economic arena in the analysis as well.

#### Fistié on Burma's quest for unity

Fistié (1985) concurs with Silverstein that ethnic diversity and efforts to reach national unity are the keys to understand modern Burma. For Fistié, politics in Burma reflect a continuous quest for unity with pre-modern roots. Fistié demonstrates that Burma's political history displays a high degree of continuity from the precolonial era to modern times. He argues that the Burmans have sought to dominate the region since the first Burman kingdom was established at Pagan in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Non-Burman groups have sought to retain their autonomy. Fistié sees Burma's history as the story of a continuous struggle between Burman kings in Upper Burma, Mon kings in Lower Burma and Shan kings in the eastern hills. Colonial rule reproduced and reinforced the existing pattern of ethnic relations rather than creating a new pattern. Since 1948, the Burmans have sought to reproduce the same pattern by either

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eliminating ethnic diversity through assimilation or by controlling ethnic minorities with a system of internal autonomy based on Burman overlordship.

Fistié's arguments bring to our attention some significant aspects of ethnic relations in Burma. Firstly, we ought to remember that the colonial era in Burma was relatively brief. It began with the fall of Mandalay in 1885 and ended in 1948. Memories of the precolonial era were still alive in the country in 1948. Fistié's description of Burmese history as marked by warfare is also fruitful. This history has frequently served as an argument to justify demands of autonomy by various ethnic groups. But I will also argue that in his dissertation, Fistié underestimates the magnitude of changes that took place in Burma during and after colonial rule. For instance, Fistié does not engage in an analysis of the evolution of the state and state power from the precolonial to the modern era, nor does he look into the introduction and development of modern concepts of national identity in Burma during this period.

#### Smith on ethnic insurgencies

Martin Smith's (1991) monograph is a detailed study of the history of armed conflict in Burma between 1948 and the 1990s. His analysis has become a work of reference for scholars attempting to understand the complexity of ethnic relations in this country. It is also a source of information for my thesis. Smith's contribution explores the links between the Communist and ethnic rebellions in Burma and outlines why the two insurgencies cannot be examined separately. However, Smith does not develop a conceptual framework for explaining the causes and mechanisms by which ethnic consciousness is politicised and develops into armed rebellion. Furthermore, his focus is on the armed insurrection, and his sources are mainly linked to armed organisations. There is less information on non-military aspects of ethnic relations in Burma and on strategies of nationality policy that are not military.

#### Brown on the development of an ethnocratic state

Brown (1994) argues that ethnic rebellions in Burma are the product of state domination by the majority ethnic group and that they have emerged as the result of a

development in three stages that began with the British colonisation. Brown thus differs from Fistié in assessing the impact of colonisation: Brown argues that colonisation played a key role in bringing about change in the traditional state in Burma. Colonisation and the introduction of a modern state system disrupted the traditional structures of authority in Burma, which were based on Buddhism, kingship and local level authority. Then, the Burman majority was allowed to capture the new state. An ethnocratic state developed in which Burmans came to dominate at the expense of other ethnic groups. Finally, ethnic conflicts erupted when this Burman-dominated state sought to penetrate the non-Burman periphery. Because the state was weak, it proved unable to control the eruption of violence in the periphery.

For Brown, ethnic conflicts in Burma are primarily the result of centre-periphery relations combined with state-building and the assimilation policies of the modern state. Brown also points to the impact of administrative centralisation and economic disparities, but he does not engage in a detailed analysis of the nexus between politics, economic and culture. Furthermore, Brown does not distinguish between state and regime, and he therefore does not examine how changes in ethnic relations are also a result of the nature of particular regimes. Finally, Brown's analysis follows a centre-periphery matrix, with the state as one actor and ethnic minorities as another. I will show that the interaction between the state and ethnic groups changed from one ethnic group to another, and that ethnic groups reacted differently to state penetration.

## 2. Chapter Two: Theoretical approaches

### 2.1 Introduction

Perspectives on the relationship between democracy and ethnic fragmentation can be grouped into two academic schools. One school argues that democracy is a mechanism for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and that democracy has a positive impact on ethnic relations, thus serving as an integrating force. The second school argues that democracy increases the prospect for ethnic conflict because more people participate in the political process and differences between ethnic groups can be articulated openly. In other words, democracy breeds fragmentation (Ellingsen 1997: pp.152-153; Gleditsch 1998: p. 308; Hutchinson & Smith 1994: pp. 258-261).

Arguments from both schools can be found in analyses of democracy and ethnic relations in Burma. One assessment of Burma's postcolonial history is that a gradual consolidation of democracy took place before 1962 and that parliamentary and local elections conducted during the 1950s and 1960s were reasonably free and fair (Silverstein 1964: p.128-131). Impediments to the consolidation of democracy as a result of ethnic demands were reduced as the civil war receded and government forces regained control over the country. A government Arms-for-Democracy programme in 1958 was successful in bringing insurgents from ethnically based organisations to give up armed struggle (Butwell 1963: pp.201-202; M. Smith 1991: pp.168-169).

The alternative view is that democracy was not about to consolidate in Burma in 1962. Proponents of the second view point to politically motivated violence that occurred during the electoral campaigns of the 1950s and argue that the elections were not fully free and fair (Callahan 1998b: p.54). In addition, several issues critical for ethnic relations were not addressed. It can be argued that more ethnically based organisations were waging armed resistance in 1962 than in 1948 (M. Smith 1991: pp. 190-195; M. Smith 1994: p.25). In 1948-1949, the leading armed ethnic organisations were Karen, Arakanese and Mon, Karenni, and Pao. None of the major hill-dwelling ethnic groups had taken up arms. The first armed organisations were set up among ethnic

groups who did not reach an agreement with the AFPFL before 1948 about future arrangements in an independent state. Ethnic groups who reached such an agreement – the Panglong agreement from 1947 - were not initially engaged in the civil war. This is the case of the Shan, the Kachin and the Chin. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, armed opposition groups were emerging among the Shan and the Kachin as well, while members of other ethnic groups in the border areas were increasingly being recruited into the army of the CPB and other insurgent organisations.

Discrepancies between the two perspectives of democracy in Burma stem in part from the failure to distinguish between the various phases of democratisation, particularly between transition and consolidation. Gunther et al (1995: p.3) propose the following definition:

The “(t)ransition begins with the breakdown of a former authoritarian regime and ends with the establishment of a relatively stable configuration of political institutions within a democratic regime. Consolidation (...) refers to the achievement of a substantial attitudinal support for and behavioural compliance with the new democratic institutions and the rules of the game which they establish”

Snyder (2000: pp.28-29) suggests that the impact of democratisation on ethnic relations varies from one phase to the next. While ethnic conflicts tend to increase during the transition from authoritarian rule, they tend to subside during consolidation. The reason is that the transition remains open-ended until political institutions are established which define the future democratic regime and create roles for various political actors. It also sets the framework for ethnic relations. The consolidation of democracy, on the other hand, hinges on the ability of the democratic government to carry out policies to promote democracy within the framework established by the transition, and, if necessary, to reform this framework to remove hindrances to the consolidation of the democratic regime.

The consolidation of democracy is more complicated in multiethnic than in monoethnic states. This raises the question of whether a common national identity is a necessary premise for the consolidation of democracy. Firstly, the consolidation of democracy is a result of policies to promote democracy that may also have a bearing on ethnic relations. Indeed, democratisation sets in motion broader political, social, economic and cultural changes that make affect the relationship between ethnic

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groups. This is the rationale behind the concept of ethnopolitics. Karklins (1994: p.5) argues that “(...) one premise of the concept of ethnopolitics is that politics in any multiethnic state inevitably takes on an ethnic dimension”. Such changes may spur ethnic conflicts in societies lacking a common national identity. In addition, democratic consolidation may be affected by nationality policies that seek to address ethnic demands through reforms in political structures and procedures. A common national identity may reduce the need for a nationality policy.

In the next section, I will first define key concepts that will be used in this thesis: democracy, state, nationalism and ethnicity. I will then proceed with a discussion of the argument advanced by Brown and other scholars that ethnic relations are shaped by the state. While I will concur that the state has an impact on ethnic identity, I will argue that this impact is related not only to the strength of the state, but also to the nature of the political regime. I am therefore going to continue with an analysis of the relationship between democratic regimes and ethnicity. I begin by asking whether a common national identity is a premise for democracy. I continue by examining the relationship between the transition from non-democratic rule and ethnic relations. Given that the outcome of such a transition is the establishment of a democratic political order, I will examine some constraints and opportunities inherent in a democratic government for the development of ethnic relations. In the final section of the chapter, I will examine some strategies for dealing with ethnic differences in democracies. I will discuss what factors determine the choice of strategy as well as advantages and drawbacks associated with these strategies.

## 2.2 Defining key concepts

The study of democratisation and ethnic relations requires the use of concepts such as democracy, state, nation, nationalism and ethnicity, which are originally Western concepts, and which pose certain challenges when applied in a non-Western context, as I will do in this thesis.

### *2.2.1 Democracy and democratisation*

The focus of this thesis is on the process of democratisation rather than on its outcome, namely democracy. Etymologically, democracy means rule by the people. It is a concept closely associated with that of the state. Indeed, Linz and Stepan (1996: p.19) argue that the existence of a state is a condition sine qua non of democracy. Democracies are political regimes, i.e. a manner of organising the state's political institutions and selecting political leaders. However, this definition conceals a great variety of views of what democracy is. These views range from definitions of democracy that emphasise the formal aspects of democratic regimes to substantial definitions of what should be "contained" in a democracy. In this thesis, I will show that both viewpoints were found in Burma, and that this distinction was also a part of the discourse on how democracy ought to address majority and minority issues in a multiethnic state. However, I will apply a liberal concept of democracy that draws on the theories of Schumpeter and Dahl in order to assess the quality and extent of democracy in Burma before 1962.

For Schumpeter (in Sørensen 1993: p.10), a democracy is primarily a method for selecting political leaders in elections. Dahl (quoted in Sørensen 1993: p.12), on the other hand, argues that elections are a necessary, but not sufficient condition for democracy. In addition, democracy requires that the government be responsive to the preferences of its citizens. As a result, Dahl argues that democracies require the existence of a number of conditions deemed necessary for the meaningful exercise of elections: respect for basic civil and political rights – including freedom of expression, organisation and association - as well as access to alternative sources of information. Dahl thus produces a set of eight institutional guarantees necessary for democracy (Rasch 2000: p.40; Dahl in Sørensen 1993: p.12). In other words, Dahl locates democracy as unfolding within the framework of a broader political arena. The quality of democracy is linked to the quality of that arena.

### *2.2.2 State, nation and nationalism*

In this thesis, I will focus on two aspects of nationalism, namely how the nation is conceived and how an organised national movement emerges. The basis of

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nationalism is the idea of the nation-state where boundaries of states and nations coincide. A definition of nationalism thus hinges on a definition of state and nation. I will follow Weber's distinction between the state as a territorial concept linked to the distribution of power and authority and the nation as a value concept (in Hutchinson & Smith 1994: p.22). The nation is, in this sense, "a cultural and political bound, uniting in a single political community all who share a historic culture and homeland" (A. Smith 1991: p. 14).

Nations and ethnic groups tend to be identified by ascriptive traits such as name, culture, history, territory and ancestry and/or by a subjective sense of shared identity and community (Schermerhorn quoted in Hutchinson and Smith 1996: p.6; A. Smith 1991: p.14). I will use the term ethnic group to refer to a group that shares a number of ascriptive traits, while I reserve the term nation for identity linked to the state. I will thus speak of the various ethnic groups of Burma, including the Burmans, on the one hand, and of the Burmese nation that includes all these groups on the other hand. I will show that a Burmese nation did not exist before 1948.

Furthermore, I found it useful to distinguish between a civic and an ethnic model of the nation (A. Smith 1991: pp. 11-12). The civic model of the nation presents the nation as a territorial and legal-political community which individuals may choose to join or leave. In the ethnic model, on the other hand, the nation is seen as constituted by members who share a common descent and culture. Membership is organic and independent of the will of individuals. The ethnic model of the nation provides for a more intimate connection between ethnicity and nation than the civic model. In a multiethnic state, the promotion of an ethnic model of the nation is therefore problematic for ethnic integration. But, as I will show, it can also be problematic to promote a civic model of the nation if the characteristics of this nation draw primarily on those of one ethnic group.

Gellner (1983) noted that it is not nations that create nationalism, but nationalism that creates nations. The ideas of nationalism have indeed been used by states to legitimise their existence, as well as by non-state liberation movements pushing for the establishment of nation-states. Gellner, Anderson and Smith represent three perspectives on the emergence of nationalism. For Gellner (1983), nationalism is

a modern phenomenon. The economic and social changes brought about by the transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society and the emphasis on education in modern societies together lead to cultural uniformisation within the state. The model for the emergence of nationalism is Europe, while in Asia, this process was triggered by colonisation.

Anderson (1983) shared the view that nationalism is modern, but not the assertion that nationalism arises as a necessary consequence of industrialisation. Instead, Anderson coined the concept of “imagined communities”: The nation is constituted of individuals who have come to regard themselves and each other as members of the same community. For Anderson, the print media played a key role in forging these “imagined communities”, and in the emergence of nationalism. The development of a script fixed languages, which in some cases became associated with the state, i.e. a pre-existing administrative unit, as the language-of-the state. Neither Gellner, nor Anderson was centrally concerned with the nexus between democracy, state and nationalism (Anderson 1963; Gellner 1983; Linz and Stepan 1996: p.24).

Anthony Smith (1991: p.39, pp. 41-42) represents a third approach to nationalism. He argued that nations - in Western as well as Third World countries - typically develop on the basis of an ethnic core, and that the aspiring nations that are most likely to succeed are those that can build upon such an ethnic core. Nation is a modern concept, but a nation draws on a pre-modern core for its development.

In chapter four, I will trace the emergence of nationalism in Burma as a result of colonialism, and its impact on ethnic fragmentation. I will examine Burmese nationhood as well as how a nationalist movement emerged, first as an anticolonial and anti-state force during the colonial era, then as its role shifted to that of a state actor in 1948. I will argue that this shift from a position of calling for change to a position of defending what had been achieved posed some specific challenges in terms of how to address ethnic fragmentation.

### *2.2.3 Ethnic identity*

An analysis of how democratisation affects ethnic identity is based on the presupposition that ethnic identities are fluid and can be affected by political change.

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This presupposition rests on an instrumentalist perspective of ethnicity. The arguments about how ethnic identity emerges and becomes politicised can be located along a continuum with the primordialist and the instrumentalist perspectives at each end of the spectrum. The instrumentalist position holds that ethnic identities are fluid and malleable and therefore affected by the circumstances within which they are expressed. Conflicts that arise between ethnic groups often have non-ethnic causes. They are rooted in the characteristics of a specific situation, such as the nature of a political regime or a change of regime. The instrumentalist view argues that ethnic identity is a dynamic variable that may change during the course of democratisation.

The counterpoint to this view is the primordialist position that ethnic identity is given, and that it is a structural variable for democratisation. Ties of religion, blood, language and custom that unite members of an ethnic group persist across time and have an “ineffable quality” (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: p. 8). As a result, conflicts between ethnic groups are often seen as given. Little can be done to avoid them or solve them.

Both the primordialist and the instrumentalist approach to ethnicity have been criticised. Primordialist views have been criticised for overestimating the role of ethnicity for individuals and communities, while neglecting that most identities are fluid. Instrumentalist views have been criticised for underestimating the role of ethnicity by defining ethnic identity as a mere instrument to serve other interests. Instrumentalist approaches do not account for why certain issues come to be regarded as ethnic while other issues are not. Nor do they explain the relative resilience of ethnicity beyond its immediate usefulness in securing access to desirable resources. Today, most scholars seek to combine the two approaches, based on the realisation that the specific aspects of an ethnic identity are open to change, but that the relevance of ethnic identity per se persists. Ethnic identity may be fluid and malleable at the level of the individual, without changing the relevance of ethnic identity at the level of the community. This is the perspective that I will apply. I will not examine changes in ethnic identity at the level of the individual, but I will argue that ethnicity plays a key role at the collective level in shaping collective political identities. Furthermore, I will argue that ethnicity should be treated as a quasi-structural variable

for democratisation, but also that democratisation may change the content and meaning of this variable.

## 2.3 The state and ethnic identity

In chapter one, I introduced Brown's argument that ethnic conflicts are the result of activities by the state. Brown's argument reflects an instrumentalist perspective of ethnicity. Both Brown (1989, 1994) and Brass (1991) have examined the role of the state in ethnic identity formation in Asia. For Brown (1994: chap. 1), ethnicity is a result of characteristics of the state, but the state does not determine which form ethnic consciousness will assume. The state engages in society in order to influence the attitude and behaviour of its citizens, but its success depends on its capabilities. If the state is weak, it will not be able to control the impact of its intervention in the periphery and reactions may follow, including ethnic conflicts. In particular, Brown (1989) argues that the state influences the shape and content of ethnic consciousness by defining or ruling out roles for ethnic groups in the public arena, by reacting to expressions of ethnic identity and by promoting national identity.

Brass does not focus on the same political and social structures as Brown, but he shares the instrumentalist view of ethnicity. Instead, Brass analyses the role of political elites, i.e. those segments of society with the capability of engaging in political decisions. For Brass (1991: p. 254), the state's policies towards ethnic groups matter less for the emergence of ethnic consciousness than the relationship of the state to the elite within ethnic groups and the competition between elites. Brass (1991: p. 243) argues that a state's activities hinge on an alliance between the state and the elites of various segments in the population. In postcolonial and developing states, these segments are often ethnically defined because of the state's propensity to distinguish between and classify population groups, for instance through the census. As time passes, the activities of the state change and the need for new alliances arises. As a result, the state's relationship with the elites, and the relationship among the elites change. In particular, Brass (1991: p. 244) stresses changes that occur "during transfers of power from colonial to postcolonial states, during succession struggles,

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and at times when the central power appears to be weakening or the balance in centre-periphery relations appears to be changing”. These situations were characteristic of Burma in 1948.

The state is a resource coveted by the elites in their competition for political power, economic benefits and social status. The elites therefore mobilise ethnic groups against rival elites, thus setting in motion the politicisation of ethnic identity. Their eventual success in this process depends on several factors, including which issues are used to mobilise ethnic communities, the level of organisation of these communities, the response from the state and the general political context (Brass 1991: p.41). Brass (1991: p. 15) states that “the cultural forms, values and practices of ethnic groups become political resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage”.

Competition also arises for control over the periphery in the state. This competition arises because the state threatens local elites as it extends its influence over the periphery. These local elites were formerly able to act as autonomous agents of the state. The result is a competition between central and local elites for control over the periphery. These two struggles – at the centre and in the periphery - “take on an added significance when elites in competition are from different groups and/or use different languages”(Brass 1991: pp.272-274).

By drawing our attention to the role of the state and elites at various levels, Brass and Brown bring the state and stage agents back into the debate about ethnicity. At the same time, their insights need to be complemented by a discussion of the relationship between state and regime because the manner in which power and authority are organised and dispersed in the state is a result of the nature of the political regime. The nature of this regime determines the manner in which elites are selected, acquire or lose political power, as well as how decisions are made and implemented. The organisation and functioning of a regime determines the public role of various interest groups as well as which public policies will be decided upon and implemented in a variety of fields.

## 2.4 Democratisation and ethnic relations

For Linz and Stepan (1996: p. 5), a democracy is consolidated when it becomes "the only game in town". While the transition to democracy establishes the formal trappings of the democratic regime, the two scholars argue that a consolidated democracy meets three conditions. Democracy consolidation has taken place when the authority of the regime is firmly established throughout the state, when attitudes in the population are overwhelmingly in favour of democratic procedures and when political groups no longer act in a manner that does not conform to democracy. The existence of ethnically based armed secessionist movements can therefore be construed as an obstacle to the consolidation of democracy.

In the present section, I will examine under what conditions the consolidation of democracy may succeed. As I will show in chapter four, the population in Burma did not share a common national identity when the transition to democracy began in 1945. I will therefore begin by an examination of the relationship between democracy and national identity in order to establish whether a shared national identity is a premise for democratic consolidation in a multiethnic state.

For Butenschøn (1998: p.249), the question of democracy and national identity is essentially a question of how to address two orders of problems. The first order is concerned with the constitution of the *demos*; the second order deals with the constitution of the political regime. Butenschøn points out that it is a common assumption that problems of the first order need to be addressed before problems of the second order, and that the solutions that are found affect the second order. He further argues that problems of the first order appear to be logically prior to problems of the second order, but that it is not necessarily the case. Below, I will present some of the arguments from this debate. I will then examine the transition to democratic rule and I will discuss the relationship between the transition and ethnicity. I will discuss how ethnicity can be addressed during the transition and how a democratic political structure may affect ethnic relations. Finally, I will examine some nationality

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policy strategies that are put into use in democracies and how these may affect the democratic order.

#### 2.4.1 *Democracy, national identity and ethnic conflicts*

The question of democracy and ethnic conflicts is closely linked to that of democracy and national identity (Butenschøn 1998: pp.248-249). While shared nationhood in a multiethnic state facilitates democratisation (Miller 1995: pp. 81-89), a complex pattern of ethnic relations creates challenges for democratisation (Linz and Stepan 1996: pp.25-26) and increases the risks of ethnic conflicts.

Rustow represents a school of thought that argues that national unity is necessary in a democracy. For Rustow (1970), the establishment of national unity – the constitution of the *demos* - must precede all other phases in a process of democratisation. Lijphart (1977: pp. 1-3) represents an alternative school. He argues that democracy is sustainable in a non-nation-state if certain conditions are met. These conditions include power-sharing arrangements that are devised between the different ethnic communities in the state and an agreement among the leaders of the various ethnic segments.

Baogang He (2001) argues that Rustow's model begs a number of questions. In particular, Baogang He argues that Rustow's model treats national identity as a structural variable for democratisation. Instead, Baogang He argues that national identity is a dynamic variable whose value changes during democratisation. Furthermore, Baogang He criticises Rustow for narrowing his analysis to the potential negative impact of national identity formation for democracy. Instead, He argues that democracy may play a constructive role for the development of national identity because it provides a procedure for solving conflicts that may arise during a process of national identity formation. For Baogang He, Rustow's article reflects a bias against democracy that developed in scholarly literature during the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, Baogang He points to the democratisation in Spain after 1975 and the Philippines after 1986 as examples showing that democratisation and problems of national identity can be addressed simultaneously. According to Baogang He (2001: p.

107), “there has been a fundamental change in the judgement of the capacity for democratic management to deal with issues of national identity” since the 1970s.

Rustow’s model can also be criticised for not addressing the question of how national identity is formed. Rustow states that national identity arises at different points in time, and from a variety of reasons, but that it takes place prior to democratisation. Rustow thus appears to suggest that the formation of national identity requires the structures of an authoritarian state.

Linz and Stepan (1996: p.24) argue that there is no given answer as to how democracy-building and nation-building affect each other. Efforts to forge a common national identity in a multiethnic society and to build democracy can be mutual beneficiary, but also at odds. The consolidation of democracy may improve ethnic relations, but it may also create tensions between ethnic groups. The promotion of national identity may strengthen or weaken democracy. Democracy- building and nation- building follow logics that can be both complementary and conflicting. Instead, Linz and Stepan (1996: p.410) argue that:

*“(t)he key questions for a democratic multinational state are whether the minorities are or not are open to multiple and complementary political identities and loyalties, and, if so, whether they will be given citizenship”.*

The concept that national unity is required for democratisation is based on the assumption that people possess one type of identity and one set of loyalties. Instead, Linz and Stepan argue that people frequently move between different and complementary identities and loyalties. Such identities may also change over time. The key to democratisation in multiethnic societies is therefore whether the population is willing to move between various identities and whether the democratic state is able to make room for different identities.

In this thesis, I will examine whether the case of Burma supports the position adopted by Lijphart, Baogang He, Linz and Stepan that democracy can be crafted to take into account “the particular mix of nations, cultures, and awaked political identities present in the territory” Linz and Stepan (1996: p.35)<sup>4</sup>. I will also argue that the existence or absence of national identity is not the only challenge for democracy

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<sup>4</sup> Linz and Stepan do not distinguish between nations and ethnic groups in their study of democratisation.

in a multiethnic state. Challenges may also arise from how national identity is defined and what strategies are selected to promote a common identity (Bakke 1996).

#### 2.4.2 *Transition and ethnic relations*

Linz and Stepan (1996: p. 3) argued that:

“ a democratic transition is complete when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of a free and popular vote, when this government de facto has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative and judicial powers generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies de jure.”

This definition of a democratic transition has much in common with the one proposed by Gunther et al. (see chapter two, 2.1). Both definitions emphasise that institutional change is a key to the transition to democracy. But Linz and Stepan's definition is better suited for an analysis of the transition process because it provides an identifiable set of criteria for the fulfilment of the transition. These criteria are the organisation of elections, the establishment of an elected government, and the extent to which the elected government plays a meaningful role in decision-making and implementation.

The transition is a phase of uncertainty. Political roles from the old regime have to be redefined. Institutions have to be recreated. Norms and practices have to be reinvented. Such events may affect ethnic relations if the contending elites use ethnicity in their attempt to control the transition and its outcome, as Brass argued that they would be prone to do.

Nevers (1993: pp.61-62) has examined the impact of the transition for ethnic relations. She argues that key factors for the understanding of how the transition influences ethnic relations include the number of ethnic groups in the state, their relative size and the existence of similar ethnic groups in neighbouring countries (as potential external allies). These are factors that we may look upon as structural in the sense that they will not be changed by democratisation. Other relevant factors include the level of tension between the groups prior to the transition and their relative power, as well as the ethnic composition and ethno-political views of the regime, the opposition and other key actors in the transition. The manner in which these factors come into play during the transition depends on the manner in which the transition

proceeds – whether it is controlled by the regime, by the opposition or is the result of a pact between the two sides. This is particularly significant if the regime and the opposition represent distinct ethnic groups or have sharply diverging views on appropriate responses to ethnic demands or on the relevance of ethnic demands for the transition. According to Nevers (1993: chap. 4; p.61), peaceful ethnic relations can develop as a result of the transition if the forces pushing for democracy recognise ethnic differences and take ethnic interests into account at an early stage. In addition, they need to accommodate those interests in a manner that is considered fair and even-handed by all parties. In chapter five, I will examine whether this was the case in Burma after 1945.

#### *2.4.3 The constitution of a democratic political order and ethnic relations*

Legislative – executive relationship, the legislature and the electoral system

The transition to democracy ends with the constitution of a democratic political order and the establishment of a democratically elected government. The transition thereby creates a framework for ethnic relations. The relationship between legislative and executive power, the nature of the legislature and the electoral system are of particular significance in this regard. In addition, the party system plays a key role in modern democracies.

The relationship between legislative and executive power establishes the focal point(s) in a given political system. In presidential systems, the two powers are clearly separated and the executive power is independent from the legislature. The head of government is a president who is elected by the population. The main cleavage in the political system distinguishes between the two powers. In a parliamentary system, the two powers are fused so that the executive is dependent on the legislature. The head of government is a Prime Minister who is selected by the legislature and who leads a collegial body. The main cleavage runs between the government and the governing party in the legislature on the one hand and the opposition in the legislature on the other hand.

A number of scholars of democracy and democratisation have argued that parliamentary rule “provides a more flexible and adaptable institutional context for

the establishment and consolidation of democracy” (Linz in Lijphart 1992: p. 126), particularly in developing countries in the Third World (Lijphart 1992: pp. 23-25). Farrell (1997: p. 156) finds that parliamentary rule allows for a smoother transfer of power from one government to another with less abrupt and dramatic changes in policy. Other scholars argue that presidential rule contributes positively to democracy. Presidential rule is said to promote stability in the executive power, limited government and popular accountability through the election of the executive (Lijphart 1992).

Parliamentary rule is also said to ensure better representation of interests groups and encourage coalition-building, and therefore to provide a better environment for solving ethnic conflicts (Stepan 1998: p. 227). It is furthermore regarded as more flexible than presidential systems. For instance, it allows for changes to place in the political system during the period between two elections (Linz in Lijphart 1992: p.122). Presidential rule, on the other hand, is said to produce rigidity in the political system and increase the risk of deadlocks between the legislature and the executive power (Linz in Lijphart 1992: p.120). Presidentialism is described as a winner-take all system that may contribute to fuel conflicts. Winning or losing elections for the executive becomes a zero-sum game because power is centred in one person (Linz in Lijphart 1992: p.123).

The relationship between legislative and executive powers is one factor affecting ethnic relations. The composition of the legislature and the manner in which the legislators are selected are a second factor. Most modern legislatures are unicameral or bicameral. Historically, the two chambers have representing different interests. For instance, the upper chamber may represent a particular social class, such as the nobility in the British parliament. However, the upper chamber may also represent regional and political subdivisions in a federal system such as in the German parliament. Furthermore, Horowitz (1985: p. 628) has argued that the electoral system plays a key role for the development of ethnic conflicts. One reason is that the nature of the electoral system influences the proportionality of the voter outcome, i.e. the relationship between the number of votes that a political party receives and the number of seats that it will control in the legislature. Evidence suggests that a high

degree of proportionality tends to improve the representation of minorities (Farrell 1997: pp. 150-153).

The choice of electoral system is often presented as a choice between proportionality and stability. It is assumed that when the electoral system provides for a high degree of proportionality, the stability of the political system will be low and vice versa. Farrell (1997: chap.7) does not find support for this assumption, although he acknowledges that a high degree of proportionality increases the chances for small and extremist parties to gain representation, thus potentially reducing stability. However, Farrell's conclusions may not be valid for a postcolonial state like Burma. Farrell draws his conclusions on the basis of case studies from Western Europe. His findings may therefore result from other factors present in these countries, such as moderation in cleavages in the population.

Four dimensions of the electoral system may play a role in shaping ethnic relations: The electoral formula, the structure of the ballot, the delimitation of the constituencies, and the number of representatives per constituency (Horowitz 1985: p. 628). The electoral formula and the structure of the ballot affect the proportionality of the electoral system, given that proportionality is generally higher when electoral formulas are based on proportional representation than semi-proportional and majoritarian representation. The threshold-level necessary for parties to gain seats affects proportionality by influencing the extent to which smaller parties can be represented in parliament. In addition, disparities in the degree of proportionality between constituencies can also significantly affect the representation of ethnic minorities, as they will result in some constituencies being over-represented in the legislature compared to others. This could be significant in situations where the delimitation of constituencies follows ethnic boundaries. Indeed, the manipulation of the boundaries of constituencies is a known mechanism to favour certain electoral outcomes (cf. the concept of gerrymandering).

I will argue that while the structure of the political system played a role for ethnic relations in Burma, it cannot be seen in isolation from other key aspects of political activity in the country. I will thus argue that there is an interacting effect between various elements within the political structure. For instance, the Burmese

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political system was a variety of parliamentary rule – which ought to allow for greater representation of minority interests – but it was combined with an electoral majoritarian formula, which I will argue had a winner-take-all aspect. In a multiethnic and severely divided constituency, the election of one representative per constituency may give rise to conflict if the population in the constituencies in question is ethnically divided. In Burma, this was topical in constituencies in Kachin State with a combined Burman-Kachin population, for instance. In addition, the effect of the political structure cannot be established without taking into account the dynamics of day-to-day politics, for instance how citizens vote during elections, how political parties are organised and how civil society organisations seek to influence political decision-making and implementation. In other words, an analysis of the structure of the political system needs to be accompanied by an examination of the dynamics of everyday politics.

#### *2.4.4 Party structure*

In established democracies, the party system plays a key role in democratic processes, especially during elections, and political parties are regarded as legitimate and important political actors. They are a fairly stable and structured organisation that possesses material as well as human resources, and that plays a key political role as channels for political ideas and as providers of political leadership. Interparty relations as well as relations between the electorate and the various parties are fairly stable. However, this is not always the case in emerging democracies where the party system is poorly institutionalised, as Mainwaring (1998: pp. 67- 81) has observed in the case of the “third wave” of democratisation. Instead, he found that interparty competition tended to be volatile with numerous voters shifting party between elections and that legitimacy of political parties was questioned more frequently. The party organisations were poorer, with few resources and a greater reliance on individual leaders.

Party systems also play a role for the politicisation of ethnic identity in multiethnic societies. Horowitz (1985: p. 291) emphasises that societies with deep ethnic cleavages tend to produce a party system that exacerbates those cleavages. Ethnicity

often forms a basis for social organisation in divided societies, for political parties as well as for organisations in civil society. The result is a system of ethnically based political parties, i.e. parties that are supported principally by one identifiable ethnic group, and that cater for the interest of that group. Once ethnic parties are established, they tend to foster further polarisation and gradually push away political parties that result from cleavages that are not based on ethnicity. This situation may have serious repercussions. Horowitz (1985: p.305) finds that the existence of ethnic parties is an important reason for the decline of party politics and the collapse of democracy.

A poorly institutionalised party system and an ethnically based party structure affect the manner in which democracy operates and is conceived. Democracy is often seen as a political system in which the will of the majority of the citizens is decisive for political decisions (*majoritarian democracy*), possibly within limits set by a constitution (*constitutional democracy*) (Rasch 2000: p. 22). This is a perception that can be difficult to sustain in situations where the will of the majority is channelled through political parties that are not deeply rooted in society. Instead, individual party leaders play a greater role.

It can be argued that in societies that are not severely divided, the boundaries between majority and minority are fluid and shift from one issue to another. No group is permanently without influence. In severely divided societies, the borderline between the majority and the minority is not fluid. An ethnically based party system may thus turn some groups into permanent majorities or minorities (Horowitz 1985: pp.293-298). In such a situation, Horowitz (1985: p. 86) concludes:

*“if we ask what went wrong with this election, there are at first plausible grounds for saying that nothing went wrong. The election was democratically conducted. The results are in conformity with the principle of majority rule. But that is the sticking point. Majority rule in perpetuity is not what we mean by majority rule”.*

This is a situation that we will recognise in Burma.

## 2.5 Democracy and nationality policy

After a democratic political order has been established, policies to promote the consolidation of the regime are the logical next step. In a multiethnic state, this step may include attempts to address ethnic demands – i.e. the formulation of a nationality policy. Strategies targeting ethnic diversity may affect the democratic regime to varying extent. Strategies such as partition or secession entail major reforms as they redraw international borders. Cantonisation and federalisation are also major reforms that recreate boundaries within the state and change the manner in which political power is divided between political subdivisions. Other strategies may create a framework of rules and regulations that affect the workings of democratic institutions, for instance by granting various forms of collective rights to ethnic groups. Finally, some strategies, such as policies of assimilation or acculturation, do not change the democratic order, but may affect popular attitudes toward democracy and behavioural compliance with democratic rules. The selection of strategy is the outcome of several factors:

### 2.5.1 *Five factors determining the choice of strategy*

#### Goals

McGarry and O’Leary (1993: chapt.1) distinguish between strategies aimed at eliminating and strategies aimed at managing ethnic diversity. Both goals are compatible with democracy: Butenschøn (1998: p.250) argues that a democratic political order can be established to overlook ethnic differences - through the application of principles of majority rule - or to institutionalise such differences - by providing guarantees for the representation of minority groups. In Burma, a third set of goals needs to be included to understand the choice of choice of strategy. These are goals that were linked to the decolonisation process – such as achieving a speedy independence from colonial rule – because the transition to democracy after 1945 occurred within the context of decolonisation.

## Actors

Bakke (1996: p.13) argues that the choice of strategies is the outcome of a dynamic relationship between the state and the ethnic groups who formulate demands, as well as of the interaction between ethnic groups. In the case of Burma, we may add a third actor to this relationship. In addition to the relationship between ethnic groups and the British colonial state, we need to include the anticolonial movement, the AFPFL, which negotiated the terms of independence with Great Britain and took over the government after 1948.

## Type of demands

Bakke (1996: pp.3-7) distinguishes between political, economic and cultural demands, as well as between symbolic and practical demands. Bakke's analytical categories allow us to grasp divergences within the state's overall nationality policy. Indeed, the state may rely on similar strategies to face all kinds of ethnic demands, but it may also choose different strategies to address different demands. In addition, the application of one strategy for one set of demands may influence the liberty later to choose strategies vis-à-vis similar or other demands. The distinction between the various forms of demands forms the basis for the division of the analysis into three separate chapters for democratic consolidation in the political, cultural and economic arenas in Burma after 1948.

## Nature of strategies

Some strategies may require extensive institutional reforms, such as constitutional reforms, while others may be applicable within the existing constitutional framework. Horowitz (1985: chap. 15&16) thus operates with a useful distinction between strategies that aim at changing the structure within which ethnic groups interact and strategies that affect the distribution of resources between ethnic groups within a given structure. One hypothesis is that major institutional reforms in the political order are more likely to take place during the transition to democracy than later. The reasoning is that major reforms are easier to achieve when the political order is open for

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reconsideration or that they may be a necessary component in the transition. The alternative hypothesis is that major reforms are more easily achieved after the transition to democracy has occurred. A transition is a difficult process. If such difficulties are compounded by controversial reforms, the demands for reforms may end up aborting the transition. Proponents of the first hypothesis would probably support de Nevers' assessment that ethnic demands should be taken into account at an early stage in the transition, while proponents of the second hypothesis would probably hold that democracy needs to be achieved before certain ethnic demands can be addressed. The case of Burma will show the validity of either hypothesis.

### Combination of strategies

Horowitz' (1985) study of ethnic groups in conflict reveals that the nature of ethnic relations is the outcome of several interacting strategies. For instance, the impact for ethnic relations of measures such as federalisation, cantonisation or various forms of power-sharing can be reinforced by reforms in the electoral system and party system. Horowitz (in Lijphart 1992: p. 22) suggests that a parliamentary system combined with elections by proportional representation, a multiparty system and coalition cabinets can reduce tensions in a divided society. Powell (quoted in Lijphart 1992: p.24) argues that public order is better maintained in political systems that combine parliamentary rule and an election system with proportional representation. Linz and Stepan (1996:pp. 33-34) and Kymlicka (1995) recommend a combination of individual human rights and collective rights in order to protect minorities in multiethnic states. Linz and Stepan (1996: p. 33) also recommend that countries with several ethnic groups explore a combination of "non-majoritarian, non-plebiscitarian formulas" to reduce tensions. But not all combinations of strategies have a positive impact on ethnic relations. Brass (1991: p.342) argues that strategies of consociationalism and group rights are incompatible because consociational models do not recognise ethnic groups that develop as political entities after the power-sharing structure has been established.

### 2.5.2 Five strategies compatible with democracy

Bakke (1996: p. 16) argues that it is more difficult to deal with ethnic conflicts in democracies than authoritarian regimes because democracies have access to fewer strategies (in particular strategies of elimination) and because the legitimacy of democracies rests on popular consent – including in the choice of strategy. In addition, the availability of types of strategies differs in the two regimes. According to Bakke, authoritarian regimes have more options when it comes to eliminating ethnic differences, while democracies have more options when it comes to managing ethnic differences.

McGarry and O’Leary (1993) have created a typology of eight strategies for dealing with ethnic conflicts. They find that three of these are not compatible with democratic norms. They include the physical elimination of one or more ethnic groups (*genocide*); changes in the ethnic composition of the population through *massive forced population transfer* and the creation of a system of coercive or cooptive rule that prevents ethnic groups from challenging the authority of the state (*hegemonic control*). Five strategies are compatible with democratic standards: 1) partition/secession; (2) cantonisation/ federalisation; (3) consociation/power-sharing; (4) assimilation/integration; (5) group rights. I will examine advantages and drawbacks for each below.

#### Partition/secession

Partition and secession are strategies closely associated with the principle of self-determination. They are typical strategies for dealing with political demands by minority groups, and require formalisation, for instance in a country’s constitution. McGarry and O’Leary argue that these strategies appear to be simple ways to ensure self-determination, but that they raise a number of questions. The two scholars (1993: p. 13) argue in particular that:

*“(...) exercising the principle of self-determination is only straightforward where there is no large or disgruntled minority within the relevant region affected by the proposed secession and when the seceding area includes the great majority of those who wish to leave”.*

Horowitz (1985: pp. 588-592) regards partition as a possible solution only after other attempts to reach accommodation fail. He argues that partition is unlikely to create ethnic homogeneity because few secessionist regions and few rump states are ethnically homogenous. Furthermore, ethnic identity among minorities in the secessionist region may become politicised as a result of the partition. Partition may thus exacerbate ethnic conflicts rather than becoming a solution.

#### Cantonisation/federalisation

These are strategies to address political demands that require formalisation in a constitution. A strategy such as federalisation aims at dealing with ethnic differences through state reforms and the diffusion of power. For Elazar (1987: p.11), federalism offers a solution for several political problems in modern states, including ethnic conflicts. Elazar (1987: p.12) argues that the diffusion of power in a federal state follows a polycentric model that ensures “self-rule plus shared rule”. In unitary states power is concentrated at the centre, and the main matrix is a centre-periphery relationship (Elazar 1987: pp.5-6). Federalism, on the other hand, is polycentric by design. However, federal arrangements require certain conditions in order to succeed. One condition is a territorially concentrated population. Federalism may be seen as an alternative to secession, but more often, it is looked upon as the first step towards secession (Horowitz 1985: p. 624). Unless a federal state is properly crafted, it can therefore aggravate problems of multiethnicity instead of attenuating them (Stepan 1998: p. 227). Horowitz (1985: pp. 621-622) also points out that there are costs associated with the upkeep of a federal arrangement that duplicates all political structures.

#### Consociation/power-sharing

Consociational models are strategies that address political demands by ethnic groups. They are characterised by four conditions. They are (1) “government by a coalition of the political leaders of all significant segments of the plural society”; (2) mutual veto powers for all segments; (3) proportionality in all aspects of political representation and (4) a high degree of internal autonomy in each segment (Lijphart 1977: p. 25). The manner in which power is shared between the segments may be more

or less formalised. While Lijphart defended the advantages of the consociational model, Horowitz (1985: pp. 570-571) argues that the consequences of consociational rule are not well known, and that the model is developed on the basis of the experience of European states characterised by moderate and fluid cleavages. Many societies in Asia and Africa face serious cleavages that may adversely affect the opportunity of the leaders of the various segments to develop a consociational power-sharing system. Brass dismisses the consociational model as a solution to ethnic conflicts. He (1991: pp. 337-338) argues that proponents of consociational models base their arguments on assumptions about ethnicity and stability in plural societies that distract attention away from more important issues, in particular the relationship between state, social class and ethnicity. Instead, Brass (1991: p. 342) argues that consociationalism increases conflicts because it “is a model for freezing existing divisions and conflicts and reducing the art of political accommodation to formulas that can work only as long as processes of social, economic and political change do not upset them”.

### Group rights

For Brass (1991: p. 342), group rights is an alternative strategy to consociational models. It is a strategy that protects minority groups without requiring reforms in the power-sharing arrangement. However, group rights are not only strategies to address political demands by minority groups. Group rights can also be used to address cultural and economic demands. Kymlicka (1995: p. 4-5) has found that there is a gradual realisation that minority rights are not a subcategory of human rights and that traditional human rights standards cannot solve important and controversial questions concerning language issues, internal boundaries, decentralisation and representation. For Kymlicka (1995: p. 5), “to resolve these questions fairly, we need to supplement traditional human rights principles with a theory of minority rights”. But Kymlicka’s support for collective rights is conditional: Liberal democracies cannot support a system of rights that allows groups to impose internal restrictions on their members, or that allows one group to exploit other groups. Kymlicka thus argues for a combination of individual rights and collective rights to ensure individual freedom within minority groups and equality between minority and majority groups.

## Assimilation/integration

Strategies of assimilation are closely associated with the ideal of the nation-state and nation-building activities. They are strategies to deal with cultural differences between ethnic groups and seek the gradual absorption of cultural minorities into the national culture with the concomitant disappearance of separate cultural characteristics. With a strong strategy of assimilation, the government promotes national cultural traits while actively seeking to eliminate the minority cultures, for instance by prohibiting the use of minority languages. A weak strategy of assimilation seeks to promote the national culture while neglecting minority cultures. Assimilation has frequently been carried out within the authoritarian structures of predemocratic states. As a result, Stepan (1998: pp. 224-225) argues that assimilation has become a difficult and time-consuming process that is likely to lead to reactions and conflicts, in particular in democracies. Indeed, Lijphart (in Hutchinson and Smith 1994: p. 261) observes that “in Third World countries, the process of democratisation and the encouragement of mass participation have undoubtedly strengthened ethnic feelings and demands”. The conditions for assimilation have thus become more difficult. Instead, Linz and Stepan (1996 p.417) suggest that the concept of identity should be reconsidered. They point out that:

*“the logic of the nation-state produces a political language and a set of descriptive terms whose discursive effect is to create polar identities and to work against the multiple complementary identities that make possible democratic life in a de facto multinational state”.*

## 2.6 Summing up

In the present chapter, I have explored three aspects of the democratisation process that affect ethnic relations. Firstly, I have argued that there is a close link between democracy, national identity and ethnic conflicts. I have discussed whether a common national identity is required for democracy and how democratisation can be supported in multiethnic states. I have also examined how the transition to democracy affects ethnic relations and the consequences for ethnic relations of various democratic institutional arrangements. Finally, I have explored the opportunities and

constraints inherent in the formulation of a nationality policy in democratic regimes. These three aspects of the democratisation process will be examined in relation to Burma in the next several chapters. In chapter four, I will explore the constitution of a national identity in Burma, and I will argue that a common national identity that spanned across ethnic cleavages had not emerged by the time the transition to democracy began in 1945. In chapter seven, I will explore the consequences of this situation as I analyse the nationality policies of the post-independence government in the cultural arena. In chapter five, I will explore how the transition to democracy occurred in Burma between 1945 and 1948. In particular, I will look into whether representatives of the various ethnic groups in the country were able to influence the transition process and if the interests of ethnic groups were taken into account during the transition. I will also analyse the constitutional order that emerged in 1948. In chapter six, I then seek to grasp how the post-independence government sought to consolidate democracy and make up for the lacunas of the transition. In chapter eight, I will explore how democratic consolidation is also linked to a country's social and economic situation.

### 3. Chapter three: Research methodology and source material

I began working on my thesis as a result of an interest in Burma and in questions related to democracy and democratisation. From the onset, I have worked on one unit of research – Burma - and a large number of variables. The questions formulated in chapter one, the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two, the research method put into use in the analytical chapters and the empirical data available together have determined the research strategy. In the present chapter, I will provide the reasons for the choices that I have made when it comes to each of these four elements and point to some consequences for the analysis.

Yin (1994: p.1) defines a case study as the examination of a contemporary phenomenon within a real life framework (as opposed to an experiment carried out in a laboratory). Andersen (1990: pp. 122-123) argues that a case study may also be concerned with historical events. I have chosen to combine a case study of Burma with a historical research method. My case study is historical in terms of its topic - the period between 1948 and 1962 - and its reliance on historical data. The main factor guiding my choice of research strategy was the nature of the questions asked in chapter one. As Yin (1994:p.9, p.21) points out, case studies are well suited to explore questions that deal with the exploration of processes and causal relationships (“how” and “why”-questions), and when the investigator has little control over events. Andersen (1990: loc.cit.) argues that case studies are applicable when the borderlines between the phenomenon that is being examined and its context are blurred. For these reasons, I find the case study to be a suitable strategy for exploring a complex phenomenon such as democratisation, which also frequently interacts with international affairs, economics, social conditions and culture. Case studies are also well suited when several sources of information are used to explore the same phenomenon. As I will show, using multiple sources is a central component of my thesis. In section five, I thus describe and discuss the data material that constitutes the basis for my analysis.

### 3.1 Why choose a case study: Strengths and weaknesses of case studies

According to Mathisen (1998), a good case study ought to be significant both at a theoretical and an empirical level. I will argue that my case study is of empirical interest for two reasons. The first reason concerns the role that history plays in the present political conflict in Burma. The second reason stems from the relevance that the nexus between democracy and ethnic relations continues to have in Burma.

#### 3.1.1 *History as a political tool*

The current political situation in Burma is characterised by serious political conflict and a wide array of human rights violations after large-scale anti-government demonstrations took place in 1988 and a general election was conducted in 1990. The nexus between democracy and ethnicity remains of paramount importance today. In addition to the ongoing struggle between the military and the democracy movement over the role of the military and the introduction of democracy, Burma is suffering the consequences of widespread disagreement over strategies for dealing with ethnicity. The three main parties in the conflict – the military, the democracy movement and the ethnically based movement – diverge in their opinions of how the two conflicts are related to each other. Ethnic organisations tend to argue that the question of democracy and the question of ethnic demands cannot be dealt with separately. Instead, they see the two issues as part of the same problem that ought to be addressed simultaneously (ENSCC 2002: p.5). Since 1994, annual resolutions by the United Nations General Assembly have also spelt out the need for a tripartite dialogue - the military, the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the ethnic groups - to address the political crisis in Burma.

Knowledge about Burma's past contributes to a better understanding of the present. Indeed, history comes into play in the ongoing crisis in several ways and serves to justify the position of key actors on various issues. The democracy movement and the military authorities have diverging and in part conflicting views of what happened during Burma's first era of parliamentary democracy. According to

the military authorities, a high level of conflict among the politicians, which culminated in a split in the AFPFL in 1958, marked the first fourteen years of civilian rule. The military authorities accuse the politicians of having failed in their duties towards the country, thus forcing the military to step in. Furthermore, the military argues that the armed forces have played a central role in keeping the country together since 1948, and that without the intervention of the armed forces, Burma would have become “a new Yugoslavia”, wrecked by internal conflict and civil war (Golden Land). This view is used to justify the military’s current hold on power and legitimise the present authoritarian regime as well as to argue for a prominent political role for the military in the future.

Many democracy activists, on the other hand, point to the failures of authoritarian rule since 1962, while arguing, in retrospect, that the period before 1962 was “a golden era” for Burma (Aung San Suu Kyi 1995: p.169; Khin Maung Kyi et al. 2000: p. 2). The democratic opposition accuses the military of having let the country and the people down and holds the military responsible for tensions between ethnic groups and for the civil war. They regard the presence of the armed forces as part of the problem rather than the solution when it comes to achieving national reconciliation (ENSCC 2002: p.5). Finally, a section of the ethnic insurgent movement argues that the conflict in Burma is essentially a constitutional problem that can be solved through the judicious crafting of a proper constitutional arrangement to address the relationship between the country’s various ethnic groups. This is thought to bring ethnically based violence to an end (ENSCC 2002: pp.5-8)

Caught between these viewpoints are younger people who have grown up after 1962 and who combine a keen awareness of the importance of learning from history with a lack of confidence in their knowledge of their country’s past. They argue that history as they were taught in school has been manipulated for political purposes, and that they have not been given a proper chance to learn about their own past. For many students who left Burma after the anti-government uprising in 1988, life in the country’s border areas and in exile have changed their views towards what they were

taught in school, particularly when it came to ethnic relations<sup>5</sup>. There is thus a clear need for the re-examination of Burma's modern history.

The importance attached to history by key political actors in Burma today is apparent in the establishment of an official historical commission by a government decree in 1989, following the suggestion of Senior General Saw Maung, then chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the main government body in Burma. The purpose of establishing this commission was said to compile "the authentic facts of Myanmar history" by recording those facts from individuals who have personally been involved in the country's anticolonial movement, and thus be able to learn from past mistakes. The work carried out by the commission covered the period of the colonial administration and the promulgation of the 1947 constitution. It resulted in a two-volume analysis of the 1947 constitution and the nationalities that was published in Burmese in 1991 and translated into English in 1999 (UHRC 1999: introduction).

### *3.1.2 History as a model*

In addition to serving as a justification for the position held by various actors, history is also present in terms of the strategies that are proposed to address the present crisis. Such strategies frequently draw on strategies that have already been applied in the past. The Panglong Agreement and the "Spirit of Panglong" from 1947 continue to provide a model for ethnic relations. Constitutional drafts proposed by the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) are based on the 1947 constitution (ENSCC 2002, NLD Interim Constitution, NCUB 1997).

The use of past experiences as a basis for future solutions is not unique to Burma. As Linz and Stepan (1996: p.83) point out, the restoration of a previous democratic constitution is a strategy often selected by a country undergoing a crisis because it allows for a speedy solution and the avoidance of further conflict. However, the resurrection of past constitutional arrangements presupposes that these

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<sup>5</sup> These are arguments that I have heard during numerous discussions over the past nine years with young Burmese dissidents.

arrangements are not somehow responsible for the present crisis and that they have not been made irrelevant by changes that have taken place since they were first in use. Such assumptions do not necessarily hold up to further scrutiny. Therefore, engaging in an examination of history can contribute to avoid a repeat of past errors.

### *3.1.3 An extension in time and space*

It has been said that case studies are of limited theoretical interest because they do not permit generalisation. According to Yin (1994: pp.30-32), such criticism fails to grasp the analytical nature of case studies. This thesis seeks to extend a theoretical framework dealing with democratisation in time and space, thus exploring its validity. Although I introduced some theoretical approaches in chapter two that derive from Asia and Africa (Brass 1991, Brown 1989, Brown 1994, Horowitz 1985), the overall theoretical framework applied in the thesis draws primarily on case studies from Southern and Eastern Europe and Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s. I then apply this framework on a process of democratisation in a postcolonial state in Asia after 1948. This attempt, however, warrants a few caveats.

Firstly, the application of theories developed to account for processes that took place in the 1970s and 1980s on a case from the 1940s and 1950s presupposes that there is a constant relationship between variables. As Hovi and Rasch (1996: chap.3) show, however, this is not necessarily the case in social sciences. Instead, it has been argued that the manner in which issues are acted upon depend on the manner in which they are perceived and interpreted. This raises the question of whether we should interpret events within the context of their time – and whether this can be done once this context has expired – or whether we can hold them up to a theoretical model that transcends time and place. Interpretations may change over time and lead to a new conception of the subject that is being studied, a process described by Kuhn (quoted by Nordby 1998) as a change of paradigm. They may thus lead to novel ways of addressing certain issues.

Linz and Stepan (1996: pp. 74-76) show that the process of democratisation is facilitated or hampered by the prevailing zeitgeist at any point in time, i.e. whether the “spirit of times” is supportive or negative towards democracy. Indeed, there are

significant differences in the zeitgeist of the 1940s-1950s and of the 1970s-1980s that needs to be taken into account when applying a contemporary framework in order to examine past events. This was Baogang He's point when he criticised Rustow for being caught up by the mood of the 1960s and 1970s in his criticism of the prospects of democracy. Democracy was introduced in Burma at a time of optimism for the future of newly independent postcolonial states. But it was also at a time when the Cold War was about to shape international relations, and issues of national security and alliance- building were beginning to take on a key role in many countries' foreign policy. In contrast, democratisation in Eastern Europe after 1989 was the result of the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War. It occurred at a time when a number of countries came to support democracy and human rights as a key component of their foreign policy.

Secondly, a recurrent dilemma in development studies is the question of whether it is possible to extend theoretical frameworks based on case studies from Europe and Latin America to postcolonial states in Asia and Africa. In the present thesis, I use definitions and concepts – such as nationalism and democracy - developed in the West. Indeed, one of the points that I make in chapter four on the historical background for the democratisation process in Burma after 1948 is that the modern state in Burma evolved from a precolonial indigenously Asian concept of the state in combination with a European model of the state.

How do I justify that I apply a Western theoretical framework such as the one I introduced in chapter two? One reason is that the introduction and development of democracy in Burma was the result of Western influence – particularly from the British colonial era - and the form of democracy that was sought in Burma was based on Western political thinking. Political leaders in Burma in the 1940s and 1950s spoke of the need to adapt the political system in the country to local conditions, but their arguments were based on Western political theories. To the extent that I can identify an indigenous concept of democracy, of national identity and so forth, it did not exist separately from the “corresponding” “Western” concept but in symbiosis.

Furthermore, it would be unfruitful to seek general knowledge in the social sciences if it were not feasible to extend theoretical frameworks from one

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geographical area to another. I seek to determine whether knowledge that has emerged from case studies in one part of the world can be generalised to other geographical regions. By using insight gained from the examination of case studies from the 1990s, I hope to be able to look at the postcolonial states with fresh eyes, and improve our understanding of the political history of these countries. A re-examination of older cases may enable us to gain new insight that can complement and extend the knowledge that studies of contemporary cases give us.

### 3.2 Collecting the data

Before I began the search for data, I decided to include only material produced before 1962 in order to avoid the pitfalls associated with using historical works written within the present political context. In addition, I decided to look for work by Burmese scholars due to their access a wider array of source (including in Burmese language) and in order to include a greater variety of perspectives than if I had limited myself to Western scholarship. However, significant limitations came to change my selection of sources, in particular the availability and reliability of material.

Availability was one reason. Academic scholarship on Burma is sparse, and material on Burma is not readily available. Burma is a closed country and it is difficult for scholars to get access to the country as well as for scholars in the country to carry out with their work. Engaging with Burma also poses some ethical dilemmas that I will address shortly. In addition, my access to information is limited to material available in English, French, German or a Scandinavian language.

Lack of data and unreliable data came to put significant limitations as to what data could be used as a basis for the thesis. This is particularly significant when it comes to quantitative data, such as statistics, which are frequently either erroneous or completely lacking for Burma. For instance, no countrywide population census has taken place since 1931. A national census was planned during 1953-1955, but was never completed due to the civil war (Maung 1979: p.96). As a result, most population counts that I refer to are estimates. However, the use of estimates, particularly over a

large number of years, opens for significant errors. For instance, it was estimated in 1979 (Maung 1979: p.98) that the population in Burma by 2001 would comprise 63,2 million people. Recent estimates by the United Nations suggest that the population in Burma by mid-2002 was only 50 million (United Nations Population Division).

Furthermore, estimates are frequently subject to disagreements, often of a political character. This has happened with estimates of the size of various ethnic groups, such as the Karen. The present military authorities estimate that there are about 2,5 million Karen in Burma, while the Karen National Union (KNU) – the main Karen opposition group – argues that there are more than seven million Karen. Anthropologists assess the number of Karen at about four million, of which 200,000 live in Thailand (M. Smith 1994: p.42). It is thus difficult to determine the accuracy of such data.

The limitations posed by erroneous data also extend to other forms of quantitative data. For instance, Thet Tun (1960), director of the Central Statistical and Economics Department of the Burmese government, complained that inadequate statistics formed the basis for much of Burma's economic planning, and acknowledged that knowledge of the country's private sector remained "very scanty".

Much quantitative data that would have been useful for my thesis is lacking. For instance, I examined the UN annual statistical yearbooks for the period 1948-1962, but much of the data on Burma was missing. It also turned out to be difficult to find disaggregated social or economic data in order to compare the situation between ethnic groups for chapter eight. In chapter eight, I will therefore focus on regional disparities instead. This is possible because ethnic relations in Burma can also be seen as centre-periphery relations, with the Burman majority living in the lowlands and various ethnic groups inhabiting the hill areas. However, such an approach does not enable me to examine the conditions for various ethnic groups within Central-Burma or within the border areas, and I have to accept that this will be one limitation for the analysis.

One consequence of the lack of reliability of much quantitative data is a greater reliance on qualitative data. In addition, I have used more recent material than

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I expected, as can be gauged from the bibliography. I have also not been able to rely as much on Burmese scholarship as I would have wished.

### 3.3 Validity of conclusions

I rely on a number of strategies to check the validity of my conclusions. Firstly, as I show in my introductory chapter, a number of scholars have identified ethnicity as an important factor in Burmese politics and pointed to the nexus between state/state institutions and interethnic tensions in Burma. My findings are thus supported by the findings of other scholars. Furthermore, my conclusions draw on experiences that have been acquired over the past eight-nine years, as I have engaged in numerous discussions with individuals involved in Burmese politics - Burmese and foreign scholars of Burma. These discussions have contributed to shape my opinion on a variety of topics, including those presented in the thesis. During my work with the thesis, I was also able to engage in oral and written discussions concerning specific topics addressed in the thesis, such as the Panglong Agreement, by email and other forms of contacts. Finally, I participated in the conference “Burma-Myanma(r) Research and its Future: Implications for Scholars and Policymakers”, which took place in Gothenburg, Sweden, in September 2002, and I presented the main conclusions from the thesis at one panel.

### 3.4 Research and politics in a Burmese context

The case of Burma poses some ethical challenges for scholars and students due to the present political situation in the country. In recent years, a debate has thus taken place over the ethics of academic engagement in Burma. Government reactions against those who write critically about Burma - such as refusing entry visas and the imposition of a strict system of public censorship - are some reasons why scholars feel reticent about engaging with the regime. For Houtman (2000), the manipulation by oppressive regimes of academic work for political purposes should make scholars wary of dealing with such regimes. Other scholars argue that academia ought to

engage with Burma. For instance, Reynolds (2000) argues that academics have a duty to engage with Burma in order to extend the space available in the country for conducting research and presenting research findings. Reynolds recognises that scholars may thus find themselves complicit with an authoritarian regime, but emphasises that they also have a responsibility towards those who are seeking to conduct academic work in Burma within the confines permitted by the authorities.

The debate has centred on one discipline in particular – archaeology. It has been triggered by attempts by the Burmese government to draw on findings from the Pondaung primate fossils archaeological project to promote a sense of national pride and legitimise military rule. However, caution is also warranted when it comes to scholarship that deals with other topics. Indeed, ethnic relations in modern Burma are a politically sensitive topic in Burma. For instance, the military government has founded a large number of museums and historical monuments during the 1990s, in particularly in the non-Burman states. Houtman (1999) argues that these efforts are part of a process of “Myanmafication” of Burma than began when the country’s official name was changed from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. Houtman sees these efforts as an attempt to reduce the importance of Aung San as Burma’s paramount figure of national unity as a result of the affiliation between him and Aung San Suu Kyi (who is his daughter) and replace him with other historical symbols. History-writing and re-writing thus plays directly into the ongoing political struggle in Burma, and history plays a central role in the regime’s attempts to forge a legitimate basis for its rule.

Given that the work on this thesis has taken place outside Burma, the ethical dilemma of engaging with Burma has been of less direct significance. However, such concerns have played a role in the choice of source material.

## 4. Chapter four: The question of national identity

In chapter two, I argued that a common national identity is posited as a premise for the consolidation of democracy. In this chapter, I will trace the development of nationalism in Burma during the colonial era. I trace the emergence of a national movement among Christian Karen in the Irrawaddy Delta and among Buddhists Burmese in Burma Proper. I will show that these two national movements failed to promote a common identity that spanned ethnic and religious cleavages, and thereby to bridge the gap between Burma's various ethnic and religious groups. Instead, the emerging Burman-dominated anticolonial movement promoted cultural attributes associated with the main ethnic groups in Burma Proper - Buddhism and Burmese language and culture. While no major national movements emerged among ethnic minorities in the Frontier Areas before World War II, tensions between various ethnic groups escalated during the war. The question of national solidarity was therefore topical for the consolidation of democracy after 1948.

### 4.1 Development of a modern state

The precolonial state in Burma was a galactic polity<sup>6</sup> (also described by historians as a set of concentric circles, *mandalas*) whose realm stretched from the Himalayas to the Andaman Sea, from Siam to East Bengal. In practice, the Burman king governed the Irrawaddy plains, where the majority of the population was living. Arakanese and Mon rulers controlled Lower Burma, while Shan and Karenni princes ruled in the eastern hills. The Burman king maintained a tributary relationship with these lesser rulers, but by the time of the British colonisation, the Burman kings were in the process of acquiring control throughout the Irrawaddy valley. The realm of the Burman kings thus came to constitute the core of the modern state (Hall 1964: p.140; Taylor 1987: p.5; pp.20-25; Thant 2001: pp. 24-25).

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<sup>6</sup> The term galactic polity is borrowed from Tambiah's (1976) analysis of the pre-modern state in Thailand. Tambiah argues that his model is valid for other countries as well, including Burma (Tambiah 1986).

The power of the king rested on his control over the army, his relationship with the Buddhist Sangha and his position at the apex of patron-client relations that permeated society. Society was divided into kinship and social status groups, which determined an individual's role in society and his/her position in relation to others and to political authority (Hall 1964: p.247; Taylor 1987: p.15, p. 25; Thant 2001: pp. 27-34; Wolters 1999: chap.2). According to Thant (2001: p. 3), colonisation brought "nothing less than the total dismantling of existing institutions of political authority and the undermining of many established institutions of social organisation".

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century attempts were made to improve public administration, but no countrywide central administration developed (Taylor 1987: p.52; Thant 2001: chap.5; Hall 1964: p.599). After the British conquest in 1885, the precolonial state was replaced by a legal-rational state with authority emanating from its administrative capabilities and control over the army and the police (Hall 1964: p.692, Taylor 1987: pp. 82-86).

The economy of the precolonial state was a subsistence economy. After 1885, it became export-oriented and based on the rapid development of agriculture, especially rice production in the Irrawaddy Delta, which developed into the backbone of the colonial economy. Natural resources such as forestry, rubber and metals were exploited in the Frontier Areas, and petroleum was exploited in the plains. Infrastructure for communication and transport was built in Central-Burma for the purpose of export and internal security (Adas 1974: pp.3-11; Hall 1964: pp.736-740; Taylor 1987: p. 76; pp. 106-110).

## 4.2 Ethnic relations in colonial Burma

In the precolonial era relations between ethnic groups had fluctuated. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Burman king acquired Assam, Arakan and Tenasserim and brought Arakanese, Karen and Mon into his realm (Thant 2001: chap. 1). Ethnic groups in the hills – such as Kachin, Chin and Karenni - did not share the polity of the Burman rulers, but maintained a relationship with the valley dominated by trade and the security concerns of the Burman polity (Taylor 1987: p.23). The British conquest brought ethnic groups in the valley and the hills into closer contact as areas inhabited by ethnic

groups that had been tributaries to the Burman kings were included within the borders of the colonial state (Taylor 1987: p. 79; Thant 2001: pp. 220-221). New economic opportunities encouraged the immigration of Europeans, Indians and Chinese, thus bringing “new” ethnic groups into the country.

The economic and administrative policies of the colonial era created new classes and class relations that developed ethnic characteristics (Adas 1974: chap.5). Burma turned into a three-tiered society with Europeans and Eurasians at the top of the social ladder. Traders, civil servants and professionals made up the middle class. Many members of immigrant communities such as the Chinese and the Indians entered these middle class professions, which were frequently a result of the new economic and political order. Indians – in particular the money-lending Chettyar caste – played a central role in the development of the colonial economy. Farmers and workers – mostly from indigenous ethnic groups - were at the bottom of the social ladder. Many non-Burman indigenous groups, such as Kachin, Karen and Chin, were recruited to the colonial army where ethnically segregated units were established (Adas 1974: chap.5; Taylor 1987: p. 101).

British administration separated the plains of the Irrawaddy river (Burma Proper) from the hills (the Frontier Areas), and discouraged interaction between the two areas. Burma Proper was brought under direct British rule, while a protectorate under traditional leaders persisted among Shan, Kachin and Chin in the Frontier Areas. The Karenni area was ruled as a separate entity under the Karenni princes. The introduction of the apparatus of a modern state was more rapid in Burma Proper than in the Frontier Areas and Karenni states (Taylor 1987: p. 88, p. 92, p. 95). In practice, Kachin, Karenni, Chin and Shan rulers replaced one tributary relation with another (Scott 1901: pp. 1-8; pp. 14-15, Taylor 1987: p. 79). In addition, British policies strengthened the traditional Shan rulers, the *saohpas*, by reducing their dependence on the local population for positions of political authority (Taylor 1987: pp. 95-96).

In Burma Proper, a process of assimilation of Arakanese and Mon into the dominant Burman culture that had begun prior to 1884 intensified under the British, but a similar process did not occur among the Karen (Fistié 1985: chap.2). In the Frontier Areas, the spread of Christianity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century – particularly among Chin,

Karen, Karenni and Kachin – created a gap between the Buddhist majority in the valley and the various non-Burman hill peoples. Christianity came to play a key role in the political identity of many ethnic minorities. In the precolonial era, ethnic identity was fluid, but colonial policies such as the census and the codification of legal codes contributed to cement ethnic identities (Leach 1970: pp. 42-44; Thant 2001: p. 243; Taylor 1987: p. 150).

The various ethnic groups in Burma responded differently to colonisation. Many ethnic groups such as Arakanese, Mon and Karen, supported British rule, while anticolonial resistance first emerged among Burmans. For many non-Burmans, their support for the colonial authorities were a result of past animosities between these ethnic groups and the Burmans (Taylor 1987: 154-155). There was also resistance to British authority in Upper Burma, among Kachin, Chin and Wa who had never before been brought under a common polity with the valley, but by the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this resistance had largely ceased (Woodman 1962: chaps. 15-16).

### 4.3 The development of nationalism

A national movement led by a Western-educated elite first emerged in Burma Proper in reaction to colonialism. The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) founded in 1906 on the model of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) is considered Burma's first nationalist organisation (Maung Maung 1980: p. 1, Taylor 1987: p. 13). The YMBA sought to protect and promote Burman indigenous culture and particularly Buddhism. Maung Maung (1980: p. 230) argues that this movement was a by-product of a religious revival from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that emerged when the traditional bond between the monarchy and the Sangha was broken up in 1885-1886. But Burmese nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also had precolonial roots, and drew on a proto-national identity that was emerging in the Irrawaddy valley during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Smith 1965: pp.81-85; Taylor 1987: p. 7, p. 150; Thant 2001: p. 88). According to Thant (2001: p. 88), this identity was based on a common Burmese language, Buddhism, common legal and political norms and institutions as well as a shared written history and literature. After colonisation, this proto-identity gradually

evolved into a full-fledged national identity that defined itself in opposition to non-Burmans immigrant, in particular Indians and Europeans<sup>7</sup>.

The culturally oriented YMBA movement was politicised after a British decision in 1917 to prepare India for Home Rule, while excluding Burma from the same reforms, although the country was then ruled as a province in India. Many Burmese nationalists opposed the separation between Burma and India on the ground that Burma ought to progress towards self-rule on a pace equal with India. The controversy split the YMBA and led to the birth of a more radical political association, the General Council of Buddhist Associations (GCBA) – an umbrella organisation of smaller nationalist groups – in 1920, while the original YMBA was marginalised. University students organised the first major popular protest against the British in 1920 (Maung Maung 1980: pp.21-23). In 1922, Burma was included in the scheme for Home Rule, and political reforms were introduced, including elections for a new legislative assembly. These reforms played a central role in encouraging the formation of indigenous political organisations.

During the 1920s, Buddhism continued to play a dominant role in the nationalist movement. Former members of the Sangha such as U Ottama became prominent nationalist leaders. According to Moscotti (1974: p. 21& p. 39), Buddhist monks served as a bridge between the urban elite and ordinary villagers. Issues related to religion and education also remained important. In addition, precolonial traditions and history inspired the nationalists. A peasant rebellion led by the former Buddhist monk Saya San in the Irrawaddy Delta in 1930 is symptomatic of this period (Cady 1958: pp.309-314).

During the 1930s, the main focus of the nationalist struggle shifted towards the students and workers. Two significant events during this decade were the student strike in 1936 and the oil workers' strike in 1938. University students and intellectuals, frequently inspired by Marx and other left-wing writers, became the main leaders of the national movement during the 1930s<sup>8</sup>. Aung San and U Nu

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<sup>7</sup> Today the Burmese term for a Western foreigner is "Ingaleik" ("English"). Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Burman court of Ava divided people into "*lu-myo*" ("race" or "extended kinship group"). There were five overarching *lu-myo* categories – Myanma (Burmese), Tayok (Chinese and other East Asians), Shan, Mon and Kala (Indians, Europeans and others from overseas) (Thant 2001: p. 88).

<sup>8</sup> Several of the young nationalists of the 1930s-generation, including Aung San, were involved in the establishment of the Burma Communist Party in 1939 (Lintner 1990).

achieved prominence as student leaders in this period. Students founded the Thakin<sup>9</sup> movement and the Dobama Asiayone (“We Burman Association”) in 1930. They espoused a new outlook, described by Maung Maung (1980: p. 234) as “patently secular in concept and activities, deliberately moving away from the Buddhist foundations of the earlier nationalist movements”. The movement became increasingly concerned with economic issues, partly as a result of its new ideological orientation and partly as a result of the economic depression that hit Burma in the 1930s. The movement began to single out ethnic groups associated with colonial rule, in particular Indians, and several anti-Indian and anti-Chinese riots took place during the 1930s (Adas 1974: pp.174-175, pp.204-205).

The focus on Buddhism during the 1910s and 1920s had attracted Burmans as well as Mon and Arakanese. The membership of the first nationalist movement in Burma Proper was initially multiethnic. The first branch of the YMBA was established in the Arakan area in 1902, the second in Rangoon in 1906. The YMBA leadership included Western-educated Burmans and Mon as well as former Arakanese monks. But increasingly, the nationalist and anticolonial movement became identified with Burmans due to its focus on Burmese language and culture, and because many prominent leaders were Burmans, such as Aung San and U Nu. It failed to win the support of ethnic minorities (M. Smith 1991: p.49).

Among non-Burmans, national organisations began to emerge, partly in reaction to the rapid advances made by the Burman nationalists. The most important non-Burman nationalist movement before World War II was Karen. The Karen National Association (KNA) was established in 1881 to promote unity within the Karen communities and act as a pressure group for the Karen (Taylor 1987: p. 155). Karen nationalism was the result of missionary activities during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gravers 1996: p.249; Hovemyr 1989: p.88), and Christianity became a key component in Karen political identity. Karen identity also developed in opposition to Burmans. For instance, the Karen nationalist leader San Po Chit argued in 1946 that “it is a dream

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<sup>9</sup> The word “Thakin” means “master” in Burmese. During the colonial era, it was usually used by Burmese to address the British. The students appropriated this title for themselves in defiance of the British to indicate that they were the real masters of the country. (Cady 1958: pp. 375-376).

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that Karens and Burmans can ever evolve a common nationality” (quoted in Gravers 1996: p.238). Christian Karen became leaders of the Karen nationalist movement.

Like the YMBA, the Karen nationalist movement became politicised by the British Home Rule decision in 1917, which the KNA also opposed, although for reasons different from the YMBA. During the 1920s and 1930s, Karen and Burman nationalists frequently split in their view about political reforms. The KNA supported British rule and British-initiated reforms, such as the separation between Burma and India in 1935-1937, while Burman nationalists frequently opposed them. The KNA demanded special representation rights for the Karen in the legislative assembly, which were granted in 1922, while the GCBA and other Burman groups opposed such measures. In 1928, the demand for a separate state for the Karen was raised for the first time.

Buddhism proved insufficient to forge a common basis for nationalists of Burman, Arakanese and Mon descent. Towards the end of the 1930s, Mon and Arakanese national organisations emerged, such as the Ramonnya Mon Association in 1937 and the Arakan National Congress (ANC) in 1938. They were concerned about protecting Arakanese and Mon language, culture and tradition (M. Smith 1991: p. 53). The lack of a common sense of history with the Burmans was one factor in this development. Mon and Arakanese used the existence of precolonial Mon and Arakanese kingdoms to press their demands. But modern style political organisations only emerged among Burma’s ethnic minorities after 1945 (M. Smith 1991: pp.52-53). Until the end of World War II, the KNA remained the “only well-organised indigenous minority party in Ministerial Burma (Burma Proper)” (M. Smith 1991: p. 50). In the Frontier Areas, no major organised national movement appeared before the war. In the Chin Hills and in the Kachin Hills, the first modern organisations were religious. The Chin Baptist Association was established in 1907, while the Kachin Baptist Convention was created in 1910 as an umbrella group of the various Kachin Baptist Churches. The purpose was to protect and promote religion, and engage in missionary activities among other ethnic groups in the Hill Areas. The Chin National Unity Organisation (CNUO) was formed in 1933. It demanded political reforms for the Chins similar to those in Burma Proper, but it had little influence among the

Chins (M. Smith 1991: p.53). Constitutional reforms in 1937 affected the Chin Hills by creating an international boundary in the area, but it did not spark strong reactions in the Chin community.

World War II militarised the Burman national movement and polarised ethnic relations. In 1941, students from the Dobama Asiayone set up the Burma Independence Army (BIA, renamed the Burma National Army, BNA, in 1943) with Japanese assistance. The core of the BIA was a group of thirty Thakins, led by Aung San and including Ne Win. The BIA entered Burma with the Japanese in 1941-1942, but did not engage in active warfare. Instead, it took over local government and administration under the Japanese occupation of the country. The war adversely affected relations among ethnic groups, especially between Burmans and Karen as well as between Burmans and Indians/Muslims (Cady 1958: p. 443). While many Karen fought alongside the Allies in the colonial army, the BIA and the war administration under the Japanese occupation forces were dominated by Burmans. Communal clashes erupted between the Burman-dominated BIA and Karen in the eastern hills and in the Irrawaddy Delta (M. Smith 1991: p.62) as well as between Buddhist Arakanese and Muslims Rohingya in Arakan (Fleischmann 1981: pp.62-65). More than 400,000 Indians left Burma during the war (Cady 1958: p.439). In Shan State, the *saohpas* swore allegiance directly to the Japanese occupants rather than to the BIA (M. Smith 1991: p.64).

#### 4.4 Summing up

In Burma, as in other postcolonial states in Asia and Africa, the nature of post-independence politics cannot be understood without taking into account the changes undergone by society in these countries as a result of colonial rule. Colonialism changed the nature of the state, the relationship between state and society and the relation between ethnic groups. The introduction of a modern state and a modern economy during the colonial era increased interaction between ethnic groups as the control of the state extended across its realm for the first time. The colonial state brought a large number of ethnic groups within its boundaries, but its borders also cut

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across territories inhabited by ethnic groups and separated them by international boundaries. Burma belongs to that group of countries where de Nevers and Linz and Stepan predict that democratisation will pose great difficulties due to the presence of many ethnic groups and of irredenta groups.

The development of the nationalist movement in Burma explains why Burmese nationalism is founded on two traditions. On the one hand, there is a historically and religiously oriented nationalism with close ties to Buddhism. On the other hand, there is a modernist and secularly oriented nationalism. Both traditions have fed into modern Burmese national identity. But the role of religion and of Burman culture as the basis for Burmese identity ensured that the population did not share a common national identity as the transition to democracy began after World War II. Instead, the Burman-Buddhist nationalist movement in Burma Proper became the dominant component in the anticolonial movement and later in the post-independence government. The experience of World War II polarised the relationship between Burmans and other ethnic groups, in particular groups associated with the colonial regime. As such, World War II became a watershed in ethnic relations in Burma. Finally, World War II brought a new political awakening among ethnic groups in the Frontier Areas, such as the Kachin. While only the Karen had developed a significant national movement before World War II, several ethnically based organisations were established after 1945. This situation further complicated the transition to democracy after 1945.

## 5. Chapter five: The transition to democracy

### 5.1 Introduction

In chapter one, I argued that the introduction of democracy in Burma occurred in two phases separated by World War II. The first phase of the introduction of democracy raised a number of issues that continued to be relevant in 1945. In this chapter, I will briefly trace the origins of democracy in Burma since the 1920s. I will record some of the main legacies of the pre-war era, namely a general emphasis on democratisation as a process that evolves through institution-building, a tradition of parliamentary rule and communal representation for ethnic groups. I will also provide an answer to the first question asked in chapter one – what characterised the democratic regime that was established in Burma in 1948 – and I will analyse the democratic political order that emerged during the transition in 1945-1948.

### 5.2 The introduction of democracy, 1922-1940

#### *5.2.1 Preparing for self-government*

After the British seized Mandalay and sent Burma's last king into exile to India in 1885, a political and administrative system was established in Burma Proper similar to the colonial government in British India. Burma became a province ruled from India, under a local British governor-general (renamed governor in 1923) assisted by a council and British officials. The powers of the governor's council were limited. The council represented primarily the interests of the foreign business community in Burma (Moscotti 1974: p.9). It gradually increased in size, but its members remained appointed until 1922. The turning point for the introduction of elected representatives and institutions of greater self-government came in 1920, after Great Britain decided to prepare India for Home Rule and to extend these reforms to Burma. A new legislative assembly with increased powers replaced the governor's council. It was to be composed equally of elected representatives and appointed administrators

(dyarchy). In addition, communal seats were reserved for Indians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans and Karen. The concept that the building of political institutions is the key to political progress in Burma dates from this period (Moscotti 1974: p. 69). But the new dyarchy failed to pacify the emerging nationalist movement, who demanded more radical reforms and greater Burmese participation in the government of the country. The concept of representation rights for ethnic groups also remained controversial.

Constitutional reforms in 1935-1937 paved the way for a second round of political reforms. In 1937, Burma was separated from India and became a colony in its own right. The dyarchy system was eliminated, but the communal seats were maintained. A “parliamentary” system of government was formed whereby the Burma government was made dependent on the legislative assembly (Taylor 1987: p. 123). The governor was given wider powers, but he was expected to delegate these to his Council of Ministers, which was composed of members who had the support of the majority of the representatives in the elected legislature. The governor retained control over defence, external affairs, monetary policy and Anglican ecclesiastical affairs (Moscotti 1974: chap. 4). Except for the period of World War II, Burma has thus been governed under a parliamentary form of rule.

Until the end of World War II, political reforms were confined to Burma Proper – mostly to urban areas, while the Frontier Areas remained under the authority of the governor (Taylor 1996: pp. 168-171). In 1922 a federation was carved from the principalities in Shan States to facilitate the maintenance of the political and administrative distinction between Burma Proper and Shan States and avoid that the political reforms in Burma Proper be extended to the Frontier Areas (Taylor 1987: p. 96).

### *5.2.2 Introducing elections*

Burma first experienced local elections for urban councils in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but franchise was then limited to the country’s European residents. The first major election – with a franchise that gave one in six Burmese the right to participate in the election - took place in 1922 (Moscotti 1974: p.138). Throughout the 1920s, the question of whether to join or boycott elections organised by the colonial rulers was one of the main controversies within the nationalist movement. Less than seven percent of the

electorate joined the first election in 1922, but participation increased gradually during the 1920s (Taylor 1987: p.165).

The 1930s were a period of consolidation of the electoral process. According to Taylor (1987: p. 167), the election in 1932 became a turning point because it “posed a substantive policy question of the kind expected in democratic politics”. Plans were then underway to separate Burma from India, and the dominant issue during the electoral campaign was whether Burma ought to be separated from India (Taylor 1996: pp. 167-168; Moscotti 1974: p. 89). Constitutional reforms in 1935-1937 also paved the way for more substantial Burmese participation in the political process, both as voters, as representatives in the elected legislature and as government ministers. However, power remained in British hands. The last regular election under British rule occurred in 1936. The 1941 election was postponed as a result of the war; the 1947 election was a step in the transition to independence.

### *5.2.3 The emergence of political parties*

The introduction of elections in Burma Proper and the Home Rule controversy during the 1920s stimulated the development of political parties. Many Burmese first became active in politics through the YMBA and the GCBA. The first political parties were mainly urban with a small and elite-based leadership, but during the 1920s and 1930s, popular support increased. By 1935, many political parties had acquired a mass base and a unified leadership. The ideological basis of the parties also changed. Many parties began with the aim of securing as much self-government as possible for Burma and gradually developed a platform for broader economic and political reforms. During the 1930s, several parties became openly anticolonial and anti-imperialist (Taylor 1987: pp. 174-188).

### *5.2.4 Interruption: World War II*

Cady (1958: p. 427) argues that the Japanese conquest and occupation from 1941 to 1945 had an impact on Burma comparable to the colonial take-over in 1885. The political system of the pre-war era collapsed and authoritarian rule was imposed. In

1943, Burma was declared independent within the Japanese sphere of interest (Taylor 1987: p. 217). The British defeat ended Burma's economic dependence on Great Britain and India. The Indian Chettyars were eliminated as a landholding class and a mass exodus of Indians from Burma followed. In 1945, Great Britain sought to restore the political and economic structure of the pre-war era, but was unable to recover its hold over the Burmese economy (Cady 1958: p. 428). The Thakin student movement became the leading force in the anticolonial movement and new political organisations were formed, while pre-war political leaders and political parties were marginalised. Although the Thakins initially allied themselves with Japan and supported the Japanese occupation of Burma, opposition within Burma to the Japanese occupation increased steadily. In 1944, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) was established as an underground force to prepare for the resistance against Japan. Leading figures in the AFPFL movement were Thakins who were then serving in the Japanese war cabinet, including Aung San. The AFPFL resumed contact with the Karen resistance and with allied forces in India in 1944-1945. The league led a large-scale uprising against the occupation in March 1945, and in May 1945, allied forces re-entered Rangoon.

## 5.3 The transition to independence, 1945-1948

### 5.3.1 *Political actors*

#### The AFPFL

After the war, the AFPFL acquired a position of virtual monopoly in Burmese politics. This role was largely the result of the dominant role played by the Thakins during the war, first as allies of Japan, and then as leaders of the resistance against the Japanese occupation. The AFPFL also developed into a multiethnic organisation. After March 1945, the AFPFL expanded to include "representatives from virtually every indigenous political group in Burma, including the minority people" (Cady 1958: p. 519). The AFPFL included all major political forces in the country; the Socialist and Communist parties, the BNA (renamed the Patriotic Burmese Forces, PBF), the All Burma Youth League (an umbrella group of Indian, Karen, Mon, Shan and Burman

youth), the Karen Central Organisation and the Maha Sangha (organised the Buddhist monkhood). The league also included representatives from pre-war political parties (Tinker 1957: PP.65-67). The AFPFL's mass following came from its control of farmers' and workers' organisations under Communist and Socialist sponsorship. An organisation loyal to Aung San – the People's Volunteer Organisation (PVO) – was set up with war veterans and affiliated with the AFPFL (Cady 1958: pp. 478-484; pp. 519-520; Taylor 1987: p. 235; Tinker 1957: p. 17). Cady (1958: p.428) argues that the AFPFL “alone acquired the essential internal cohesion, the mass following, and the capabilities of physical resistance needed to champion the nationalist cause”.

The leadership of the AFPFL, on the other hand, was centralised under “a closely knit cadre of Thakins, long united by personal acquaintance” (Cady 1958: p. 519-520) and by common experiences acquired during the war. The main leaders were Aung San and U Nu as well as Than Tun (leader of the Communist Party, and Aung San's brother-in-law) and Mya (leader of the Socialist Party and of the farmers' union). Aung San was in a unique position. According to Silverstein (1993b: p. 1), “for two short years, 1945-1947, he completely dominated politics in Burma”. The assassination of Aung San and several Cabinet ministers in the interim government in July 1947 was therefore a serious blow to the anticolonial movement.

Aung San played a key role in holding the AFPFL together when rifts began to develop between Communist party members and other members of the league after 1945 (Taylor 1987: p. 235). The prospects of decolonisation had increased tensions within the AFPFL between the CPB and the main body of the league as the two sides disagreed on the strategy to pursue to secure independence. While the main AFPFL favoured negotiations and participation in elections, the CPB relied on strategies such as a “no rents no taxes”-campaign and strikes and called for a boycott of the 1947 election. In February 1946, these disagreements led to the expulsion from the AFPFL of one of the Communist leaders, Thakin Soe. Thakin Soe established a “Red Flag” Communist Party<sup>10</sup>, which went underground to wage guerrilla warfare. It was later

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<sup>10</sup> The flags were used to distinguish between various Communist factions. The Communist Party of Burma was known as the “White Flag” Communist Party. For further information on the Communist Party, see Lintner 1990.

outlawed. Although the “Red Flag” Communist faction remained a relatively small group, it continued to be active when the civil war erupted after 1948. In May 1946, the remaining “White Flag” faction of the Communist Party (CPB) led by Than Tun was also expelled from the AFPFL. In addition, activities defined as Communist were forbidden in the rural branches of the league (Cady 1958: pp. 527-552; U Aung San’s Explanation 1946). Instead, the Socialist party became the leading ideological force in the AFPFL (Silverstein 1964: p.122).

The British government was initially reluctant to negotiate with the AFPFL over independence for Burma. There were several reasons for this reluctance. Partly, it was due to the role played by many AFPFL leaders, including Aung San, as allies of Japan during the war. In addition, there were disagreements within the British government over the future of the Burmese exile government, which had been based in Simla, India, during the war years. Finally, the British government initially sought to promote the economic reconstruction of Burma over political reforms. These plans were outlined in a White Paper in 1945 (Cady 1958: pp.505-506). Due to the reluctance of the government to deal with the AFPFL, the league was first recognised as a military organisation by Lord Mountbatten, the supreme allied commander for Southeast Asia. In September 1945, Lord Mountbatten and Aung San entered an agreement at Kandy, Ceylon, for the amalgamation of the colonial army and the Patriotic Burmese Forces (PBF). It was decided that the new Burma army should be composed equally of forces from the former colonial army and the PBF. The new army would also retain the British system of ethnically segregated units. War veterans who were not included in the new army were recruited into the PVO. The agreement created a basis for a clear distinction between military and political affairs. After the signature of the Kandy agreement, Aung San resigned from his position as leader of the PBF in order to become leader of the AFPFL (Defence agreement 1947; Exchange of Letters 1945; Kandy Agreement 1945; Letter from Aung San 1945; Memorandum 1945)

The British governor returned to Burma in October 1945. Relations with the AFPFL became strained when the governor first refused to accept a majority of AFPFL representatives in the Council of Ministers. After a change of governor in August 1946, the transition to independence proceeded quickly (Cady 1958: pp. 530-538).

## Ethnically based political organisations

The effect of the war on ethnic relations was not after 1945. Three sets of consequences can be identified. Firstly, there was a mushrooming of ethnically based political organisations among ethnic groups that had not been politically organised before the war in 1945-1947. Secondly, co-ordination between organisations representing the same ethnic groups improved. Finally, tensions between several ethnic groups escalated, and became manifest in the emergence of armed wings for several ethnically based organisations during 1947-1948.

Examples of new ethnically based organisations created after 1945 can be found in Arakan and Mon areas. The Mon Freedom League (MFL, later known as Mon United Front) was established under the leadership of the nationalist leader Nai Shwe Kyin in 1947. The organisation also established an armed wing, the Mon National Defence Organisation (MNDO) the same year. Together with the United Mon Association, the MFL reached an agreement for a common set of demands for the establishment of Mon State (M. Smith 1991: p.86). In Arakan, the Arakan People's Liberation Party (APLP) led by the former monk U Seinda, split off from the pre-war Arakan National Congress (ANC) in 1945. The main ANC was dissolved into the AFPFL (M. Smith 1991: pp.80-81). Nationalist organisations also appeared among Rohingya in Arakan. In December 1947, a Mujahid Party was set up by Rohingya nationalists in Arakan region in order to fight for an Islamic state and push for parts of Arakan to be included in the newly created East Pakistan (M. Smith 1991: p.87).

Among the Karen, who had organised nationalist organisations since the 1880s, various smaller organisations came together in a large front. In 1947, the various Karen organisations – the Karen National Association (KNA), the Buddhist Karen National Association (BKNA), the Karen Central Organisation (KCO) and the Karen Youth Organisation (KYO) – came together to set up the Karen National Union. Under the leadership of the Karen nationalist leader Saw Ba U Gyi, the KNU pressed the demand for the establishment of a separate Karen state. However, the conflict between Burmans and Karen that had developed during the war quickly escalated as the KNU's demand went unheard. In July 1947, the KNU established an armed wing,

the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) to protect Karen communities in the ethnically mixed Irrawaddy Delta. The KNDO also began to take over local administration in villages inhabited by Karen.

#### Relations between the AFPFL and ethnically based political organisations

Two viewpoints have dominated the AFPFL's position towards ethnic demands (Silverstein 1980: chap. 6). Aung San was the leading representative of the first viewpoint. He sought to promote national unity through strategies to accept and manage ethnic differences. Ahead of the Constituent Assembly in 1947, Aung San proposed the creation of a union that would secure cultural, religious and political rights for ethnic minorities. This proposal reflected Aung San's conception of the nation as a community of will that arises not from sharing a common religion or language, but from common experiences (Aung San 1946; *The Fourteen Points*, 1947). It was embodied in his slogan of "unity in diversity". Aung San's views strongly influenced the constitution that was adopted in 1947. U Nu, who succeeded Aung San at the helm of the AFPFL, opted for measures to ignore or eliminate ethnic differences. For U Nu (1955: pp.113-120), the ideal model for a nation was the United Kingdom where English, Scots and Welsh coexisted as cultural communities within an overarching British national identity. U Nu (1951: p.65-71; Silverstein 1980: p.149) argued that the development of national unity was necessary to prevent the disintegration of the union and further democracy. Although U Nu did accept a degree of cultural autonomy for ethnic minorities, he and other leaders in the AFPFL sought to establish that in most circumstances and for most purposes, the people in Burma shared the same culture (Tinker 1957: p.165). For U Nu, cultural rights could be granted as a means to encourage national solidarity and strengthen the "Union spirit", but they were not a goal. Instead, Silverstein (1980: p.151) argues that U Nu favoured policies of assimilation. U Nu's thinking laid the basis for the policies that were followed after 1948.

Relations between the AFPFL and ethnically based organisations also followed two patterns after 1945. On the one hand, relations improved after AFPFL included a number of non-Burman organisations. The AFPFL first sought to forge an understanding with young non-Burman nationalists over the question of

independence, but gradually, it also began to seek out traditional leaders among ethnic groups, particularly in the hill areas (Taylor 1983: pp.21-22). In 1946, a tour of the hill areas by AFPFL leaders led to the formation of the Supreme Council of the United Hills Peoples (SCUHP) under the leadership of the Shan *saohpa* of Yawnghwe, Sao Shwe Thaik (M. Smith 1991: p.74). But in Lower Burma, relations deteriorated with several Karen, Arakanese and Mon organisations.

### 5.3.2 *The transition to democracy, 1945-1948*

The transition to independence in Burma was the result of negotiations that led to the signature of an agreement between Aung San and the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee in January 1947. The Aung San-Attlee agreement marked a turning point in the democratisation process. Before January 1947, key decisions regarding Burmese politics were taken in Great Britain. After the signature of the agreement, attention shifted to the Burmese domestic arena (Taylor 1987: p.218). The main political issues became the country's future political system and the future of ethnic relations.

The Aung San-Attlee agreement outlined the procedure for the transfer of power and, by the same token, the introduction of democracy. An interim administration that included two representatives from the Frontier Areas was set down in February; an election was conducted in June for the Constituent Assembly; and a new constitution was drafted between June and September. The specific institutional arrangements for democracy in Burma, however, were the result of a domestic process. Aung San played a key role in ensuring that the AFPFL, rather than the British, were able to determine the speed and modalities of the transition (Tinker 1957: p.28).

During the first phase of the transition, the AFPFL, and particularly Aung San, became the dominant political force in Burma at the expense of the CPB and ethnically based organisations. The British made few attempts to meet ethnic demands and recognise non-Burman leaders until 1947. During negotiations for the Aung San-Attlee agreement, British authorities asked for guarantees that the interests of the minority people would be respected, but both sides agreed that Burma Proper and the Frontier Areas should be joined in a common state.

Ethnic relations were primarily seen as a domestic Burmese issue. The Burmese delegation that negotiated the Aung San-Attlee agreement included several members of the Governor's Executive Council, but not its Karen members. Demands by Karen, Arakanese and Mon organisations for separate states went unanswered, and the British government did not officially receive a Karen Goodwill Mission that sought to present the "Case for the Karens" in London in 1946 (Gravers 1996). In 1946, a telegram by Kachin and Shan leaders stating that the AFPFL delegation negotiating the Aung San-Attlee agreement did not represent the Shan and the Kachin went unheeded. British neglect of these initiatives went counter to the expectations among many Karen and other ethnic minority nationalists that they would be rewarded for their support for the Allies during the war (Gravers 1999: pp.49-50).

The question of ethnic relations was addressed after the signature of the Aung San-Attlee agreement. In February 1947, an agreement was signed between Aung San and leaders of the Shan, Kachin and Chin regarding the future relationship between Burma Proper and the Frontier Areas. This agreement, signed at Panglong in Shan States, guaranteed full democratic rights for the citizens of the Frontier Areas as well as full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas. In addition, a Frontier Area Commission of Enquiry (FACE 1947) was set down in March to receive testimonies from representatives of the ethnic groups in the Frontier Areas regarding a future union with Burma.

One consequence of the transition was that ethnic minorities were poorly represented in the preparations for independence, which were dominated by the AFPFL. This is apparent in the 1947 election result. The 255 seats in the Constituent Assembly were divided between 210 from Burma proper (of which 24 were reserved for Karen representatives and four for Anglo-Burmans) and 45 seats from the Frontier Areas and Karenni State. The AFPFL won all but 10 of the non-communal seats. Independent candidates, the majority of who had close links to the CPB, won the remaining non-communal seats. The majority of the Karen seats were taken by KYO, which was affiliated to the AFPFL. Leading opposition parties to the AFPFL - the CPB and the KNU - boycotted the election (Cady 1958: p.55; Silverstein 1964: p.86; Silverstein 1980: p.172; Taylor 1996: p.171; Tinker 1957: p.26). In addition, the debate in the Constituent

Assembly was based on a draft constitution developed by the AFPFL at its convention in May 1947.

Aung San was crucial to the agreements that were reached between the AFPFL and non-Burman leaders in 1947. The understanding that developed between the AFPFL and non-Burman leaders was dealt a serious blow when Aung San was killed as no other AFPFL leader commanded the same level of confidence among non-Burman representatives. Aung San's death also hastened the preparations for independence and the proceedings in the Constituent Assembly. Ethnic concerns were postponed. The AFPFL sought to reach the autumn 1947 parliamentary session in London and fulfil Aung San's vision of independence within 1948. As a result, a number of critical issues – and most significantly, a number of issues concerning ethnic relations - had not been solved by the time independence was declared.

## 5.4 The nature of democracy in Burma

### *5.4.1 The concept of democracy in Burmese elite political thinking*

Aung San (1946) argued that a democratic state depends on popular consent and identifies itself with the interests of the people. For Aung San, there was a close link between politics and economics; genuine democracy could not develop under capitalism. U Nu (1955: pp. 45-62) argued that in a democracy, representatives were elected by the people to a non-oppressive government. In democracies, problems were solved through dialogue. For U Nu, the use of violence by either the government or the opposition was incompatible with democracy. For U Nu as well as for the AFPFL government (Nu 1951:pp. 12-27; Burma and the Insurrections 1949: pp.32-33), the communist and ethnic insurgents in the country were therefore primarily enemies of the union.

In 1947, Aung San had argued that only democracy could secure the nation's progress, but that true democracy could not exist only in the political arena. He had proposed a political system with constitutional rule and elected representatives accountable to the people combined with a mixed economy. Aung San (1946) called this concept New Democracy. After 1948, the AFPFL continued to emphasise the

link between economics and politics as the league developed a political platform based on Aung San's thinking (Tinker 1963: p.27). The long-term goal of the AFPFL was a socialist welfare state, to be known as Pyidawtha, the "happy land", where people no longer suffered from hunger and diseases. The development towards a socialist state was to take place gradually rather than through a revolution (Aung San 1946). It was to be achieved in a democratic political system and with an economy that mixed private ownership by Burmese citizens and public ownership (Nu 1951: pp.82-94; Tinker 1957: p.112).

A different concept of democracy prevailed among leading non-Burman politicians. Many non-Burman nationalists saw politics, economics and culture as closely connected, albeit in a manner different from the AFPFL. For them, democracy was closely associated with the idea of autonomy. The Panglong agreement had linked the introduction of democracy to Burma with political autonomy in the hill areas and economic equality between Burmans and non-Burmans. For a number of non-Burman nationalists, democracy also entailed respect for minority cultures. For instance, the Karen nationalist leader San Po Chit concluded in 1947 that democracy would be impossible to achieve in Burma as long as several nations co-existed under Burman domination. The KNU's demand for a separate Karen State sprang out of concern for the political and economic future of the Karen, but also from the view that autonomy was necessary for the Karen to be able to develop their culture (M. Smith 1991: p.114). For the Mon Freedom League (MFL) as well, cultural rights were considered part of democracy. Nai Ba Lwin (1951), the president of the MFL, pointed to Switzerland in 1951 as a "truly democratic" country because the four ethnic groups were granted both autonomy and language rights.

#### *5.4.2 Democratic institutions in Burma*

##### The Panglong Agreement and the Frontier Area Commission of Enquiry

In today's Burma, the Panglong agreement and the "Spirit of Panglong" are seen as models for ethnic relations. A proper understanding of the agreement, however, requires that it be understood within the context of the time, which was that of

decolonisation and the need to address issue linked to the transition from British rule. In fact, the Panglong agreement dealt with the relationship between Burma Proper on the one hand and Shan, Chin and Kachin in the Frontier Areas on the other hand. It provided for a representative of the Frontier Areas to be included in the Burmese interim government. In addition it secured political autonomy in internal administration within a democratic framework for the peoples in the hill areas in independent Burma. Finally, the agreement included a promise of financial support for the hills and a promise of economic equality between Burmans and non-Burmans. During the negotiations, Aung San had told the participants that “if Burma receives one kyat, you (i.e. the ethnic minorities, my addition) will also get one kyat” (M. Smith 1991: p.78). Cultural issues were not addressed.

The Panglong agreement did not provide general principles for relations between ethnic groups in an independent Burma and there were several lacunas to the agreement. Firstly, many ethnic groups were neither present for the discussion at Panglong, nor were they signatories to the agreement. Significantly, this was the case of the Mon and Arakanese. The Karen were only present as observers. In April 1947, a Frontier Area Commission of Enquiry warned that the adherence to the Panglong agreement of many ethnic groups could not be taken for granted (FACE 1947). In addition, some provisions in the agreement were vague. For instance, the Panglong agreement did not specify how to solve disputes that may arise over interpretations of the agreement or how to define the relationship between autonomy in the hills and democracy.

The report of the Frontier Area Commission of Enquiry (FACE) revealed that there were significant disparities in the opinions of Burma’s ethnic groups regarding a future union with Burma. For instance, the Karenni representatives who testified to the commission agreed to join the Constituent Assembly, but refused to commit the Karenni states to join the union, while representatives from two areas in Shan State asked to be incorporated into Burma Proper. One Wa representative argued that his people were not competent enough to form an independent opinion (Cady 1958: pp. 547-551; FACE 1947; M. Smith 1991: pp.84-86). As for the Karen, Martin Smith (1991: p. 85) concludes that “even today a reading of the Karen testimony at the FACE gives a

clear warning of the growing racial antipathy and inter-communal violence about to break out”.

The findings of the FACE were significant in spite of weaknesses in the manner in which the FACE’s work was carried out. The mandate of the FACE was to find ways of associating the Frontier Areas with Burma Proper. It therefore did not address communal tensions in Burma Proper, particularly how to respond to Karen demands. In addition, the work of the commission was carried out after the Aung San-Attlee agreement and the Panglong agreement had already been signed. There were therefore *de facto* limits on which scenarios could be discussed by the commission, as basic principles such as the amalgamation of the two areas and internal autonomy had already been agreed upon. For instance, the option of independence for non-Burman states had been ruled out in the Aung San-Attlee agreement. Finally, it turned out that many of the testimonies heard by the FACE were not representative for the ethnic groups they were said to represent (M. Smith 1991: p.84).

## The 1947 Constitution

### *Citizenship*

The new union was carved from Burma proper, the Frontier Areas and Karenni State. Citizenship in the union was granted to descendants of a parent or grandparent from an indigenous ethnic group in Burma. In addition, a person born in a British dominion and resident in Burma was eligible for citizenship. Citizenship was thus granted both on the basis of *ius sanguini* and *ius soli*. The Union Citizenship Act from 1948 (amended in 1954) dealt with questions of naturalisation and dual citizenship. Naturalisation was made possible for applicants residing in Burma and who spoke an indigenous language. Dual citizenship was rejected.

It is sometimes argued that the principle of *ius sanguini* reflects a conception of the nation as a closed ethnic community, while the principle of *ius soli* is thought to reveal an open and culture-based view of the nation (the difference between the ethnic and the civic model of the nation). The case of Burma shows that there is no such simple parallel. There were several reasons why both principles were adopted.

According to Maung Maung (1961: p.92), the decision to apply both principles was a liberalisation of the proposal of the AFPFL in May 1947. The AFPFL first suggested that citizenship should be granted only to those born in the Union, while others would have to apply for naturalisation. The decision to include *ius sanguini* was the outcome of specific circumstances in Burma in 1947 rather than the victory of a narrow ethnic conception of the Burmese nation. Burmese nationalists sought to define citizenship in a manner that would distinguish Burmese citizens from other British subjects. Individuals temporarily resident in Burma as a result of colonial rule were excluded while individuals with a claim to be Burmese and not resident in the union were included. The rules of citizenship did not distinguish between indigenous ethnic groups, but between indigenous and migrant groups. The ban on dual citizenship adversely affected the mainly immigrant Chinese community because of the use by the People's Republic of China of *ius sanguini* to define a Chinese citizen (Maung Maung 1961: p.94) and the Anglo-Burmans, who had to give up their British citizenship (Tinker 1957: p.187)

#### *The executive-legislative relationship and the union legislature*

The constitution created a system of parliamentary rule with executive power vested in a president elected by the parliament. He could not simultaneously be a Member of Parliament. The president signed and promulgated laws passed by the parliament and granted pardons. The main executive power was the government appointed by the president and composed of Members of Parliament.

The parliament was divided into two chambers, with a more powerful lower chamber. The government was only answerable to the lower chamber. In addition, legislation followed a navette system. Except for money bills, all laws were regarded as passed once they had been passed by one chamber and approved by the second. Only the lower chamber could initiate money bills, while the upper chamber was entitled to make recommendations, which the lower chamber was not obliged to follow. The dissolution of the lower chamber automatically brought the dissolution of the upper chamber.

The 125-member upper Chamber of Nationalities represented the various political subdivisions in Burma. Some representatives in this chamber were appointed, while others were elected. The lower chamber was the 250-seat Chamber of Deputies.

In both chambers, elections proceeded under a system of simple plurality votes in single member districts, but deputies to the lower chamber did not necessarily come from the same constituencies as the representatives in the upper chamber. We do not possess sufficient information about the delimitation of constituencies and the number of representatives per constituency. However, the constitution provided for a ratio of one representative per 30,000- 100,000 inhabitants in the chamber of deputies. A breakdown by divisions and states (table 5.1) suggests that the share of representatives from Burma Proper (i.e. the divisions) in the lower chamber was fairly similar to this area's share of the total population. On the other hand, the states were represented by a share of the deputies in the Chamber of Nationalities that was larger than their share of the total population. Ethnic minority areas were thus "over-represented" in the less powerful upper chamber, but not in the lower chamber.

#### *Union-state relations*

There were five main political subdivisions: Burma proper, Shan State, Kachin State, Karenni State and Chin Special Region. In addition, provisions were made for the future creation of Karen State. The Shan and Karenni States were granted the right to secession after ten years. The subdivisions were represented in the Chamber of Nationalities, where 62 seats represented Burma proper and 48 seats represented the former Frontier Areas and Karenni State. In the Chamber of Deputies, the seats were divided between 203 deputies from Burma proper and 42 from the former Frontier Areas and Karenni State. In addition, the Karen were granted 24 seats (reduced to 15 by a constitutional amendment in 1951 when Karen State was established) in the upper chamber and seven seats in the lower chamber. (Table 5.1). The largest ethnic minority areas – the hills, Karenni State and Karen areas – controlled a majority of the seats in the upper chamber. In the more influential lower chamber, however, the majority of the deputies came from Burma proper.

A system of informal power sharing where the main political and military positions were not held simultaneously by individuals from the same ethnic group was also established. The cabinet also included representatives from various ethnic groups<sup>11</sup>. In the armed forces, a Karen was appointed commander of the army (Lt. Gen. Smith Dun) and of the air force (Saw Shi Sho) in 1948, but these commanders were removed when the Karen rebellion broke out in 1949 and Karen officers were purged from the military.

The state legislatures consisted of a council of state composed of the Members of Parliament from each state from both chambers, except in the Chin special division where there was a Council for Chin Affairs. State executive power was vested in a head of state with a council of ministers selected by and among the members of the council of state to advise him. The head of state was selected by the union's Prime Minister and appointed by the union president. He was also a minister in the union government, and thus mainly accountable to the Prime Minister and the lower Chamber of Deputies. There were no particular provisions for a government for Burma proper. The union government and the union parliament served both as union bodies and local bodies in Burma proper. The result was that elected representatives from the states were involved in decisions regarding Burma proper (Silverstein 1980: p.203).

There were several rules as to who could stand as a candidate for the states in the Chamber of Nationalities and, thus, exercise state legislative and executive authority. In Shan State, the 25 representatives were elected by and among the 33 *saohpas*. No *saohpa* could be a deputy in the lower chamber. However, the *saohpas* retained influence over the electoral process in the lower chamber during the 1950s (Taylor 1987: p.269). The three seats for Karenni State were reserved for the Karenni *saohpyas*. The 12 seats from Kachin State were divided equally between representatives for the Kachin and representatives for the non-Kachin in the state, due to the existence of Burman enclaves near Myitkyina and Bhamo, which had been part of Burma proper under British rule. In Kachin State, the head of state could not reach

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<sup>11</sup> Presidents until 1962 were Sao Shwe Thaik (1948-1952, Shan), U Ba U (1952-1957, Burman) and Mahn Win Maung (1959-1962, Karen). The Prime Ministers were all Burmans (U Nu, 1848-1956; 1957-1958; 1960-1962; Ba Swe, 1956-1957, Ne Win, 1958-1960).

decisions in areas where the majority of the population was non-Kachin without consulting their representatives in parliament.

The legislative domain of the councils of State and the union parliament was outlined in the constitution. State legislation had to conform to union legislation and be approved by the president. Sources of revenue for the states and the union were divided in a union revenue list and a state revenue list. Sources of revenue that were not mentioned in the constitution automatically belonged to the union.

The constitution provided for a mixed economy and guarantees of basic social and economic rights for workers and farmers. Land and natural resources – including minerals and timber in the states – were nationalised and turned into union property. The union government had to consult with the head of the state for decisions regarding the exploration of natural resources – forests, mines and oil fields – in a state, but the states did not own their own natural resources. Nor did they have a veto right over decisions regarding natural resources by the union government.

### *Minority rights*

Burma's ethnic diversity was apparent in the choice of national symbols. The national flag in red, blue and white depicted a large white star surrounded by five smaller stars. The smaller stars represented each of Burma's main ethnic groups while the largest star symbolised the union (Maung Maung 1961: p.203).

The main strategy for dealing with ethnic demands was the creation of constituent states. Special representation rights that did not hinge on the existence of a state were granted to the Karen until Karen State was established in 1951. There were no provisions to protect economic rights for ethnic minorities. Minority cultures were protected to the extent that basic civil and political rights such as freedom of speech, assembly and organisation were granted to all citizens, but not in terms of collective rights. The discrimination of religious, racial or linguistic minorities in admission to state educational institutions was made illegal, and there was a guarantee against the imposition of compulsory religious instruction on religious minorities.

Several provisions regarding the national culture drew mostly on Burman culture. Burmese became the official language, while none of the other languages spoken in Burma had an official status. The use of English was permitted, but as Silverstein (1980: p.220) points out, this was not regarded a viable alternative for many non-Burman nationalists because English was associated with the colonial regime. The constitution itself was promulgated in Burmese and English, with both versions having equal status. The constitution did not create a state religion – although a proposal to proclaim Buddhism state religion was discussed. The constitution furthermore guaranteed freedom of worship to all citizens, while recognising that Buddhism was the religion professed by most citizens, and that other religions – Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Animism – were also professed in the Union. The use of religion for political purposes was forbidden.

### Analysis

In chapter two, partition was discussed as one possible strategy to address ethnic demands. In Burma, neither immediate partition nor secession was seen as possible solutions to the country's ethnic diversity. Both the Karen and the Mujahid Party failed in their attempts to secure separate statehood. However, a right to secession was granted to Shan and Karenni after a ten-year trial period.

Instead, federal rule was envisaged as the main strategy to deal with ethnic differences, although the term “federal” is not mentioned in the constitution (Silverstein, quoted in M. Smith 1991: p.79). Separate states were constituted in the former Frontier Areas and Karenni State. They were granted significant internal autonomy. However, a number of features associated with a fully federal state were absent. There were no separate election for the state legislatures independently of the election to the union legislature and the distinction between state and union government was blurred.

Minority cultures were protected through basic civil and political rights, but as Kymlicka (1995: pp.4-5) argues, individual rights are a necessary but insufficient condition to protect minority cultures in democracies. Minority cultures were also protected as a result of some collective cultural rights and as a consequence of the political autonomy granted to the constituent states, but overall, there were few

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provisions in the constitution that dealt with Burma's cultural diversity and none that addressed economic rights for minority groups.

Martin Smith (1991: p.79, p.83) describes the constitution as riddled with inconsistencies and "a recipe for disaster" because of the inconsistency with which demands by different ethnic groups were met. He argues that the rights granted to various ethnic groups seemed to reflect more the individual bargaining powers of these groups and the legacy of British rule than genuine national aspirations by the constitution-makers. Martin Smith also casts doubt over whether a nationality policy had been formulated by the AFPFL before 1948. We may argue that the league's policies were reactive when faced with the ethnic demands rather than pro-active.

The federal structure of the union was more nominal than real, according to Silverstein (1964: p.1179), and the difficulties in establishing the true nature of the state soon became apparent. In the mid-fifties, a Burmese Supreme Court Judge, U Chan Htoon argued that "our constitution, though in theory federal is in practice unitary" (Tinker 1956: p.340). A series of trials in the Supreme Court during the 1950s to test the relationship between the union and the states further strengthened the union. The lack of separation between federal government bodies and state government bodies is the chief reason why the structure of the union was not federal. Instead, the state governments depended on federal institutions. The constitution thus did not fill Elazar's description of federalism as "self-rule plus shared rule". In addition, a number of provisions seemed to prioritise the union over the states. For instance, sources of revenues for the states were limited to those outlined in the constitution and state legislation had to conform, not only to the constitution, but also to union legislation.

The power-sharing arrangement that was agreed upon in 1948 has some features in common with consociational democracies. For instance, the constitution of the union government ensured that ethnic groups in the hill areas were represented in the government. The distribution of political and military positions to members of different ethnic groups in 1948 is also an example. However, it was not a consociational arrangement that fulfilled the four criteria described in chapter two. In addition the system broke down rapidly after the outbreak of the civil war.

**Table 5.1: Population by political subdivision, 1966; distribution of seats by political subdivision, 1948-1962**

Political subdivision	Population	Percentage	Seats, Chamber of Deputies	Seats, Chamber of Nationalities
<b>Divisions</b>			203	62
Arakan	1,602,000	7,57		
Irrawaddy	3,499,300	16,53		
Magwe	2,137,000	10,09		
Mandalay	2,543,400	12,01		
Pegu	4,650,300	21,96		
Sagaing	2,346,400	11,08		
Tenasserim	1,543,400	7,29		
<b>States</b>				
Kachin	502,100	2,37	7	12
Karen			7	24 (15)
Kayah	103,300	0,49	2	3
Shan	1,972,900	9,32	25	25
<b>Special division</b>				
Chin Hills	271,200	1,29	6	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,171,500</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>125</b>

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica 1966, Dassé 1976: pp. 135-136.

## 5.5 Summing up

I have dealt with how the transition to democracy and the constitution of a democratic political order created a basis for ethnic relations in Burma. I have shown that some aspects of the Burmese political system were a legacy from the first phase of democratisation before the war. Furthermore, I have shown that ethnically based political organisations did not play a leading role in shaping the first stages of the transition to democracy after 1945 and that ethnic demands were largely postponed until after an agreement on independence had been reached between the British government and the AFPFL, except for the future relationship between Burma Proper and the former Frontier Areas. I pointed out that the AFPFL included several ethnically based organisations after the expansion in 1945, but I also demonstrated that the league remained to a great extent identified with the Burman ethnic majority.

The key features of the democratic order created in the 1947 constitution were parliamentary rule, a bicameral legislature and elections based on majority vote in single-member districts. The constitution paved the way for several strategies to deal with ethnic differences, but the dominating strategy was federalisation. The constitution thus appeared to create a precedent for the management of ethnic demands. The appointment of personnel to man key government and military

positions in 1948 had some features in common with a strategy of consociationalisation, which is also a strategy for institutionalising and managing ethnic demands.

However, such rules of appointment were not part of the constitutional order. It is therefore necessary to examine what happened to this practice after 1948 and the outbreak of the civil war in order to assess its significance. Indeed, the system collapsed. The constitution failed in establishing a consistent set of strategies to address similar demands by different groups. After 1948, diverging viewpoints appeared over the significance of constitutional provisions, particularly in order to address critical issues that had been postponed until after independence, such as demands for separate statehood by Arakanese and Mon and the establishment of Karen State. In the next three chapters, I will explore the consequences of these lacunas for the consolidation of democracy after 1948. I will thereby answer the second and third questions that I asked in chapter one.

## **6. Chapter six: Efforts of democratic consolidation in the political arena**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In chapter five, I found that the constitution established a democratic regime in Burma that institutionalised some ethnic demands and ignored others. After 1948 a broad set of political, economic and cultural activities were initiated to extend the authority of the democratic regime and influence popular attitudes and behaviour towards democracy. The extent to which these activities succeeded were linked to the opportunities and constraints of the constitution, but also to how the democratic government was able to meet popular expectations.

In the present chapter, I will assess the significance of ethnicity for the elections that took place in 1951, 1956 and 1960 and for the formation of political parties and societal organisations. After having demonstrated the relevance of ethnicity for political behaviour in Burma, I will proceed to study the consequences of a border agreement between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Burma that was signed in 1961. I have chosen to analyse the circumstances under which the agreement was signed because it provides a good example of how an issue that was not initially conceived as "ethnic" by the government and that was addressed through regular democratic channels had ethnopolitical implications and changed relations between Burmans and Kachin.

In Burma, one challenge for the consolidation of democracy was the manner in which ethnic demands that had not been addressed during the transition and that had been ignored in the 1947 constitution were met after 1948. I will look into how the movement dealt with the demands for statehood by Arakanese, Mon and Karen and with ambiguities in the relationship between the union and the states. In addition new demands arose after 1948. I will look into how the government dealt with two new issues, namely demands for federal reforms among non-Burman groups in the late fifties and efforts to promote political reforms in Shan State.

## 6.2 Elections and political parties in multiethnic democracies

### 6.2.1 Elections and party system

The organisation of free and fair elections at regular intervals is held out as a basic characteristic of democracy. In Burma elections were conducted regularly after 1951. Increasing electoral turnout during the 1950s is an indication that the legitimacy of democratic rule was increasing in the electorate in this period. While about 20 percent of the electorate participated in the polls in 1951, turnout was twice as high in 1956 and 65 percent higher in 1960 than in 1956 (Taylor 1996: pp.173-174).

In spite of the civil war, the security situation at election time improved during the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, the conditions under which elections took place improved. In 1951 the polls were conducted in three stages. Still, 11 of 250 constituencies for the Chamber of Deputies could not be contested because of the civil war. In 1956 this figure had been reduced to nine constituencies where polls were postponed until 1958 for security reasons. In 1960 polls could not be held in six constituencies, also for security reasons, and in a further five constituencies for other reasons. In addition to the impact for the organisation of elections, improved security combined with a higher electoral turnout can be interpreted as an indication of a more powerful state and of enhanced legitimacy in the population for democratic rule, i.e. of a process of democratic consolidation that was underway. This is consistent with the findings of Silverstein (1964: pp. 128-131), Butwell and Mehrden (1960: p.145) and Dupuy (1961: p.432), who argue that a process of democratic consolidation was taking place after 1948.

According to Silverstein (1964: p.139), Butwell and Mehrden (1960: p.150), the elections were conducted relatively freely and fairly. However, a critical examination of the circumstances under which the elections were organised reveals that institutional guarantees necessary for a working democracy, including Dahl's eight institutional guarantees, were also broken. Scores of political opponents to the AFPFL government were arrested under the 1947 Public Order Preservation, which allowed for the long-term detention of a suspect without going to trial (Callahan 1998b: pp.54-55; Silverstein 1964: p.120). Incidences of politically motivated violence and

intimidation occurred during both elections (Maung Maung, quoted in Taylor 1996: p.174). Scholars have cited the impact of corruption, patronage networks and abuse of power during and between elections (Cady 1958: pp.601-602). Finally, the civil war effectively limited the geographical scope of the authority of the elected government. According to Fairbairn (1957: p.301), there were claims during the 1950s that politically motivated violence for which the AFPFL was responsible was particularly widespread in ethnic minority areas. Taylor (1996: p.175) and Tinker (1957: p.89) argue that force was more important than persuasion in winning elections in the 1950s and 1960.

According to Callahan (1998a: p.25, p.33), abuse of power was criticised by opposition parties, media and even the AFPFL as early as 1948, but the AFPFL government was largely unable to deal with the abuses as long as the league controlled a majority of the seats in parliament. Callahan argues that the emergence of a larger opposition bench in parliament after the election in 1956 was significant in providing the government with the means to address abuses and crack down on criminal activities among supporters of the AFPFL. Callahan's (1998a: p.19) conclusions are based on data from Lower and Upper Burma, not from the state or the Arakan and Chin regions. We can therefore not conclude whether the 1956 election had a similar impact in ethnic minority areas.

### *6.2.2 Political parties in Burma*

Although data is not available to determine the significance of ethnicity for electoral behaviour after 1948 – this would require data on individual voting behaviour or broken down by ethnic group – we can assess the impact of ethnicity on political behaviour by other means. There is a close relationship between electoral system and party system in modern democracies, and we can therefore seek an alternative approach to this issue. Horowitz's analysis of party systems in multiethnic countries can be helpful in this regard. Indeed, Horowitz showed that in democracies where the population is severely divided along ethnic cleavages, people tend to vote for ethnically based parties and an ethnically based party system is likely to emerge.

In Burma, two main types of political parties developed before 1962. Some parties received countrywide support in elections; others had their main support in

one of Burma's regions. Such locally based parties tended to promote local issues and local leaders. They were frequently based on ethnicity, although there were also non-ethnically based regional parties, such as the Justice Party founded by former Supreme Court judge U E Maung. In addition, a number of parties coalesced around individual non-Burman leaders, such as the party of the Arakanese nationalists Paw Tun and Kyaw Win. A number of candidates also got elected as independents – both on an ethnic basis and on other bases.

### Regional and ethnically based parties

Regional parties were found in Burma Proper as well as in the former Frontier Areas and Karenni State. The conservative Burma Nationalist Bloc from Burma Proper represented a non-ethnically based type of regional party, but most regional parties identified themselves with one or several ethnic groups. The main ethnically based parties during the 1950s were Arakanese, Kachin, Chin, Pao and Shan. Between 1951 and 1956, the largest ethnically based party in parliament was the Independent Arakan Parliamentary Group (IAPG). Examples of ethnically based parties in parliament after 1956 included AFPFL affiliates such as the All-Shan States' Organisation, as well as opposition parties such as the Arakan National Unity Organisation (ANUO, formerly IAPG) and the Union National Pa-O Organisation. In 1960, ethnically based parties in parliament also included the Chin National Organisation (CNO), the Kayah National United League and the Kayah Democratic League (Fairbairn 1956: p.214; Butwell and Mehrden 1960: p.151; Taylor 1985: pp.106-154). The majority of the parties that gained seats in 1956 and 1960 were parties that claimed to represent one or several ethnic groups, and that drew their support from that group – in other words, they fulfilled Horowitz' (1985: p.291) two criteria of an ethnically based party.

### Countrywide parties

The AFPFL was the only properly organised nationwide party before 1962. Other parties with nationwide aspirations included the Burma Workers and Peasants' Party (BWPP), which was established to contest the 1951 election. In 1956, a nationwide

electoral alliance, the National Unity Front (NUF), was formed by the BWPP and other opposition parties to challenge the AFPFL in the election.

From 1948 to 1951, the AFPFL dominated the temporary legislature, the Constituent Assembly from 1947. After the 1951 election, when the AFPFL received about 60 percent of the vote, the league continued to control a majority of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Together with its affiliates, the AFPFL in 1951 controlled 147 of 250 seats. The BWPP and other opposition parties gained 30 seats, while the rest went to independents (Silverstein 1964: p. 129)<sup>12</sup>. In 1956, the share of votes for the AFPFL dropped to 48 percent, but together with affiliates, it still controlled 173 of 250 seats. The NUF and other opposition parties got 43 seats, while the ANUO got six seats (Silverstein 1964: p.129). The AFPFL was also the dominant party in the Chamber of Nationalities, where the league controlled 85 of 125 seats in 1956<sup>13</sup>.

The organisational structure of the AFPFL was a legacy of the anticolonial struggle. The party programme was based on Socialism (Silverstein 1964: pp.121-122). The AFPFL was therefore not an ethnically based party, but due to its historical origins, the league was closely associated with the Burman ethnic group. For instance, the local AFPFL government in the Arakan area during the 1950s was perceived locally as an example of Burman dominance (Fairbairn 1957: p.304-306). Decision-making in the AFPFL was centralised and dominated by the top leaders. There was neither a clear chain of command from the top to the bottom, nor a proper career path from the bottom to the top. Most senior figures in the AFPFL had joined the leadership of the league before 1948, and were in majority Burmans (Callahan 1998a: p.36; Silverstein 1964: p.124).

The organisational structure of the AFPFL indicates that ethnicity and religion played a key role as a basis for political organisation. Several ethnically and religiously based parties, such as the Anglo-Burmese Association, the Burma Muslim Congress, the Kachin National Congress, the Union Karen League, the Chin Congress and the United Hill People's Congress remained affiliated to the AFPFL

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<sup>12</sup> Information is not available on the election result in 1951 for the Chamber of Nationalities..

<sup>13</sup> I have found several compilations of election results, none of which tally exactly. These figures date from June 3, 1957, and are taken from Fairbairn 1957. They were confirmed to Fairbairn at the time by the Burmese embassy in London.

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after 1948 (Taylor 1985: p.111). However, an institutional distinction between the main AFPFL body and these affiliates was maintained.

A split in the AFPFL in 1958 had a significant impact on the influence of ethnically based parties in the union parliament. The split followed years of personal rivalries in the AFPFL leadership (Sein Win 1989; Silverstein 1964: pp.125-126). The faction led by Prime Minister U Nu was renamed the Clean AFPFL, while the faction led by the Socialist leaders Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein became known as the Stable AFPFL. As a result of the split the U Nu government lost its majority in parliament and came to depend on the NUF and the ANUO in order to get its political programme passed in parliament. In 1958, five ministers from ANUO were therefore brought into government (Taylor 1985: p.115). In addition, the government agreed to a proposal to establish Arakan and Mon States (M. Smith 1991: p.176). In addition, new ethnically based parties emerged as former AFPFL affiliates split. For instance, Kayah (Karenni) politicians split into the Kayah National United League allied with the Clean AFPFL, and the Kayah Democratic League allied with the Stable AFPFL (Taylor 1985: pp.137-138). Both parties gained seats in 1960.

The 1960 election did not lead to changes in the parliament that had been expected after the split in the AFPFL, and it did not change the dominant role of the league. The Clean AFPFL – now renamed the Pyidaungsu Party - and the Stable AFPFL were again the main contestants. More than half of the votes in 1960 went to the Pyidaungsu Party of U Nu. Together with its allies, the Pyidaungsu Party gained 168 of 250 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The Stable AFPFL got about 1/3 of the votes and only 41 seats. The third main countrywide party, the NUF, was reduced to less than six percent of the votes and to four seats (Silverstein 1964: p.130). Ethnically based parties were marginalised. As the two factions of the AFPFL assumed rival positions on a number of issues, they further limited the scope of activity for other parties (Silverstein 1964: p.102).

These observations indicate that ethnicity played a central role in politics between 1948 and 1962, but in spite of the number of regional parties in parliament, the AFPFL remained the dominant party. Indeed, Silverstein (1964: p.121) has argued that the dominant role played by the AFPFL curtailed the development of a

multiparty system in Burma. The party system in place in Burma before 1962 can be described as a one-party dominant regime where a single party “dominate(s) the electorate, other political parties, the formation of government, and the public policy agenda” (Pempel 1990: p.4). The case of Burma thus does not support Horowitz’ prediction that ethnically based parties will gradually displace other kinds of parties in an ethnically based party system.

In addition to the dominant role played by the AFPFL, there were other several aspects to the electoral system and the party system in Burma that affected the representation of ethnic minorities. The electoral system was not constituted to promote the representation of smaller interest groups. As Horowitz argued, electoral formulas play a significant role in multiethnic societies. In 1948, Burma adopted the same electoral system as the United Kingdom, with single member districts and a simple majority vote (Khin Maung Win & Smith 1998: p.121; Silverstein 1964: p.128). No information is readily available on district magnitudes and the delimitation of the constituencies. I interpret this lack of information as an indication that there were no major controversies in these matters. There is insufficient information to gauge the full impact of the choice of electoral formula in Burma, but one consequence is apparent. The electoral formula gave rise to significant discrepancies between the number of votes that have been cast and the number of seats in parliament. For instance, the party which gained the third largest number of votes in Burma Proper in 1956 fail to win a single seat, while the Burma Nationalist Bloc got one seat with 40.000 votes less (Silverstein 1964: p. 129). The electoral formula thus appeared to favour parties with strong local support rather than parties with support spread evenly across the country. This system ought to have worked to the advantage of ethnically based parties from areas where these groups were territorially concentrated and to the detriment of ethnic groups spread over several constituencies. Indeed, during the 1950s, the main ethnically based parties represented primarily territorially concentrated ethnic groups such as the Arakanese, Kachin, Chin, Pao and Shan.

The impact of ethnicity in the elections should not be exaggerated. The extent of support for the AFPFL – 60 percent of the votes in 1951 – suggests that there were many reasons why the voters cast their vote. However, as Taylor (1996: p.173) points

out, the extent of support in the population for the AFPFL was actually much lower than 60 percent, given the low electoral turnout. In 1956, the number of votes cast for the AFPFL slipped further. Taylor (1996: loc.cit.) suggests that this may be because the opposition was better organised or because of a higher turnout, which favoured other parties as well. Fairbairn (1956: p.211; 1957: p.300-302) adds that the government's inability to live up to the initial optimism from 1948 and that increased violence, including violence committed by government forces, were reasons why support for the AFPFL slipped. These reasons were manifest in Burma Proper as well as in ethnic minority areas.

### *6.2.3 Other ethnically-based organisations*

The role of ethnicity in social and political organisation in Burma is confirmed if we examine the nature of other organisations in the country after 1948. Due to the AFPFL's dominance in parliament, much of the opposition to the league was expressed in forums outside parliament before 1962. The main opposition forces at the time were the insurgent organisations— particularly communist and ethnically based organisations (Silverstein 1964: p.103; Tinker 1957: p.67). Indeed, the civil war overshadowed much of the activity that was taking place in parliament and in other public arenas. In addition key actors included the media, student organisations and the Buddhist monks. Farmers' and workers' associations played a minor role (Silverstein 1964: pp.99-108).

An examination of students' and monks' organisations also reveals the impact of ethnicity. The main student bodies in the country after 1948 were the national student unions, such as the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU, founded by Aung San and other nationalist student leaders in 1936), and in particular the Rangoon University Students Union (RUSU) branch. Like the AFPFL, the ABFSU had been a leading force in the anticolonial movement of the 1930s. But ethnically based student organisations also emerged during the 1950s, such as the Shan State Students Association and the Shan Literary Society. Student associations were set up at the Rangoon University campus for Kachin, Karen, Arakanese, Pao, Karenni and Chin students. In 1961, these came together and formed the Nationalities

Students United Front (NSUF) (Yawnghwe 1987: p.7, note 18 p.35). In Shan State, links developed between Shan youth organisations and underground armed groups. In Kachin State, the Kachin youth movement played a similar role as the Shan movement in galvanising opposition to Rangoon during the 1950s (M. Smith 1991: p.192).

A comparable pattern of ethnically based organisations can be observed in the Buddhist monkhood. In addition to leading countrywide Sangha organisations such as the Young Monks' Association (YMA) and the Presiding Sayadaw's Association (KSA), Buddhist monks were organised in ethnically based associations that sought to promote nationalist goals, particularly in the case of the Mon and the Arakanese. In 1953, the Arakanese Thawtuzana Sangha Association was established to promote "the racial and religious uplift of the Arakanese". The Mon Sangha Association has played a major role in preserving the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Mon, and supported demands for a separate Mon State (Mendelson 1975: p.338; Smith 1965: p.198).

### 6.3 The Sino-Burmese border agreement and Burman-Kachin relations

The border demarcation between China and Burma in 1961 had repercussions on ethnic relations in Burma, particularly on the relationship between the central government and the Kachin and was one factor that triggered the outbreak of armed rebellion in Kachin State in 1961. For the central government, the relationship with China was a key foreign policy issue after 1948. During the colonial era, the border demarcation between the two countries had been the subject of several disputes. A commission from the League of Nations had drawn a temporary boundary, which was later repudiated by China. After 1949 Burma's relationship with China was affected by the communist take-over in China. Forces from the Chinese nationalist Kuomintang entered Shan State as they were fleeing from the new government. The KMT invasion was the first international crisis in which Burma was involved and led Burma to appeal for support from the United Nations in 1953 (M. Smith 1991: p.120).

However, a border settlement between the two countries did not become a major public issue in Burma until 1956 when Burmese media inaccurately reported

on the intrusion of Chinese government forces in Wa territory in Burma (Woodman 1962: p. 526; Silverstein 1980: pp. 208-210). The border demarcation came to play an important role in forging a common sense of nationhood across ethnic cleavages, except in Kachin areas bordering China. The U Nu government came under severe domestic pressure to defend Burma's sovereignty and resumed negotiations with China. Although the elected leadership of Kachin State was involved as advisors in the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee of the Cabinet, they did not join the negotiations (Woodman 1962: p.528). The border agreement was finalised under the military caretaker government in 1960, and signed in 1961.

The main source of disagreement between Burma and China until 1961 was the future of the Namwan Assigned Tract near Bhamo in Burma. The most contentious question in Burma was the future of three Kachin villages on the Burmese side of the border. The Burmese central government proposed to cede these villages to China in exchange for the Namwan Assigned Tract. The proposal was "hotly debated" in Rangoon and Kachin State (Woodman 1962: p. 530) and rose widespread discontent in Kachin State. In Rangoon the AFPFL was divided between supporters of U Nu, who had agreed to cede the three villages, and the Kyaw Nyein-Ba Swe faction, who opposed the cession. For both factions however, the question of whether to cede the three villages was assessed more in terms of its impact on Sino-Burmese relations than on account of Kachin opposition, in particular in the three villages concerned (Woodman 1962: p.531).

In Kachin State, traditional leaders, elected members of the Kachin State government and representatives from Kachin State in the union parliament were divided between opponents and supporters of the proposal. According to Woodman (1962: pp. 528-537), the issue split the two leading traditional Kachin leaders (*duwa*): The Sima Duwa Sinwa Nawng from Myitkyina as well as a minor *duwa*, Zau Rip, supported U Nu's position while the Duwa Zau Lawn from Bhamo opposed it. Partly, this division reflected existing political cleavages. The Sima Duwa Sinwa Nawng was a Buddhist, who had served with the Japanese during the war, assumed a Burmese name and married a Burmese lady. He was close to the AFPFL and was appointed the first head of Kachin State in U Nu's government in 1948. The Duwa Zau Lawn was a

Christian, a former headmaster of the American Baptist Mission School in Bhamo and had fought with the allies. He had served as head of Kachin State in the government after 1953 (Tinker 1956: p.342).

The issue also divided elected representatives from Kachin State in the parliament. As long as the negotiations between China and Burma were taking place, several leading Kachin representatives criticised the cession of the villages. They included U Zan Hta Sin (Member of Parliament for the constituency in which the three villages were located and appointed Kachin State minister in 1956), and Duwa Zau Lawn (Kachin State minister in 1961). Before the agreement was signed in 1961, it was debated and voted over in the union parliament. Three of six Kachin representatives in the Chamber of Nationalities as well as several representatives in the Chamber of Deputies spoke up against the agreement. They challenged the legitimacy of the Chinese claim to the territory in question as well as the legality of the agreement. Some representatives argued that the union parliament did not have the competence to make decisions that concerned border agreements. The question of the competence of the parliament was taken to the Supreme Court, which ruled that the parliament did have such authority. In spite of the opposition expressed during the debate, the vote in favour of the agreement in parliament was overwhelming, with only one vote cast against it in the Chamber of Deputies (Woodman 1962: p.537).

Opinions in the question of the Sino-Burma border agreement ran along ethnic lines in the sense that opposition to the cession of the three villages was much stronger among Kachin than among the Burman majority. After 1956, the issue gradually evolved at the national level and became defined as an issue of national interest to the detriment of local concerns. In Rangoon, the border agreement was seen as an international issue between Burma and China and a matter of foreign policy. In Kachin State, it was regarded as a case in which Burmans imposed their will over the Kachin. Opponents of the agreement were put under severe pressure to yield in an issue that had become defined as a matter of national interests (Maung Maung 1961: p.199). In addition to the impact of the agreement on public opinion in Burma Proper and Kachin State, the ruling of the Supreme Court also resulted in a precision

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of the division of competence and authority between the union and the states and a strengthening of the union.

## 6.4 Nationality policy in the political arena

### *6.4.1 Redefining internal boundaries and creating states*

Karenni, Kachin and Shan States and the Chin Special Region were established as a result of the constitution. The constitution also provided for the future creation of Karen State, but left the details to be worked out after independence. No provisions addressed demands for self-determination by Arakanese, Mon and other groups. The constitution opened for the use of federalisation to address ethnic demands for autonomy, but it can also be argued that the outcome in 1947 was a result of the bargaining power of individual ethnic groups (M. Smith 1991: p.83). The circumstances of the creation of Karen State in 1951 and the decision to create Arakan and Mon States in 1958 are therefore central to an understanding of federalism as a nationality policy strategy in Burma. The debate that accompanied the creation of these states reveals diverging viewpoints among key political actors in Burma regarding means to ensure national unity. It also reflects some of the challenges for a durable nationality policy in a complex multiethnic society such as Burma.

The creation of four states in 1947 indicated an initial willingness to reach an accommodation with non-Burman groups consistent with Aung San's thinking, but this accommodation was only reached with ethnic groups that had signed the Panglong agreement. After 1948, the line of accommodation was not maintained towards other ethnic groups. For U Nu, the establishment of states in 1947 did not set a precedent for dealing with demands for autonomy; rather it was the result of historical circumstances. For U Nu, the states were a necessary instrument to unify two administrative territories from the colonial era and secure support from non-Burman leaders in the anticolonial struggle (Maung Maung 1961: pp. 190-191). They therefore did not commit the AFPFL government to pursue the line of federalisation after 1948.

## Setting up Karen State: Burman-Karen relations

U Nu's opposition to the creation of states did not affect the creation of Karen State, which had been agreed upon in the constitution. The constitution also created some temporary measures while awaiting the establishment of Karen State. A Karen Special Region was established and administered by a Karen Affairs Council. A minister for Karen affairs was appointed to the union government, and special representation rights were granted to the Karen in the union parliament. However, these measures fell short of what many Karen had expected, and of the Karen demand for separate statehood from 1928. Martin Smith (1991: p. 82) argues that by and large, issues concerned with the Karen remained unsolved by 1948.

After 1948 the issue of Karen-Burman relations and the future of Karen State quickly became an important topic for the new government, which sought to prevent the outbreak of an armed rebellion among Karen and other ethnic groups. Conflicts arose over the demarcation of the borders of the new state, within the Karen community as well as between Karen organisations and the government. The Karen are the second largest ethnic group in Burma and can be found across Lower Burma. Various subgroups of the Karen dominate the hill areas along the Thai-Burma border south of Taunggyi. They also make a significant number of people in the Irrawaddy Delta, in Pegu and in Tenasserim, where they mingle with other ethnic groups, such as the Burmans and the Mon. The Karen National Union (KNU), which had boycotted the elections for the Constituent Assembly, did not accept the borders for Karen State outlined in the constitution. Instead, the KNU asked for Karen State to cover Karen areas in Eastern Burma as well as Karen-majority areas in the Irrawaddy Delta. The KNU also suggested that a combined Karen-Mon state be created in areas with a mixed population in Tenasserim. The Karen Youth Organisation (KYO), which had been affiliated to the AFPFL before 1948, asked for a combination of Karen State to be carved out of Eastern Burma and group rights to protect Karen culture and identity in the Delta.

In 1949, the government set down a Regional Autonomy Enquiry Commission (RAEC) to examine the issue. The proposal of the RAEC was presented after the

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Karen insurrection had broken out in 1949. On the basis of this proposal, the AFPFL government decided in 1951 to constitute Karen State from the Salween district and adjoining Karen majority areas in Eastern Burma and to rescind Karen representation rights in the union parliament. The number of reserved seats was halved in 1951, and fully abolished in 1956. The solution that was decided upon in 1951 turned out to be unsatisfactory for all the parties involved and did little in bringing the armed conflict to a halt. Karen State in 1951 encompassed less than a quarter of the Karen population (M. Smith 1991: p.146).

The controversies over the boundaries of Karen State were compounded by a debate over the constitution of Karenni State. The Karenni are a Karen subgroup distinguished by their political organisation, which is similar to the system of *saohpa* rule in Shan States. In 1948, many Karen nationalists had opposed the creation of a separate Karenni State. Instead, they had argued that one common state should be created for all Karen, and that Karen and Karenni were essentially the same ethnic group. After the outbreak of the Karenni insurrection in August 1948 and of the Karen insurrection in 1949, the AFPFL government became concerned that an alliance should not develop between Karen and Karenni nationalists. During the 1950s, government measures to prevent the development of a joint Karen-Karenni force included attempts to gradually define the Karenni as a separate ethnic group. It became important to the government to draw an ethnic distinction between Karen and Karenni. Karenni State was renamed Kayah State in connection with the establishment of Karen State in 1951. According to Martin Smith (1991: p.145), the change of name enabled the government both to get rid of a name associated with the struggle for Karenni independence and to create a distinct Karenni ethnic identity. In the early 1960s, the American anthropologist F.K. Lehman (1967: p. 14) was asked by the Burmese government to conduct fieldwork in Kayah State. The government sought evidence to support its claim that Karenni and Karen were distinct ethnic groups, and that Kayah State and Karen State therefore should remain distinct political units.

### 1958: The decision on Arakan and Mon States

The question of statehood for Arakanese and Mon provide a second example of an issue that had remained unaddressed during the transition. Indeed, Martin Smith (1991: p.82) remarks that the AFPFL remained ambiguous in its response to Arakanese demands before 1948. While Aung San accepted that separate states should eventually be created during negotiations with the Arakanese community, he also argued that the issue could not be addressed before independence. After 1948 U Nu openly opposed the idea of creating separate states for Mon and the Arakanese on several occasions (Silverstein 1980: pp.150-151), including in comments on the work of the Regional Autonomy Enquiry Commission, which proposed the creation of separate states in 1949. Demands of autonomy had by Arakanese and Mon nationalists had some basis in the historical existence of Arakanese and Mon kingdoms in Lower Burma. But it was also argued that Mon and Arakanese should be treated on an equal basis as the Shan, Kachin and Karenni, who were granted states in the constitution.

Separate statehood for the Arakanese remained an on and off issue throughout the 1950s (M. Smith 1991: p.124) until the split in the AFPFL. The parliamentary crisis caused by the split in 1958 turned the tables because U Nu became dependent on support from the ANUO in the parliament. The decision to establish Mon State was reached the same year to entice recruits from the insurgent Mon Freedom League (MFL) to surrender to government forces under an Arms-for-Democracy programme. The plans for state creation for Arakanese and Mon were overcome, however, by the political crisis that first brought a military-led caretaker government to power in 1958 and then led to the military coup d'état in March 1962. They were not carried out until a constitutional reform in 1974.

The question of state creation revealed several challenges connected to the use of federalisation to accommodate ethnic demands. Firstly, the settlement pattern of ethnic groups seldom follows neat geographical boundaries. While Burmans are in majority in Central Burma, the region is also populated by Karen, Arakanese, Mon, Indians, Chinese and numerous other non-Burman groups. Arakanese areas are found mainly in western Burma, along the borders of present-day Bangladesh, where the

Muslim Rohingya also live. Mon areas stretch from the Irrawaddy Delta, to Pegu north of Rangoon to northern Tenasserim and Karen State. The KNU proposal in 1949 to create a common Mon-Karen was the first acknowledgement by the KNU that territories demanded by Karen nationalists were not inhabited solely by Karen. In the four states carved out in 1947, the population is largely non-Burman, but it still includes a wide array of ethnic groups. None of the political subdivisions created in 1947 were thus ethnically “pure”. Kachin State has a significant Burman community around Bhamo as well as a large number of smaller ethnic groups. The population in Shan States is ethnically speaking highly diversified. In addition, many of the ethnic groups for which states were created also lived outside these states. For instance there are Shan in Kachin State, Kachin in Shan State, Karen in Karenni State and Karenni in Karen State. The question of federalisation further revealed the problem of applying different nationality policy strategies to address similar demands by different ethnic groups. The decision to postpone the creation of Karen State led to great difficulties after 1948, while the decision to create four states and to ignore other demands was one factor that encouraged Arakanese and Mon demands for separate statehood.

#### *6.4.2 Redefining the relationship between union and state governments*

In chapter two I argued that there was a fusion of power between union and state government and that the fact that the legislatures at both levels were not elected separately weakened the autonomy of the states. During the 1950s, several events contributed to strengthen the union over the states and curtail the development of a federal government. A number of trials were conducted in the Supreme Court during the 1950s over issues that tested the relationship between union and states. The Sino-Burmese border agreement was one such issue. In several key cases the verdicts came out in favour of the union.

In addition, the constitution had ensured that the appointment of heads of state/state ministers in the union government did not depend on election result in that state or on the composition of the state councils. Instead, the union Prime Minister appointed the various heads of state. In several cases, U Nu selected ministers for the

Cabinet from the states more as a result of their links with the AFPFL than because they commanded a majority in the state councils (Tinker 1956: pp.76-77). This happened in Karenni and Kachin State (Silverstein 1980: p.211). The split in the AFPFL exposed the significance of this precedent as some state leaders resigned due to their support for the Stable AFPFL. State leaders loyal to U Nu's faction of the AFPFL replaced them (Silverstein 1964: p.118). The authority of the union's Prime Minister to appoint state ministers who did not command the support of the state legislative council was one of several grievances behind demands for secession in Shan State in the late 1950s (Htoon Myint 1957a).

The location of state governments also contributed to strengthen the union. Most state governments were located in Rangoon, except some of the departments of the Shan State government (located in Taunggyi) and some of the offices of the Karen State government (located in Moulmein). Most state council meetings were held in Rangoon. For instance, the Shan State Council only held one of its annual meetings in Taunggyi. Finally, the civil war further weakened the states as the power of local authorities was curtailed in regions under martial administration (Yawnghwe 1987: p.115).

#### *6.4.3 Promoting democracy in an ethnic minority area: Political reforms in Shan State*

The constitution had established that there were two sources of political authority in Burma. Political leaders were to be appointed in connection with an electoral process, but the constitution also recognised the traditional hereditary authority of Shan and Karenni leaders. The 25 seats for Shan State and the three seats for Karenni State in the Chamber of Nationalities were thus reserved for Shan *saohpas* and Karenni *saohpyas*. The Shan State Council was composed equally of *saohpas* and elected deputies, but positions in the state executive were limited to the *saohpas* (Fairbairn 1957: p. 307). The constitution did not recognise traditional leaders such as the Kachin *duwas* and the Chin headmen. After 1948 the political status of the *duwas* and the Chin headmen came to depend on winning elections as for other deputies.

Shortly after independence, the Shan *saohpas* began a process to cede their authority partly to the union government and partly to the Shan State government.

The *saohpa* of Yawnghwe – Burma's first president from 1948 to 1951 – played a central role in these reforms, which first affected the judiciary authority of the *saohpas*. The constitution had initially defined the court system below the Supreme Court and High Court level as a matter of state competence. In 1953 Shan, Kachin, Karenni and Karen States passed a resolution that transferred the competence to the union in order to create a uniform judiciary system in the states.

Negotiations also began between the Shan *saohpas* and the union government to introduce an elected government in the state. It was decided that the transfer of power would take place gradually, first by creating administrative districts, then by passing from a bureaucratic to an elected government (Tinker 1957: pp.162-163). The process was completed in 1959, under the caretaker government. First, the Shan *saohpas* and the Karenni *saophyas* lost their rights to a seat in the Chamber of Nationalities by a constitutional amendment that replaced them by elected representatives. Then power was transferred to the Shan State government under a ceremony in Taunggyi, the Shan State capital. In return, the *saohpas* were granted a compensation package (Taylor 1987: p.269).

In addition to the formal loss of power in 1959, the *saohpas* lost influence in other ways during the 1950s. One reason was the declaration of martial rule in Shan State following the invasion of the Chinese Kuomintang (Hall 1964: pp.849-850). Military administration undermined the authority of the *saohpas*, who were unable to deal with the abuses committed by the Burma Army (Htoon Myint 1957a; Taylor 1987: pp.268-269; Yawnghwe 1987: p.115). For many Shan, the Army represented their main contact with Burmans and the behaviour of the Burma Army in the state fuelled anti-Burman feelings (Yawnghwe 1987: p.112). In 1957 a Shan nationalist leader, Htoon Myint (1957a), accused the AFPFL government of deliberately orchestrating a weakening of the Shan State government by bringing in the army. The changes in the political authority of the *saohpas* had repercussions for Shan ethnic and political identity. As Wiant (1984: pp. 85-88) demonstrates, the role of the *saohpa* was fundamental for the organisation of Shan society and without the *saohpas* at the apex of Shan society, one key for maintaining a distinctive Shan identity was lost.

The population in Shan State reacted differently to the loss of power of the *saohpas*. Opposition to the transfer of power was expressed by leading figures such as the Mahadevi of Yawngghwe, the wife of the *saohpa* of Yawngghwe and Member of Parliament for the Union Hill People's Congress (UHPC) during 1956-1960. But a movement of "anti-feudalists" also emerged to support the reforms. Taylor notes that several minor parties emerged in Shan State during the 1950s in a sign of growing disaffection with the rule of the *saohpas* (Taylor 1985: p. 149). The loss of power by the *saohpas* opened a lid that triggered the Pao rebellion in the early 1950s<sup>14</sup>. The rebellion developed in reaction to the extension of the authority of the union government as well as in protest against Shan *saohpa* dominance (M. Smith 1991: p.47, p.146). The Pao National Organisation (PNO) grew rapidly during the 1950s into one of Burma's largest insurgent forces, with 5,000 recruits in four military zones in Shan State (M. Smith 1991: p.168). The majority of its members surrendered in 1958. Reputedly, the PNO was promised a separate state together with the Mon and Arakanese, but the promise never materialised (M. Smith 1991: pp.168-169).

It has been argued that the reforms that led up to the transfer of power in 1959 were the outcome of a struggle to promote democracy in Shan State (Maung Maung 1969: p.263). Taylor (1987: p. 227-228) argues that the power granted to the *saohpas* in the constitution was inconsistent with the democratic agenda of the AFPFL and a compromise that the AFPFL had been compelled to accept in order to ensure their support in the anticolonial struggle. According to Tinker (1957: p.159), the AFPFL regarded the power of the Shan *saohpas* as an anachronism from Burma's feudal past. In 1946 Aung San had criticised *saohpa* rule as being "out of date" (Silverstein 1993b: p.10). Indeed, reforms to push for democratisation in Shan State were initiated shortly after 1948 (Burma and the Insurrections 1949: p.44). The Shan politician Htoon Myint (1957a) argued that the constitutional arrangements that allowed the *saohpas* to retain power in parliament were a breach of two key democratic principles – the right to vote and the right to be elected. They did not grant full freedom for people in Shan State to elect their parliamentary representatives and prevented the *saohpas* from running for election in the lower chamber of parliament.

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<sup>14</sup> The Pao are a subgroup of the Karen living in Southern Shan State.

In addition, the reforms were also seen as part of a political struggle between conservative and progressive forces in Burma representing different political ideologies. In this view, the traditional Shan *saohpas* were a conservative force, while the AFPFL represented a progressive and socialist force (Fairbairn 1957: p.309). Finally, a third interpretation of the struggle is that it was an ethnic conflict between Shan and Burmans. For many Shan, the AFPFL government in Rangoon was primarily seen as a Burman government. Attempts by the union government to reduce the power of the *saohpas* were perceived as a matter of Burman influence in internal Shan affairs. According to Martin Smith (1991: pp.193-194), few people in Shan State would have defended the *saohpas'* rights as such, but the transfer of power developed into an ethnic issue because it was pushed through from Rangoon, and by largely Burman politicians. It thus threatened the balance of forces that had been created at Panglong in 1947. Indeed, several contemporary observers noted that they were uncertain whether the anti-feudalist movement that opposed the power of the *saohpas* was an indigenous Shan movement or whether it was encouraged by the AFPFL (Tinker 1957: p.162). Fairbairn (1957: p. 311) points out that there were few political conflicts in Shan States before 1957. He thus suggests that this was a conflict driven by outside forces. At the same time, the political reforms in Shan State were followed with interest in other parts of Burma as well because they were regarded as a model that would eventually be applied throughout the union (Cady 1958: p.639).

Political reforms affecting the power of the Shan *saohpas* were one of several factors that marked politics in Shan State during the 1950s and contributed to shape Shan perceptions of the Shan-Burman relationship. In addition, the state was deeply affected by the invasion of the KMT, which led to the imposition of a martial administration in 1952 and the deployment of forces from the Burma Army. The election of the Mahadevi of Yawnghwe to the Chamber of Nationalities in 1956 can be interpreted as a polarisation of politics in Shan State during the second half of the 1950s (Elliott 1999: pp.258-263). After 1956, the Shan State Council was divided almost equally between supporters and opponents of political reforms affecting the authority of the *saohpas*. In 1958 a federal movement emerged in the state to press for political reforms in the relationship between the union and the state. Indeed, Shan State had

been granted the right to secede from Burma after a ten-year trial period in 1948. This clause was up for debate in 1958. But the federal movement also sought to deal with deficiencies of the constitution in securing local autonomy since 1948, and to build an alliance with other non-Burman forces in the country. It pushed for constitutional reforms to create a federal state modelled on the United States of America, with equal representation in both houses, more power for the Upper Chamber, a new state legislative list and a Burman state in Burma Proper different from the union. In 1961, a constitutional conference was organised in Taunggyi that brought together Shan, Karen, Kachin and Chin delegates (Yawnghwe 1987: p.119).

The Shan nationalist leader and scholar Yawnghwe (1987: p.118) argues that federalism ought to be interpreted as a legal and constitutional alternative to secession as well as to armed struggle, promoted by moderates in Shan society. Indeed, Shan students also set up the first Shan armed organisation, the Noom Suk Harn, in 1958. The AFPFL government responded to the demands of the federal movement by inviting to Shan and other non-Burman leaders to a seminar in Rangoon in March 1962. This meeting then triggered the coup d'état.

## 6.5 Summing up

In this chapter, I have first shown that ethnicity played a central role in Burmese politics after 1948, both as a guide for electoral behaviour and as a basis for political and social organisation. But the political system in Burma also left room for non-ethnically based parties. Secondly, I have provided one example of ethnopolitics in practice through the analysis of the Sino-Burma border agreement from 1961. I have shown how a decision was made on the question of settling the border between the two countries through regular democratic procedures and how this decision failed to appease ethnic concerns in Kachin State. Instead, the Sino-Burmese border agreement had a significant impact on Burman-Kachin relations and contributed to reduce the legitimacy of democratic processes among many Kachin as a means to promote their concerns. It became one of the factors leading to the Kachin insurgency that broke out in 1961. While strategies of management – chiefly federalisation – were held out

in the 1947 constitution- such strategies were not followed consistently after 1948. The study of the disagreements surrounding the creation of Karen State in 1951, and the decision to establish Arakan and Mon States in 1958, revealed that there were considerable disagreements among leading political actors in Burma over appropriate strategies to deal with ethnic differences. The creation of Karen State in 1951 and attempts to address the secession issue in Shan State were tests of the ability of the government to carry out the provisions from the 1947 constitution and to promote constitutional reforms in issue affecting ethnic relations. Both attempts failed. Reforms to promote democracy through constitutional reform in Shan State during the 1950s, on the other hand, were largely successful.

## 7. Chapter seven: Cultural aspects of efforts at democratic consolidation

### 7.1 Introduction

In chapter two, I presented three arguments on the relationship between democracy and national identity. Rustow's argument was that democratisation cannot take place in a state where the population does not share a common national identity. Lijphart, on the other hand, held that democratisation is possible in multiethnic states if power-sharing arrangements are devised between the leaders of various ethnic groups. This is a strategy that I have identified as political, and that I have therefore examined in chapter five. Finally, Linz and Stepan argued that democratic consolidation is possible in situations where the population is open to multiple and complementary identities. There are two cultural-political strategies available to governments to deal with minority identities; namely assimilation or a strategy of incorporating minority cultures in public life, for instance by granting cultural rights to ethnic groups. In this chapter, I will examine which of these strategies were pursued after 1948.

In chapter four, I identified the Burmese language and Buddhism as the main vehicles of Burman culture and an emerging Burmese national identity and as some of the cultural traits that distinguished the Burman majority from various ethnic minorities. I will therefore focus on language and religious policies in particular.

### 7.2 Language policy after 1948

#### *7.2.1 Language in the political arena*

Burmese was the only indigenous language that was granted the status of national language in the 1947 constitution. In addition the use of English was permitted. After 1948, however, Burma pursued a policy of gradually replacing English with Burmese as part of a move to get rid off the colonial heritage.

Both English and Burmese were used in parliament after 1948. After 1951 however, it was decided to avoid the use of English. In 1956 the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies warned deputies against sprinkling their speeches with English phrases if there was an equivalent Burmese term. Maung Maung (1961:p.204), himself a Burman, argued that there was no problem when the parliament decided to use only Burmese because “(...) members representing the minority peoples too, speak fluently in Burmese in parliament now”. However, examples can also be found that the use of Burmese affected non-Burman deputies. For instance, one Arakanese representative, U Kyaw Min, who spoke English, was allowed to read from a prepared text to make up for his deficiency in Burmese (Maung Maung 1961: loc.cit).

Burmese was also the leading language in dealings between the union and the state, while local languages were used within the states (Silverstein 1980: p.220). In daily life, Burmese was used in situations where people had to deal with official matters related to union affairs. Legislation that had originally been promulgated in English was translated into Burmese, and new legislation was promulgated in Burmese. In 1948, it was decided that all official correspondence should be done in Burmese. The decision was implemented gradually after 1952, especially in the constituent states, but Tinker (1957: p.178) notes that by the mid-fifties, the use of Burmese was widespread. Other indigenous languages were relegated to home use.

### *7.2.2 Education and cultural life*

In 1948, education and culture became the legislative domains of the constituent states. It was decided to use local languages as the medium of instruction until 4<sup>th</sup> grade for students who did not speak Burmese as a mother tongue and Burmese at higher levels. English became a compulsory subject after 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

The division of tasks between the union and the states made it possible for the state to create an education system to protect and promote the language and culture of ethnic minorities. At the same time, it can be said that the education remained Burman-centred because the curriculum was chiefly concerned with Burman history and culture, and because the Burmese language gradually replaced English in higher education, which fell within the competence of the union. It thus became necessary to

speak Burmese in order to get higher education. In 1955 it was decided that the matriculation exam, which determined access to university, could only be taken in Burmese (Tinker 1957: p.179).

There were several reasons why Burmese was preferred as the medium of instruction in higher education. Most institutions of higher learning were located in Burman-dominated areas and several Burmese officials argued that Burma could not afford to develop all the languages and cultures that existed in the country (Silverstein 1980: p.220). But it was also a result of the ethnic conflicts in the country. The AFPFL government blamed the separatism of Karen and other ethnic groups on the system of Christian missionary schools during the colonial era. The government argued that these schools had created a segregated system where a common sense of nationhood failed to develop (Tinker 1957: p.203).

The emphasis on Burmese was accompanied by a neglect of other languages and cultures. There were no studies of the ethnic groups at Rangoon University while Classical Mon and Old Pali were the only indigenous languages apart from Burmese to be taught and researched at the university during the 1950s (Tinker 1957: p.179; *Burma and the Insurrections* 1949: pp.35-36). The situation of the Mon is worth mentioning, as the existence of the Mon as a separate cultural community was recognised at an early stage. One reason could be that Mon are commonly seen as the ethnic group that brought Buddhism to Burma, while Mon language is at the origin of the Burmese script (Maung Maung 1961: pp.190; U Nu 1955: pp.113-120).

In addition to the language policy of the government, access to public education in ethnic minority areas was also difficult for other reasons, and the old missionary schools remained important. In many parts of Burma, the education sector had almost completely broken down during the 1950s as a result of World War II and the civil war. According to Tinker (1957: pp.195-197), the number of schools and pupils nationwide fell after 1948, and did not catch up to the 1947-1948 level again until 1953-1954. In rural areas, most schools ceased to function because of the war, and there was a shortage of teachers. Tinker does not give a breakdown of the situation in various regions of Burma, but given the pattern of the civil war – which most

severely affected rural areas and border areas - we can assume that the situation was precarious in ethnic minority areas.

### 7.3 Religious policies after 1948

Buddhism is the religion of most Burmese. At the same time, religion serves to distinguish between ethnic groups because most religious minorities belong to ethnic minorities. Most Christians and Animists in Burma are hill people or people of mixed ancestry, such as the Anglo-Burmans. In 1931 the census recorded more than 12 million Buddhists, approximately 85 percent of the population. Most Burmans, Shan, Mon and Arakanese as well as a large proportion of the Karen are Buddhists (Table 1.1). Estimates of the number of Buddhist monks in Burma ranged from 45,000 in 1958 (Mendelson 1975: p. 336) to 80-120,000 in the 1960s (Smith 1965: p.186). For Arakanese, Mon and Burmans, Buddhism constitutes a common cultural heritage. Most Burmese acknowledge that Buddhism and the Burmese script originate from contact with scholars from the Mon kingdom. Arakanese and Burmans also share a common spoken language.

In Central Burma, Buddhism has been a force of social cohesion since it was adopted as state religion by the Burman kings of Pagan during the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Smith 1965: p.83). Buddhism is also an important component in the political identity of a number of ethnic groups. For Mon, Shan and Arakanese, Buddhism and the relationship between the king and the Sangha have been a source of political legitimacy for the traditional rulers. Christianity, on the other hand, is a significant component in the political identity of Karen and other ethnic groups. After 1948 Christianity continued to be propagated among non-Burman groups. For instance, the proportion of Christians among the Kachin increased from 10 percent in 1931 to almost 50 percent in 1962 (Table 1.1; Tegenfeldt 1974: p.181).

The nature of the relationship between religion and state has been difficult since 1948. In 1947, Aung San had argued that an independent Burma should be a secular state. For Aung San, politics was a public matter and included freedom of worship, while religion was a private matter. Aung San (1946) regarded the idea of

mixing religion and politics as something that went against the grain of both religion and politics, and that eventually would spoil both religion and politics. But during the Constituent Assembly in 1947, conservative leaders pressed for the proclamation of Buddhism as state religion (Maung Maung 1961: p. 96). The resulting constitutional provisions were a compromise between the two viewpoints.

U Nu did not share Aung San's reluctance about linking religion and politics after 1948. Instead, the revival of Buddhism played a central role in Burmese politics after 1948 (Mendelson 1975: pp.263-264). U Nu and other government ministers sought to encourage ties between the state and the Buddhist Sangha and support the propagation of Buddhism within Burma as well as internationally. Buddhist teachings were used to explain the causes of the civil war and the poor economic situation in Burma. For instance, in 1960 finance minister Thakin Tin sought to solve problems of profiteering and black-marketing by appealing to businessmen to observe Buddha's teachings (Smith 1965: p.146). In effect, religion can be seen as the moral aspect of the AFPFL's plans for the development of a welfare state, the Pyidawtha Plan (Mendelson 1975: p.264).

After 1948, the AFPFL government sought to resume control over the Sangha and to compete with Sri Lanka to make Burma a major international centre of Buddhism. A system of ecclesiastical courts was created in 1950 to settle disputes within the Sangha, and a programme for monastic schools was established. The government also played a key role in interactions with the Buddhist world. In 1950 Burma received Buddhist relics from Sri Lanka and India in a major public ceremony attended by U Nu and other government ministers. In 1954, Burma organised a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, and in 1954-1960, the Sixth Great Buddhist Synod was held in Rangoon under U Nu's leadership to coincide with the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the Buddha (Smith 1965, p.147; Mendelson 1975: pp.271-283).

A Ministry of Religious Affairs was created in Burma in 1950. Its main purpose was to strengthen ties between the Buddhist Sangha and the state (Smith 1965: p.148). In addition, a Pali University and a Buddha Sasana Council (BSC) were established by an act of parliament to promote and propagate Buddhism. Several

prominent Burmese were patrons of the BSC, including Prime Minister U Nu and U Chan Htoon, a Supreme Court judge who served as secretary of the BSC.

Government ministers and key public figures also supported Buddhism by attending religious events and organising Buddhist ceremonies as part of official ceremonies. For instance, the Union Chief Justice and judges and officials from the Supreme Court and the High Court celebrated the opening of each new session of the courts with a religious ceremony at Burma's main religious shrine, the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon (Smith 1965: pp.166-167).

The government's religious activities also included the propagation of Buddhism in non-Burman areas, especially in the Karen Hills. Indeed, Karen State was the only constituent state to have a Ministry of Religious Affairs, created in 1953. The propagation of Buddhism was closely associated with attempts to create a common national identity by promoting unity between valley and hill peoples (Mendelson 1975: p.267). Missionary activities in the hills included the establishment of a Frontier Buddhist Mission, sending missionaries, planting sacred *bo* trees and funding monasteries in the hill areas, as well as public celebrations of conversions to Buddhism (Smith 1965: p.155; Tinker 1957: p.170).

The period of the Caretaker Government under general Ne Win marks a turning point in linking Buddhism and politics because the Ne Win government began to use religion in its fight against the insurgencies. In 1958 the caretaker government began setting up billboards and organising mass meetings to denounce the Communist insurgency. Pamphlets that depicted Communism as a threat to Buddhism were published in Burmese, Mon, Shan and Pao. Similar pamphlets were also published about Christianity and Islam, in Burmese, Urdu, Karen, Chin, Kachin and English. These were directed against the ethnic insurgencies as well, but the strongest effect came from the pamphlet on Buddhism. The use of religion to combat Communism marked a complete turnaround in the political discussion in Burma on the relationship between Marxism and Buddhism. During the anticolonial struggle, U Nu and other nationalist leaders had argued that Marxism and Buddhism complemented each other. After the Communist rebellion began in 1948, the arguments of the AFPFL leadership changed gradually. Marxism and Buddhism were

no longer seen as complementary, but neither were they regarded as incompatible. By 1958 the two had become regarded as opposed to another (Smith 1965: p.125).

Mehrden (1960: p.291) notes that the use of religion in fighting against the civil war was a carefully conceived plan begun by the Army in 1956 and that it was implemented when it would have a maximum impact. At the same time, it served to prop up the government because popular support was increasingly directed towards political leaders who were seen as preserving religious values. In 1960 religious issues had become prominent during the electoral campaign. This is indicated by the use of religious symbols used by the candidates - U Nu chose deep yellow, the traditional Buddhist colour, as a symbol for the Clean AFPFL - and by U Nu's electoral promise to proclaim Buddhism state religion.

The state religion issue is indicative of the political influence wielded by the Sangha at the end of the 1950. Political parties, Sayadaw associations, monks and individuals had pressed the issue before 1960, but in 1960 it became the main issue in the competition between the Clean and the Stable AFPFL. The Stable AFPFL argued that secularism was a part of democracy and positive for national unity. But once U Nu proposed to make Buddhism state religion, it became difficult to oppose him because attempts to argue against the introduction of state religion were construed as attacks on Buddhism (Smith 1965: chap.7).

The state religion issue polarised public opinion. Among the main opponents were non-Burman religious minorities, especially the Kachin and the Chin, but also non-Burman Buddhists objected to this reform, as the imposition of state religion was seen as part of the government's efforts to burmanise the ethnic minorities, i.e. as part of an effort of assimilation. A National Religious Minorities Alliance was formed with prominent members such as the former president Sao Shwe Thaik to oppose the proposal. In 1961, still, the government proclaimed Buddhist the state religion and added an amendment to safeguard the rights of religious minorities. The amendment, however, was strongly opposed by militant monks.

The state religion bill was challenged by massive public demonstrations and in court (for being anti-constitutional), and was hotly debated in parliament. Supporters argued that it represented the will of the vast majority of Buddhists in Burma.

Opponents argued that it contravened modern democratic principles and would create two classes of citizens, and that it violated the “Spirit of Panglong” from 1947. Significantly, the state religion bill did not include a requirement that the head of state and other higher officials be Buddhist, something that would have had serious political implications for ethnic and religious minorities. The bill was also seen in connection with the emerging federal movement among non-Burmans because U Nu threatened to revoke his promise for statehood for Arakanese and Mon and to refuse to consider the demands for federalism of Shan and Karenni if the bill did not pass parliament. The bill finally passed with a large majority in both chambers, but it was a key factor in the outbreak of civil war among ethnic groups that had signed the Panglong Agreement in 1947, especially the Kachin.

There were several reasons why the U Nu government encouraged a religious revival. Several scholars have examined the nexus between the public promotion of Buddhism by the government and U Nu’s private faith (Mendelson 1975: p.262-265; Smith 1965: p.140-148). Changes within the AFPFL –the split with the Communist Party in 1947-1948, and with the Kyaw Nyein – Ba Swe faction in 1958 - made it possible for U Nu to promote a religious agenda as internal opposition was wiped out. In addition, the development of ties between the government and the Sangha can be seen as an attempt by the government to build up legitimacy in the population by appealing to traditional religious and political symbols. For instance, U Nu was praised as “unique among the world’s statesmen, by his unparalleled piety and the embodiment of the ideal of the Rajarsi, the ruler who is also a sage” (Smith 1965: p.147).

To what extent was the promotion of Buddhism an initiative by the government, and to what extent did the government respond to public sentiments? Smith (1965: p.137) argues that there were elements of both and that the development of democracy in Burma “stimulated and sustained the trend towards the identification of Buddhism with the state”. Buddhism made it possible to legitimise the democratic political system and the political leadership after 1948. Smith argues that Buddhism represented an important component in traditional Burmese culture that could also be associated with a liberal democratic system. Buddhism thus represented a link between an indigenous political tradition centred on the monarchy and a modern

political system based on popular rule. At the same time, U Nu's philosophical and religious outlook played a central role in initiating the use of religion in the political arena.

There were several reasons why Buddhism and democracy reinforced each other. Firstly, there was the nature of the Burmese electorate. The introduction of universal adult suffrage meant that the majority of the electorate was composed of farmers with a traditional outlook shaped by Buddhism. As Mendelson (1975: pp.261-262) observed, many Burmese felt strongly about monastic discipline and supported the government's attempts to control the Sangha during the 1950s, because the monasteries were regarded as a major vehicle of Burmese culture.

The second reason was linked to the public and political role of the Sangha. As a result of the anticolonial struggle, it had become accepted for monks to get involved in public affairs, although Theravada Buddhism holds that monks should not become involved in mundane matters. For instance, members of all religious orders were barred from voting or standing for elections (Constitution, article 71.4). Many monks were not directly involved in politics, but they were influential leaders in the local communities (Smith 1965: p.186) whose support was crucial for candidates during elections. The political potential of the Sangha is apparent if we examine the effect of the split in the AFPFL on the Sangha after 1958. After 1958, the main Buddhist sect in Burma, the Thudamma, was organised in two groups, the Young Monks' Association (YMA) and the Presiding Sayadaw's Association (KSA). The YMA was the oldest organisation, and supported the Stable AFPFL. The KSA was formed as a result of the split and was strongly backed by lay politicians connected with the Clean AFPFL of U Nu. These two organisations were highly influential in political and social life in Burma's two main cities, Rangoon and Mandalay (Mendelson 1975: pp.318-334).

The promotion of Buddhism was accompanied by a certain neglect of other religions. Buddhism became central to the government's efforts to create national unity because of its role in the formation of national identity and its dominating position in Burmese society. The situation of religious minorities was often difficult. Tinker (1957: p.184) notes that Christians were associated with the colonial order and

blamed for supporting the British during the anticolonial struggle. Christian Burmans came under pressure to rescind a faith that was considered alien and return to Buddhism.

The situation of the Muslims was different, although they too were associated with the colonial order. Until World War II, Hinduism and Islam had been the second largest religions in Burma after Buddhism. In Arakan area, tensions between Buddhist Arakanese and Muslim Rohingya stemmed from the colonial era. The immigration of people from Chittagong after Burma and India were separated in 1937 had adversely affected the economic position of the Arakanese and given rise to resentment against Rohingya. There were several incidents in which Muslims were assaulted during the 1930s. Such incidents escalated into a riot and a massacre in 1942, and sparked a mass exodus of Indians from Burma. After 1948, a separatist Mujahid movement was formed to demand that Muslim-inhabited areas of Arakan become part of East Pakistan (Fleischmann 1981: p.64; M. Smith 1991: p.64). There were also tensions between Buddhists and Muslims in other parts of Burma during the 1950s. In 1961, Buddhist monks occupied a mosque in Rangoon in protest against the number of mosques that were erected in the neighbourhood. The conflict led to a riot, but no action was taken against the monks because the government feared the reaction of the Sangha (Mendelson 1975: pp.353-354; Smith 1965: pp.278-280).

The difficulties encountered by various religious minorities were linked to the government's effort to spread Buddhism, but also to a Buddhist revival that was not directly sponsored by the government. Indeed, the extent of religious activities affected the general mood in the country. By the second half of the 1950s, Tinker (1957: p.176) observed that "the climate of opinion now regards religious observance as an essential duty".

For instance, a civilian Buddhist movement emerged to promote social and religious practices consistent with Buddhism, such as vegetarianism and the non-killing of animals. Slaughterhouses were put under government control and closed during religious festivals, while the sale of beef came to a halt in Lower Burma due to restrictions. These measures affected Muslims and Kachin, for whom the killing of animals was a part of religious ceremonies. The number of animals sacrificed for

Muslim religious festivals thus dropped during the 1950s, and in 1953, U Nu had to appeal publicly for Buddhists to show religious tolerance towards Muslims in connection with the slaughtering of animals for the Id festivals. The sacrifice of buffaloes for the Kachin Manao festival was stopped after 1951 (Nu 1955: pp.42-44; Tinker 1957: p.171).

## 7.4 Summing up

It can be argued that the AFPFL government pursued policies of assimilation in the arenas of language and religion. As Silverstein (1980: p.221) observed, the choice of Burmese as a language and access to higher education in Burmese often meant that a person would be expected to adopt Burman customs and culture. Smith (1965: p.154) also find that Buddhist missionary activities organised by the government became an important part of the government's programme of "burmanisation" of ethnic minorities. However, I will argue that it was a weak strategy of assimilation. Although the AFPFL government actively sought to promote Buddhism and Burmese as common elements of the national culture, attempts were not made to restrict minority cultures. Instead, the situation of the ethnic minorities can be characterised as one of benign neglect. The government sought to promote the use of Burmese, while ethnic minority languages and the English language were relegated to home use. In terms of religion, Buddhism was given an increasingly prominent position throughout the 1950s, but the private exercise of other faiths was accepted.

The AFPFL government's cultural policies were a result of the nature of democracy in Burma, but sparked discontent among non-Burman ethnic groups by providing a sense that minority cultures were being threatened. Cultural and literary organisations emerged during the 1950s to promote and protect minority cultures. Such organisations included student and youth groups, monks' associations and literary societies. A number of these came to form the backbone of armed organisations that were formed in Kachin and Shan State after 1958.

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## 8. Chapter eight: Economic aspects of efforts at democratic consolidation

### 8.1 Introduction

Nationality policy in the economic arena typically addresses the exploitation of natural resources in an ethnic minority area. There may be conflict over ownership over natural resources in ethnic minority areas, procedures for decision-making regarding the exploitation of such resources and the distribution of income derived from their exploitation. Such issues are addressed through an economic nationality policy. But economic policies that are not formulated specifically to address the relationship between ethnic groups may also have ethnopolitical consequences, for instance by contributing to increase or reduce economic disparities between ethnic groups.

For the AFPFL government that came to power in Burma in 1948, there was a close link between democratisation and economics. As the government sought to promote a welfare state and a socialist economy, economic policies were defined as one tool to promote and improve the quality of Burmese democracy.

In the present chapter, I will examine the consequences of the pattern of economic and social development in Burma for ethnic relations and outline how the government addressed demands by ethnic minority groups in the economic arena. First, I will provide an outline of the economic and social situation in Burma after 1948. I will show that the former Frontier Areas played a marginal role in the national economy during the colonial era, and that this role was further reduced after 1948. Then, I will examine the consequences for ethnic relations of some aspects of the Burmese economy. I will discuss the economic relationship between union and states as well as the consequences in relation to ethnic relations of national economic planning and of policies that were carried out for land nationalisation and land reforms. Finally, I will examine economic demands raised by ethnic groups and the government's response to such demands.

## 8.2 Economic and social background

Burma is well endowed with natural resources both in the lowlands and the hills, but only a few constitute the core of the national economy: Rice, timber and petroleum. Under the British, Burma was the prototype of a colonial economy. The country was a producer of agricultural products and raw materials, while industrial development was limited to the processing of the country's natural resources (Steinberg 1981: p.137). Economic development was concentrated to Burma Proper. The British developed only two major economic enterprises outside Burma Proper, the silver-ore mines at Bawdwin-Namtu in Shan States and the Mawchi Mines in Karenni State (Tinker 1957: p.283).

Arteries of communication were built to facilitate the exportation of resources and limited to areas where such investments were economically viable. The main transport arteries – water, rail and roads – ran north-south and converged on Rangoon (Tinker 1957:p.281). No railway lines connected Burma to neighbouring countries. There was no railway line and few roads in the Arakan Hills, Chin Hills and Shan State.

The export of rice constituted the core of the economy. Before 1939, Burma was the world's fourth largest rice producer. More than 60 percent of the population in working age were farmers and 90 percent of the population lived in the countryside (Chambers 1950: p.697). The main agricultural areas were the lowlands of Upper Burma and the Irrawaddy Delta where farmers practice wetland irrigation. In the hills, the traditional form of agriculture was slash-and-burn cultivation for subsistence. The Frontier Areas and Karenni State have been dependent on rice from the lowlands since the early 1900s to feed the local population (Bamforth et al. 2000: p.20).

The second main export commodity during the colonial era was petrol products and mineral resources. Oil fields and refineries were located in Central Burma and in Syriam near Rangoon, while the main sources of minerals were located in the Frontier Areas, Karenni State and Tenasserim region. In 1939, the Frontier Areas and Karenni State accounted for half of Burma's mineral production. The Mawchi mines supplied 10 percent of the world's wolfram, while the Bawdwin-Namtu mines were the world's largest mines of silver and lead (Bamforth et al. 2000: p.24;

Chambers 1950: p.698; Crozier 1994: p.4; FEER 1956a&b). Finally, Burma was a major exporter of teak and various hardwoods. About 230,000 tons of teak was exported annually before 1939. Teak was extracted across the country, except in the Arakan Hills, the Irrawaddy Delta and South Tenasserim, but the most important teak forests were located in Karenni and Kachin State as well as in the Pegu Yoma hills north of Rangoon (FEER 1956a&b).

World War II and the subsequent civil war brought much of the agricultural and industrial production to a standstill. In 1949-1950, government finances were close to collapse for lack of revenue. Much of the communication and transport infrastructure was damaged (Khin Maung Kyi et al. 2001: p.6). An estimated half of the country's national capital was destroyed (Survey of Burma 1955). No trains could run at night until 1950 because of the danger of attacks by armed groups. After 1950, the trains ran with armed escort. It took 36 hours to make the 620-kilometre journey between Burma's two main cities, Rangoon and Mandalay (Tinker 1957: p.296). Burma's gross domestic product (GDP) fell between 1948 and 1951. In 1953-1954, GDP remained at 84 percent of its pre-war level, and in 1959-1960, it was only seven percent above pre-war level in 1938-1939 (Khin Maung Kyi et al. 2000: pp.7-8).

Efforts of economic development in Burma after 1948 followed a system of central planning, and sought to promote socialism and nationalism. The basics of economic planning were union ownership of resources, union ownership over industrial enterprises and social welfare. After 1956, more room was given to private ownership. In 1952, the government announced a Pyidawtha Plan ("Happy country") for the creation of a welfare state, but in 1956, the plan was stalled because of lack of funds. There was also a nationalist bias to economic planning that was reflected in the desire to eradicate British and Indian control over the economy and encourage Burmese-owned enterprises. For the first few years, British and other foreign private companies remained active, but gradually, many were nationalised.

Rice continued to be the single most important item in internal trade and exports although agriculture production became more diversified between 1948 and 1960 (Khin Maung Kyi et al. 2000: p. 8). By the mid-1950, all former export lines had become unimportant compared to rice (Tinker 1957: p.266). In 1960, rice exports

accounted for 75-80 percent of Burma's foreign exchange earnings (Tin Tin Shwe 1960: p.573).

Both rice and natural resources such as petroleum, timber and minerals were nationalised after 1948, thus bringing the main sources of income in ethnic minority areas under the control of the central government in Rangoon. For instance, the main resources in Karenni State – one of the smallest ethnic states in Burma – were rice, teak and wolfram from the Mawchi mines. When these resources were nationalised, decision-making authority as well as revenues from their exploitation accrued to the AFPFL government in Rangoon (Tinker 1957: p.95; FEER 1956a&b). Rice was controlled by the State Agricultural Marketing Board (SAMB), which was given a monopoly on the export of rice in 1950. The State Timber Board controlled teak and other timbers, while a Mineral Resources Development Corporation was set down in 1952. During the caretaker government from 1958 to 1960, the military also acquired a monopoly on fish trade throughout Burma through the economic activities of the Defence Services Institute (DSI). By 1960, the DSI had become a major force in the Burmese economy, only superseded by the SAMB (FEER 1960: pp.587-589).

During the first eight years of independence, much of the efforts for economic development were concentrated to the Rangoon area due to security and transportation problems (Tinker 1957: p. 125). Tinker (1957: p.125) remarked in the mid-1950s, that “nine tenth of the development work of the last eight years can be seen in a forty-minute drive, going no more than ten miles from the city (Rangoon), in the triangle formed by the Hlaing River and the Pegu River”. Much of the industry was also located along the railway and road between Rangoon and Mandalay, and along the Irrawaddy up to Myitkyina.

The nationalisation of foreign enterprises in the Frontier Areas adversely affected these areas. For instance, there were seven factories employing about 3.500 people in Shan States in 1939. These factories were foreign-owned and operated in connection with the silver-lead mining industry (Chamber's 1950). After 1948 they were nationalised to the union government. In Karenni State, a British company had exploited the Mawchi mines before World War II. After the outbreak of civil war, KNDO forces gained control over the mines. In 1953 the union government retrieved

control of the mines and established a joint venture with the British company again. The Karen State government received no share in the joint venture or from the revenues from the mines. Furthermore, local labour was not permitted to work in the mines until 1958 due to the outbreak of the war (Crozier 1994: p.68).

The role of the Frontier Areas was marginal in the national economy after 1948 for several reasons. The population is sparse in the hills, and there are few large towns in ethnic minority areas, except Bassein in the Irrawaddy Delta (an area with an ethnically mixed population) and Moulmein in Mon State. None of Burma's largest towns are located in the hills. In addition, the outbreak of the civil war and a drop in world rice prices in 1953-1954 prevented a recovery in Burma's economy. In 1952-1953, 35 percent of the total current and capital expenditures of the annual union budget went to the security and defence forces. Little investment was made in the development of new infrastructure. Instead, priority went to the restoration of existing infrastructure and industry. These were located predominantly in central areas in the lowlands. Still, the civil war also disrupted such efforts at rehabilitation (Tinker 1957: p.287). Insecurity disrupted agricultural production, while natural resources in many ethnic minority areas fell under rebel control and could not be exploited. For instance, the ferrying of timber logs from the Karen and Karenni hills to Rangoon and Moulmein came to a halt because of the war in these areas (Tinker 1957: p.257).

## 8.3 Nationality policy in the economic arena

### *8.3.1 Economic relations between the union and the states*

In 1947 Shan, Chin and Kachin were promised financial support for the states and economic equality between the union and the states. When the constitution was drafted, few provisions examined the economic aspect of the relationship between union and states and no collective economic rights were granted to ethnic groups. Throughout the 1950s the states remained financially dependent on the union government, from which they received a share of their annual income. Silverstein (1980: pp.201-202, p.213) notes that no effort was made by the union government to

increase the income base of the states, and that there was no satisfactory means to apportion the annual budget transfers from the union. There was no co-ordination between the union and the states to match allocations from the union with state expenses. Instead, the union government set aside a sum in the budget that was granted according to a fixed ratio to the various states. As a result, problems in the union economy quickly affected the economy of the states. For instance, Shan States did not get its share of the budget in 1951, and public expenses had to be covered by the *saohpas* (Elliott 1999: p.232). In 1956, Karenni State was only able to meet 1/7 of its budget requirements (Silverstein 1980: pp.201-202). In addition, when a public enterprise was established in an ethnic minority area, there were complaints that the revenue accrued to the central government rather than to the local area (Elliott 1999: p.300).

### *8.3.2 Economic demands by ethnic minorities*

Lack of control over local resources and the failure to transfer resources from the centre to peripheral areas were recurrent complaints by non-Burman groups towards the union government. In Kachin State, the state government complained about the poor quality of the roads in Kachin State (M. Smith 1991: p.192). Much of the state capital Myitkyina was destroyed during World War II, but little of the Japanese war compensations were returned to the state for rehabilitation (Lintner 2002). Burma – as the first country in Asia – reached an agreement with Japan in 1954 about the payment of compensation for damages inflicted during the war. The agreement included a provision that Japan would invest in Burma over a period of ten years (Tinker 1957: pp.267-268). For the first two years, most of the investment was used for the construction of the Baluchaung power plant in Karenni State in order to provide towns such as Rangoon, Mandalay and Pegu with electricity to boost industrialisation in central parts of the country (Tinker 1957: p.267; p.307).

In Arakan - which is a major rice growing district - complaints coalesced around the region's share of income from rice cultivation. The various state marketing boards, especially the SAMB, developed into a major source of revenue for the union government during the 1950s. In 1955, the SAMB provided half of all public revenue for the union (FEER 1955). A conflict developed between the IAPG, the

main Arakanese nationalist party in the parliament, and the AFPFL government over the share that Arakan was receiving from the revenues of the SAMB (Fairbairn 1957: p.305). Many Arakanese complained that their region did not receive its fair share of this money.

In Shan State people complained about budget cuts in the transfers from the union and demanded a share of the Japanese war reparation money to compensate for damages during the war. Demands were also raised that Shan State should receive a share of the revenues from the Namtu-Bawdwin Mines as well as taxes accruing from the activities at the mines (Htoon Myint 1957a). Discontent also erupted over rumours that the central government was ready to give away Shan land for the resettlement of European Jews after World War II. In 1956 such issues formed the basis for the electoral campaign of the Mahadevi of Yawnghwe (Elliott 1999: p.258; p.266). Discontent over economic issues was one of the reasons for Shan demands for federal reforms in 1959 (Htoon Myint 1957a; Htoon Myint 1957b; Silverstein 1980: p.227).

There were positive aspects to the economic integration with Burma as well. Lehman (1963: chap.9) shows that the integration with Burma after 1948 introduced a cash economy and opened up trade and communication routes between Burma and the Chin Hills. Government development schemes were put in place to open schools and provide a local civil service. However, in 1958 the Chin Affairs Council complained that not one high school had been built in the Chin Hills since 1948 (M. Smith 1991: p.194). Lehman (1963: p.216) sees demands for the establishment of Chin State as a result of the modernisation that took place in the Chin Hills after 1948, while Martin Smith (1991: p.194) argues that such demands were a result of dissatisfaction with the lack of autonomy of the Chin Affairs Council and of government neglect of the Chin Hills.

### *8.3.3 Economic planning*

The post-independence government in Burma – as many other governments of the post-war period – emphasised social engineering and economic planning as the chief means to promote social and economic development. Some of the government's main efforts in the economic arena were invested in economic planning. The planning

process began in 1951 when an American company, the Knappen-Tibbetts-Abbett Engineering Company (KTA), was invited to make a survey of the country's resources. The KTA produced a comprehensive survey of Burma's economic situation and a set of recommendations in collaboration with the union government. The report was presented during a Pyidawtha Conference in 1952, which convoked "top government leaders, executives, administrators and representatives of the great mass political and farm organisations". The conference approved the economic growth and investment goals of the KTA report, and laid the basis for a comprehensive development plan that was completed in 1953 (Walinsky 1963: p.29).

The Pyidawtha report contained a programme for the post-war reconstruction of Burma as well as plans for economic and social development. Development hinged on the export of rice and an increase in agricultural production. Rice export was designed as the main earner of foreign exchange to be subsequently invested in various economic and social projects. An increase in agricultural production was intended to pay for the necessary infrastructure for industrial development, power and transport. In addition, the report envisaged a comprehensive exploration of mineral resources and a master plan for industrial development with growth centres in Rangoon and Myingyan in Central Burma as well as Akyab in Arakan. The selection of economic development projects depended on factors such as the location of the relevant natural resources, closeness to the market, the presence of skilled labour, economic soundness and technical complementarity (FEER 1955).

The main actors in the design of the plan were foreigners and the union government, while the states played a minor role. The planning process was coordinated by a Union Ministry of Planning, while the implementation of the plans depended primarily on agencies of the union government (Pyidawtha 1954: p.14). Furthermore, no mention is made in the Pyidawtha report (1954) of the impact of economic development on ethnic relations. The report argued that an end to the civil war was a priority because it was deemed necessary for economic development. But it did not address demands for economic autonomy or equality for ethnic minorities. Nor did it examine the consequences of various economic strategies and goals for ethnic groups and ethnic minority areas.

### 8.3.4 Land nationalisation

Land redistribution and nationalisation were a key demand for the AFPFL since the anticolonial struggle. The purpose of the policy was to get rid of peasant indebtedness and absentee landownership that had developed during the colonial era and that had become an acute problem after the economic depression in the 1930s. By 1939 absentee landlords owned half of the land in Lower Burma (Tinker 1957: p.224). It was part of a nationalist drive against the immigrant Indian community, as Indian moneylenders (Chettyars) owned 25 percent of the cultivable land in the major rice growing districts in Burma (Taylor 1987: p.144).

After 1948 control over land developed into a major source of conflict between the union government and several ethnic nationalists, particularly in Arakan and Shan State. The first land nationalisation act was passed by parliament in October 1948, but halted by the civil war. A second law was passed in 1954. In Shan State, the *saohpas* argued that nationalisation fell within the mandate of the states. Tinker (1957: p.240) notes that land nationalisation was pressed forward by the union government, but that land legislation was on the legislative list of the states. Fairbairn (1957: p.305) also notes that land nationalisation played a role in the conflict between the AFPFL and the Independent Arakanese Parliamentary Group (IAPG). While the IAPG did not oppose land redistribution, it opposed land nationalisation. In 1952, the conflict between union and states over competence in land issues was brought to the Supreme Court, which ruled in favour of the union government (Silverstein 1980: p.203-204).

The issue split Shan leaders. Shan parliamentary deputies were split between those who supported the AFPFL government's policies and those who opposed the policy. The supporters of the act were known as the anti-feudalists. For the anti-feudalists, the struggle for land reform was part of a greater reform movement to change the traditional power structure and class relations in Shan State. Indeed, land played a major role in the social structure of the Shan. As Wiant (1984: pp.85-89) explains, the perseverance of Shan society and identity depends on the position of the Shan *saohpa*, which stems in part from his control over the land and his relationship

to the farmers who till the land. Land nationalisation could therefore undercut the basis for Shan pyramidal society and Shan identity.

## 8.4 Summing up

A number of studies of ethnic relations in Burma have emphasised the political and cultural relationship between Burmans and non-Burmans. These studies have analysed Burma's political institutions and the assimilation policies of the government after 1948. This chapter shows that the examination of political and cultural factors needs to be complemented by an analysis of the economic factors in ethnic relations in Burma and that economic issues were a significant part of the ethnic relations in Burma after 1948 because they underscored the disparities between the Burman-inhabited lowlands and the ethnic minority areas in the border and hill areas.

An analysis of the economic aspects of ethnic relations can be carried out in Burma by comparing regional disparities given the pattern of settlement of various ethnic communities. Such a comparison shows that there were significant disparities between regions, partly as a legacy of colonial rule, and that the situation did not improve after 1948. Combined with the political development after 1948 and the government's culture policies, this strengthened the sense of non-Burman groups that they were being dominated by Burmans. The AFPFL's failure to develop the economy in the periphery was not a result of ethnic discrimination, but had clear ethnopolitical consequences as the failure to do so provided a basis for the discontent that led to the civil war.

## 9. Chapter nine: The failure to consolidate democracy: The civil war

Attempts to consolidate democracy and to address political, economic and cultural demands by various ethnic minority groups took place against the backdrop of civil war, which erupted in Burma Proper in 1948-1949. Despite a lull in the fighting in the mid-fifties, the war resumed in the late fifties and early sixties, and extended to ethnic groups in the Frontier Areas as well. The civil war is the main indication that the consolidation of democracy failed. As I showed in chapters six-eight, the war had a major impact on the development of the democratic process after 1948 as well as on the prospects for economic and social development in a country that had been devastated during World War II. In the present chapter, I will describe the pattern of the war and examine the consequences of the civil war for democratisation after 1948.

### 9.1 The pattern of the civil war

The civil war broke out in two waves, first in Lower Burma and Karenni State in 1948-1951, then in Shan and Kachin States in 1958-1961. During the first phase of the war, the main challenge to the authority of the elected government came from Communist and Karen armed organisations (Burma and the Insurrections 1949: pp.32-33). Armed organisations also emerged among other ethnic groups in the area, such as Arakanese, Mon and Rohingya, as well as among Pao in Shan State during the later 1940s and early 1950s. A Kachin military commander from the government's armed forces, Naw Seng, mutinied and joined the KNU/KNDO in 1949, but most Kachin did not support armed struggle at this stage, nor did most Chin and Shan (M. Smith 1991: p.141, p.191; Burma and the Insurrections 1949: pp.53-55). This first phase of the war can therefore be interpreted as a consequence of the lack of response to ethnic concerns during the transition between 1945 and 1947. In the cases where these concerns had been addressed – by the Panglong agreement and in the 1947 constitution – armed

conflict was averted. The case of Burma thus supports de Nevers' argument that ethnic conflicts are more likely to occur when ethnic interests are not addressed at an early stage of a transition to democracy.

The manner in which the various insurgencies broke out produced a general state of chaos. The Karen insurgency provided a model for other ethnically based uprisings and Karen nationalists were involved in setting up armed organisations in various parts of the country. Forces from the Karen National Democratic Organisation (KNDO) were instrumental in forming the Mon National Democratic Organisation (MNDO) in 1948. The KNDO was also active in western parts of Karenni State as early as 1948. This was a result of the opposition of many Karen nationalists to the existence of Karenni State in favour of a pan-Karen state that would encompass all Karen, including subgroups such as Pao, Kayan and Karenni (M. Smith 1991: p.172). The KNDO in 1948 thus included members from each of these ethnic groups. Later, the KNDO played an active role in encouraging the formation of local armed organisations among various Karen subgroups, such as the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), established in 1957 (M. Smith 1991: p.173) and the Pao National Organisation (M. Smith 1991: pp.144-146). The KNU/KNDO remained the largest ethnic insurgent group during the 1950s.

While ethnicity was a central dimension to the war, the ethnic insurgencies were also mixed with the communist insurgency (M. Smith 1991: p.28). One reason was the geographical pattern of the war and the strategies applied by the government in response to the two insurgencies. The civil war broke out when the CPB went underground in March 1948, but the situation was already tense in Arakan, Karen and Mon areas. A year later, most of lower Burma was enmeshed in battles between government forces and insurgents. The CPB established its strongholds in the densely populated and mainly Burman-inhabited regions of Central Burma, while the KNU established its bases in the largely Karen-inhabited areas of lower and eastern Burma. The KNU and the CPB both gained a foothold in the ethnically mixed Irrawaddy Delta. The Arakan region also became a base area for the CPB in 1948, and the CPB insurgency quickly became mixed up with the Arakanese uprising (M. Smith 1991: p.135). However, a sense of mistrust between ethnic armed organisations and the CPB –

many ethnic leaders regarded the CPB as a Burman force – and ideological differences prevented the development of closer co-operation between the two organisations (M. Smith 1991: pp. 28-29, p.149). The KNU and the CPB made their first agreement for mutual co-operation in 1952, when the tide of the war was turning in favour of the government forces and the KNU came under heavy pressure in the Irrawaddy Delta (M. Smith 1991: pp.148-149).

The outbreak of the communist insurgency led to large-scale mutinies in the armed forces, the Union Military Police (UMP) and the PVO (Burma and the Insurrections 1949: pp.21-25). During 1948-1949, the government therefore used Karen, Kachin, Chin and other non-Burman military units to quell the communist insurgency (Hall 1964: p.798), but this led to resentment among many Burmans and further impaired relations between Burmans and non-Burmans, in particular Karen (M. Smith 1991: p. 109; 111).

The government also made several attempts to prevent the communist uprising from spilling over into an ethnic insurgency. The communist uprising thus provided a motivation for the government to address ethnic issues that had been postponed in 1947. Several rounds of negotiations took place between the government and the KNU in 1948 and a Regional Autonomy Enquiry Commission was set down to inquire into the question of autonomy for Karen, Arakanese and Mon. However, by the time the commission presented its conclusions in 1949, negotiations between the government and the KNU had broken down and the Karen insurrection had begun. The government responded differently to the ethnically based and the communist insurgency. The KNU was outlawed four days after the rebellion broke out, while the CPB remained legal until 1953 (M. Smith 1991: p.116).

The Karen community was deeply affected by the outbreak of war. In the armed forces, Karen officers were placed on indefinite leave and isolated after 1949. The Karen army commander-in-chief, Smith Dun, was forced to resign, and replaced by his deputy, General Ne Win (Callahan 1998a: p.28). Karen were also isolated in other sections of government. In 1949, the two Karen ministers in the union government resigned. Thousands of Karen civil servants, soldiers and policemen were arrested and interned. Many lost their jobs (M. Smith 1991: p.147).

The insurrections reached a height in the period between 1948 and 1951, when various armed groups controlled most of Burma except Rangoon and outlying areas (M. Smith 1991: p.119). After 1952, the war gradually receded. CPB activity in Central Burma slowed down, and by the mid-fifties, the CPB was no longer a serious threat for the government (Lintner 1990: p. 19). Military operations pushed the KNU into the hills of East Burma and forced KNU troops in the Delta on retreat. The government was, however, largely unsuccessful in getting the armed organisations to surrender voluntarily. Amnesties were proposed in 1948, 1949, 1950 and 1955 but met with little response, until the AFPFL launched an Arms-for-Democracy-programme in 1958. This programme triggered large-scale surrenders in the PVO as well as in Arakanese, Pao and Mon armed organisations (M. Smith 1991: pp. 168-170).

Overall, the foundation for an effective democratic government seemed improved by the late 1950s. More territory was under government control, while the armed opposition had been weakened by the surrenders (M. Smith 1991: p.169). The government was also about to overcome other forms of challenges to its authority at the local level. As Cady (1957: p. 602) explains, several districts in Burma were run like semi-independent units under local bosses during the first post-independence years, and the central government in Rangoon was often powerless in local affairs. Instead, the government frequently depended on militias organised and controlled by such local bosses in order to beat back the insurgencies (Callahan 1998a: pp.22-26). By 1955, however, the government had become more stable, and had begun to eliminate these private armies. By 1957, national authority was beginning to supersede the power of the local bosses (Callahan 1998a: pp.26-32).

Shortly thereafter, the second wave of civil war broke out in Shan and Kachin States. The Noom Suk Harn was established in Shan State in 1958, while the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) were established in 1961. There was little direct relationship between these uprisings and the first phase that occurred in lower Burma. The causes of the outbreak of the second phase of the civil war were also different. In Shan State, a combination of three factors explains the outbreak of armed rebellion: The invasion by the Chinese Kuomintang and the subsequent deployment of the Burma Army, the transfer of

power of the *saohpas* in 1959 and the debate about the secession clause in the constitution. A combination of three factors is also held out to explain the outbreak of armed rebellion in Kachin State: The fallout from the Sino-Burmese border agreement, the decision to proclaim Buddhism state religion in 1961 and the poor economic conditions in the state. A major source of disaffection in these states thus stemmed from policies carried out by the government after 1948, which were seen as gradually undermining the autonomy promised by the Panglong agreement. The second phase of the civil indicated a degradation of relations between the elected government and ethnic minorities in these areas from 1948 to 1962.

## 9.2 Consequences of the civil war

The consolidation of democracy hinges on the ability to extend authority of the elected government after the transition to democracy has occurred and to change popular attitudes and behaviour towards democracy. There were three major consequences for democratisation in Burma as a result of the civil war. Firstly, a large portion of the country remained outside the effective control of the democratically elected government until 1962, thus in practice restricting the geographical scope of democracy. It can therefore be said that Burma did not fulfil the first criterion set by Linz and Stepan for a consolidated democracy, namely that the authority of the elected government be effectively extended across the state. Secondly, the war was an indicator of behavioural non-compliance with democratic requirements. Democratic processes such as the organisation of elections were postponed for three years after 1948, while activities in the parliament and government were overshadowed by the war during the 1950s. The outbreak of armed rebellion in Shan and Kachin State indicated a loss of faith in the political system that had been devised in 1947. It can therefore also be said that Burma did not fulfil Linz and Stepan's second and third criteria for a consolidated democracy: attitudinal support and behavioural compliance with democracy.

Thirdly, the civil war contributed to strengthen the armed forces at the expense of the civilian government. The military has played a central role in Burmese society

since the armed forces were established as a part of the anticolonial struggle (Butwell 1961: p. 75). However, the nature of the Burmese armed forces changed considerably between 1948 and 1962. By 1948, an estimated half of military troops and half of the military's equipment were lost in mutinies (Callahan 1998a: p.20). During the early 1950s, the government therefore relied on private armies controlled by local and national leaders from the Socialist Party, which were often organised and armed by the government. Callahan (1998a: p. 23, p. 25) points out that a long-term consequence of the civil war was the institutionalisation of "a kind of local authority in village and town defence units that grew increasingly autonomous from Rangoon". The situation began to change in 1951. A restructuring of the armed forces created a more organised and efficient military force (Callahan 1998a: pp. 29-30). In 1955, an army of volunteers, the *Pyisawthis*, was formed to replace the private militias. A unified command that made field operations easier was created (Maung Aung Myoe 1998: pp.5-8). Many officers, in particular conservatives and Karen, were removed from the Army during the reforms. By 1958, most leading officers in the Army were Socialists. The most powerful were officers who were not closely linked to the AFPFL, and who had grown increasingly frustrated with corruption among civilian politicians (Callahan 1998a: p.29). They played a key role when U Nu temporarily handed over power to the caretaker government led by Ne Win in 1958. The caretaker government gave the military practical experience in government and established the military as an influential public institution with which any elected government would have to contend in major political decisions. In 1961, Butwell (1961: p.79) argued that Burma Army had become "the single most important group in the life of this country today". In addition, the military strengthened itself politically under the caretaker government, through the creation of a National Solidarity Association, and economically, through the establishment of a number of military run enterprises under the Defence Services Institute. After the coup d'état in 1962, these institutions formed a basis for military rule.

The empowerment of the military was significant for the policy towards ethnic demands in the late 1950s as the Army resisted the idea of accommodating ethnic demands. For instance, Maung Maung (1969: p.203) describes the opposition expressed

by general Ne Win and leading officers in 1948 to the creation of ethnically segregated units in the army, which they argued would “only tempt them (i.e. the ethnic minorities) with the thoughts that they could dictate their terms by force”. The impact of martial administration in Shan and Karenni State has also been accounted for. Under the caretaker government from 1958 to 1960, the military was able to put its views into practice. Under Ne Win, the Arms-for-democracy programme was terminated, the process of removing the traditional powers of the Shan *saohpas* was completed, and the promise to establish Arakan and Mon States was postponed. After 1962, policies of non-accommodation under the military rule have predominated in the government’s dealings with ethnic minorities.

## 10. Chapter ten: Some concluding remarks

In conclusion, I will present the answers that I found to the questions presented in the first chapter as well as some theoretical implications of these findings. I will also assess some lessons that this analysis of Burma's past may hold for the country's future. Indeed, there is a thread running from Burma's pre-1962 history to current Burmese politics, as demonstrated in chapter three. Aung San Suu Kyi (1995: p.193) referred to the post-World War II struggle for national liberation in her first major public speech, when she spoke of the events in 1988 as a national crisis that "could in fact be called the second struggle for independence". In late December 2002, she brought up the same reference when she described her father Aung San as a major source of inspiration and argued that one of her aims is to build up "the kind of country that he would like to have seen" (BBC 2002).

### 10.1 Findings

**What characterised the democratic regime that was established in Burma in 1948, and what foundation did this framework lay for ethnic relations?** The political system established in 1947-1948 combined a semi-federal state with parliamentary rule and elections based on a majoritarian formula. British Westminster democracy provided a model for the 1947 constitution, while the political structures that had been established in Burma since the 1920s provided some experience with such a political system. The combination of parliamentary rule and first-past-the post elections, however, produced conflicting outcomes. A bicameral parliament institutionalised the representation of ethnic diversity in the Chamber of Nationalities. The use of majoritarian formulas for the election of representatives to parliament, however, reduced the representation of smaller and territorially non-concentrated interest groups in either chamber. The Burmese party system was furthermore dominated by the AFPFL. Although ethnic identity played a significant role for political behaviour, as testified by the establishment of ethnically based organisations, including parties,

student groups and religious organisations, ethnic groups were comparatively less influential in parliament. The examination of the Burmese political structure and of the party system suggests that they were important frameworks for ethnic relations, but that the parliament did not serve as an efficient channel for ethnic minority concerns. Unfortunately, we lack some of the information necessary to draw definitive conclusions as to the full impact of these aspects of the political system. In addition, the time span that has been examined is relatively short. We cannot therefore fully test the theories presented in chapter two about the advantages and drawbacks of presidential versus parliamentary rule, nor can we fully test Horowitz' theory about the role of elections and of the party system in politicising ethnic identity in democracies.

The 1947 constitution produced some strategies for dealing with ethnic diversity. The principle of accommodation was applied in the political arena, where it was a result of the demand for autonomy raised by non-Burman groups. The main strategy was the creation of autonomous states within a semi-federal polity in ethnic minority areas, but this strategy was only applied in the Frontier Areas. It was thus only effective for ethnic groups living in these areas and only as a strategy for centre-periphery relations. The constitution did not institutionalise strategies of power-sharing or group rights for ethnic groups in Burma Proper. In addition, issues related to ethnic relations within the states were not addressed, except in Kachin State where provisions were made to ensure the representation of the Burman minority. Secession was accepted with a ten-year trial period for Shan and Karenni, and denied other ethnic groups. In the economic and cultural arenas, ethnic minority concerns were accommodated within the federal framework of union- state relations. Instead, socialism provided an important overall guideline for economic affairs. There were no additional measures to deal with ethnic diversity in these arenas, and the choice of strategies was left to the elected post-1948 governments.

**What nationality policies did the government formulate and carry out after 1948 in the political, cultural and economic fields to address ethnic demands?** A nationality policy that comprises strategies to address ethnic diversity underpinned by a political programme did not fully exist in Burma after 1948. Firstly, there was no consensus in

the Burmese political elite over what political programme to adopt. Viewpoints differed within the AFPFL as well as between the AFPFL and other leading political actors, such as the military, as to how to deal with ethnic diversity. One viewpoint held that ethnic diversity ought to be addressed by accommodating ethnic demands. An alternative viewpoint was that ethnic identities ought to be replaced by a common national identity and that strategies of accommodation ought to be used only as a last resort. Finally, it was also argued by some, particularly in the armed forces, that accommodation would fuel new demands and thereby contribute to dissolve the union. Secondly, as a result of this lack of consensus, strategies of accommodation and strategies of rejection were both applied. In some cases, different strategies were applied towards similar demands by different ethnic groups. In other case, strategies differed in relation to demands by the same ethnic group. Such inconsistencies were one reason for ethnic dissatisfaction in the 1950s-1960s.

Strategies of accommodation continued to be applied more commonly in the political arena, where accommodation had been made a constitutive principle of the democratic regime in 1947. Political strategies of accommodation applied after 1948 included the creation of Karen, Arakan and Mon States. In the case of the Karen, however, this statement must be qualified. Indeed, the creation of Karen State was accompanied by the abolition of Karen representation rights. In the cultural arena, the government's policies aimed at a weak form of assimilation of non-Burman and non-Buddhist groups into a national identity based on Burman culture and Buddhism - except for the Mon, who were recognised as a cultural minority and granted certain collective cultural rights. In the economic arena, the government's policy was dominated by negligence of ethnic minority demands. Economic collective rights remained absent.

**What were the ethnopolitical consequences of these policies and other efforts to consolidate democracy after 1948?** There were two phases to the outbreak of armed conflict in Burma. Firstly, there was an outbreak of armed conflict in Burma Proper in connection with the transition to democracy in 1947-1948. This was a result of the failure to include ethnic groups such as the Karen, Arakanese and Mon in the

transition and to address their concerns. The conflict did not extend to the Frontier Areas. The second outbreak of armed violence, however, occurred in the Frontier Areas in the late fifties and early sixties. By this time, it was linked to the failure to consolidate democracy and to develop a consistent set of nationality policy strategies after 1948. This pattern indicates that the accommodation of ethnic groups in the Frontier Areas was initially successful in preventing armed conflict from breaking out, while the lack of concern for ethnic demands in Burma Proper brought armed conflict to that area.

The failure to manage ethnic diversity after 1948 had three major consequences. Firstly, it meant a continuation of the civil war, which had erupted in 1948, and now spread to new geographical areas and ethnic groups. Secondly, it empowered the armed forces and justified an extended role for the military. Finally, it contributed to the collapse of democracy in 1962 and the imposition of military rule.

## 10.2 Some theoretical implications

In chapter one, I introduced four perspectives regarding the nature of ethnic relations in Burma: those of M. Smith, Silverstein, Fistié and Brown. I have drawn heavily on the findings of Smith for data to support my analysis. However, as stated in the critique in chapter one, Smith made few attempts to develop a theoretical framework for understanding ethnic relations in Burma. This thesis is therefore an attempt to complement his analysis of ethnicity and insurgency in Burma.

The analysis supports Silverstein's argument that the principle of accommodation that was established by the Panglong Agreement and partly in the 1947 constitution was not followed up after independence, and that this accounts for some of the ethnic disaffection of the 1950s-1960s. But the analysis has also revealed more complex aspects of ethnic conflicts in Burma and that the contrast between what was seemingly agreed upon in 1947 and what was enacted after 1948 was not as significant as argued by Silverstein. I have argued that there were lacunas in the process leading up to the Panglong Agreement, as well as in the text of the agreement, and in the constitution-drafting process in 1947, which played a

significant role in the outbreak of civil war in 1948-1949. Furthermore, the 1947 constitution did allow for strategies of disregarding ethnic diversity. The strategies that were selected after 1948 were thus also an inherent part of the constitutional arrangements in 1947. In addition, I have shown that government policies in the cultural and economic arenas played a central role in producing the pattern of ethnopolitics that characterised post-independence Burma.

Fistié and Brown represent two opposite viewpoints as to the impact of colonisation. I have shown that there was a degree of continuity between the precolonial and the postcolonial era. For instance, I demonstrated in chapter four that a proto-national identity existed in Central-Burma before the arrival of the British. Still, my analysis does not support Fistié's argument that ethnic relations after independence ought to be regarded as merely continuing the precolonial pattern. Instead, I agree with Brown that the colonial era was a period of significant change in Burma. In chapters three and four, I show that the process of colonisation brought a reappraisal of the significance of ethnicity and nationhood in Burma, that it changed the nature of the state and of political institutions, and that it introduced the idea and institutions of Western liberal democracy to Burma.

The theoretical framework that guided the analysis is a synthesis between the works of several scholars. It is based on contributions by Linz and Stepan and by Gunther et al., on democratisation in Europe and Latin America, on work by Brass and Brown's regarding the role of the state in ethnic relations, on work by de Nevers on the impact of the democratic transition for ethnic relations, as well as on the typology developed by McGarry and O'Leary over nationality policy strategies addressing ethnic diversity. I found Snyder's distinction between the transition and the consolidation phase of democratisation to be useful as an analytical tool, but I also found that the consolidation phase continues to play a key role in shaping ethnic relations. It is thus necessary, but not sufficient to follow de Nevers in focusing the analysis on the transition phase. The two phases need to be analysed in relation to each other. Indeed, the failure to engage in a major political reform in Burma in 1958 indicate that what had been achieved during the transition to democracy had not

consolidated, and that much had not been achieved in terms of ethnic integration during the first decade of independence.

Post-independence Burma reveals the challenges associated with the promotion of democracy in a multiethnic state. It shows that ethnic concerns need to be addressed at an early stage in the transition, or risk derailing the democratisation process at a later stage. It does not support the argument that democracy ought to be achieved first, and ethnic concerns addressed later, nor that strategies of accommodation ought to be avoided. It also does not support Rustow's argument that nation-building must precede democratisation. Instead, it has shown that ethnic relations are an inherent factor in the process of introducing and consolidating democracy, and that the two issues need to be addressed simultaneously. The analysis revealed that an arsenal of strategies is available to deal with ethnic diversity in democracies, but that the selection of strategies and the combination of strategies have to be done with care. The rush to draft the constitution during the final months of the summer of 1947, the lack of consensus-building during the constitution-drafting process as well as after independence, and inconsistencies in the manner in which ethnic concerns were addressed during and after 1947-1948 all had a negative impact on the development of multiethnic democracy in Burma. The outbreak of war was a consequence of these lacunas. But the war also became a cause of further ethnic resentment. Indeed, the civil war became a factor that shaped perceptions of how the elected government would address ethnic minority demands and thus contributed to further reduce the trust between the state and non-Burman groups.

### 10.3 Lessons for the future

With the hindsight of forty years, I have drawn conclusions that show a mixed record for democracy in Burma. While there was progress in the process of democratisation before 1962, there were also impediments to the consolidation of democracy. Does this signal that Burma lacks the necessary preconditions for democratisation to succeed? We cannot answer such a question and assess the future prospects of democracy and ethnic relations in Burma unless we take into account the

experiences from the period after 1962. This includes forty years of military rule, nationality policies carried out since 1962, the popular uprising in 1988, the emergence of new political actors in the wake of the events in 1988 and the election in 1990, and the ebb and flow of the civil war. Overall, the situation has changed a great deal since 1962, and return to past arrangements is no longer possible. In addition, the current political actors in the country are different from those that dominated Burmese politics fifty years ago. In particular, the current military government has more interests vested in influencing political change in Burma than the British government had in 1948. Still, some lessons can be drawn from the past. Ethnicity continues to play a central role in Burmese politics today, as it did in 1948 and the need to deal with ethnic diversity will remain a paramount issue for any future democratic government. Knowledge about strategies to address ethnic demands has improved compared to 1948. However, the demands of ethnic minority groups today show that the emphasis remains on political issues as the root cause of ethnic conflicts. The key demands remain federalism and autonomy for ethnic minorities. As a result, democracy and ethnicity will continue to be related in the future, and a process of democratisation will have to contend with the concerns of ethnic minority groups. The civil war and the collapse of democracy in 1962 have been diagnosed as a constitutional failure. Indeed, lacunas and inconsistencies in constitution drafted in 1947 were reasons for the conflicts that erupted. Burma's history is testimony of the need to devise a comprehensive constitutional solution to deal with ethnic diversity and the need to include all relevant actors in this process from an early stage. But from this diagnosis also follows the argument that much can be achieved to improve ethnic relations by constitutional design. A suitable constitution would thereby settle the premises on which the relationship between the state and ethnic groups as well as among ethnic groups will be based, "once and for all". This thesis has shown that ethnic diversity cannot be addressed solely by constitutional design at a given point in time. Ethnic relations are also the result of the dynamics of everyday politics and of events that cannot be foreseen when the constitution is drafted. An appropriate political structure and good leadership are equally important factors for democratisation in multiethnic societies.

## Appendix: Acronyms and Burmese glossary

### Acronyms:

**ABFSU:** All Burma Federation of Student Unions  
**AFPFL:** Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League. Split in "Stable" and "Clean" faction in 1958 (the "Clean" faction later renamed Pyidaungsu Party)  
**ANC:** Arakan National Congress  
**ANUO:** Arakan National Unity Organisation  
**APLP:** Arakan People's Liberation Party  
**BIA/BNA:** Burma Independence Army/ Burma National Army  
**BKNA:** Buddhist Karen National Association  
**BSC:** Buddha Sasana Council  
**BWPP:** Burmese Workers and Peasants' Party  
**CNO:** Chin National Organisation  
**CNUO:** Chin National Unity Organisation  
**CPB:** Communist Party of Burma  
**DSI:** Defence Services Institute  
**FACE:** Frontier Area Commission of Enquiry  
**GCBA:** General Council of Burmese Associations  
**IAPG:** Independent Arakan Parliamentary Group  
**KCO:** Karen Central Organisation  
**KIO/KIA:** Kachin Independence Organisation/Kachin Independence Army  
**KNA:** Karen National Association  
**KMT:** Guomindang (Kuomintang)  
**KNPP:** Karenni National Progressive Party  
**KNU/KNDO:** Karen National Union/Karen National Defence Organisation  
**KSA:** Presiding Sayadaws' Association  
**KYO:** Karen Youth Organisation  
**MFL/MNDO:** Mon Freedom League/ Mon National Defence Organisation  
**NUF:** National Unity Front  
**NSUF:** Nationalities Students United Front  
**PBF:** Patriotic Burmese Forces  
**PNO:** Pao National Organisation  
**PVO:** People Volunteer Organisation  
**RAEC:** Regional Autonomy Enquiry Commission  
**RUSU:** Rangoon University Student Union  
**SAMB:** State Agriculture Marketing Board  
**SCUHP/UHPC:** Supreme Council of United Hills Peoples/ Council of United Hills Peoples

**UMP:** Union Military Police

**YMA:** Young Monks' Association

**YMBA:** Young Men's Buddhist Association

### Burmese glossary:

**Burma Proper/Ministerial Burma:** Central Burma during British colonial rule

**Chettyar:** Indian money-lending caste

**Dobama Asiayone:** We Burman Association

**Duwa:** Jingpaw term. Title of traditional Kachin/Jingpaw ruler

**Dyarchy:** government in which power is vested in two rulers or authorities

**Frontier Areas:** hill areas not under direct British administration

**Kyat:** Burmese unit of currency

**Mahadevi:** Shan title for a female ruler. Used as title for the wife of the saohpa

**Mandala:** Circle

**Noom Suk Harn:** first Shan armed organisation

**Pali:** Indo-Aryan language used as the liturgical and scholarly language of Theravada Buddhism

**Pyidawtha:** "Happy Country", programme for the development of a welfare state

**Pyisawthi:** Armed semi-official militia

**Sangha:** The institutionalised community of Buddhist monks

**Saohpa/saohpya:** "Lord of the Sky" in Shan/Karenni.

Traditional title of rulers of the Shan and Karenni principalities. "Sawbwa" is the equivalent Burmese term

**Sao:** polite form of address in Shan language

**Thakin:** meaning "Master" in Burmese, used to address the British in the colonial era, then used by the nationalist movement to name nationalists

**Thawtuzana:** Young monk in Buddhism

**Theravada:** literally, doctrine of the elders. Dominant branch of Buddhism in Burma

**U:** Polite form of address to elder male in Burmese language

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