The Quest for Peace in Kawthoolei:

The Strategies, Outcomes, and Sustainability of Peacebuilding in Southeastern Myanmar, 2012-2020

Klo Kwe Moo Kham

Master of Arts in Human Geography

Dept. of Sociology and Human Geography

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Klo Kwe Moo Kham

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Summary

Amidst the continuing uncertainties that followed the recent military coup in Myanmar, this research takes a step back and critically investigates parts of the peacebuilding efforts of the past decade. More specifically, it looks into the local dynamics of peacebuilding between the State of Myanmar and the Karen National Union (KNU) in the security, governance, and development sectors in southeastern Myanmar, a region locally known to Karen people as Kawthoolei. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with key Karen actors, including military and political leaders of KNU, and on an extensive review of document sources, the research observes that a slow and hidden continuation of war by other means had persisted in Kawthoolei throughout the 2010s. That is, rather than conflict resolution, it finds that the Burmese military-led peacebuilding has in its fundamental been a process of conflict containment. Among other ways, by waging a silent war in KNU's last stronghold, by expanding and cementing its civilian state structures into ethnic Karen areas, and by opening the former combat zones to the market forces, the state has sought to achieve hegemonic territorial, political, and economic control over the region. The form of peace achieved has been one of negative character, where the underlying causes of the conflict remained unresolved, but one that has also been constantly contested and reshaped due to the state's multi-sectoral encroachments on Karen territories. As the "peacebuilding" in this context has come to mean conflict containment, its potential to produce a sustainable peace remains limited.

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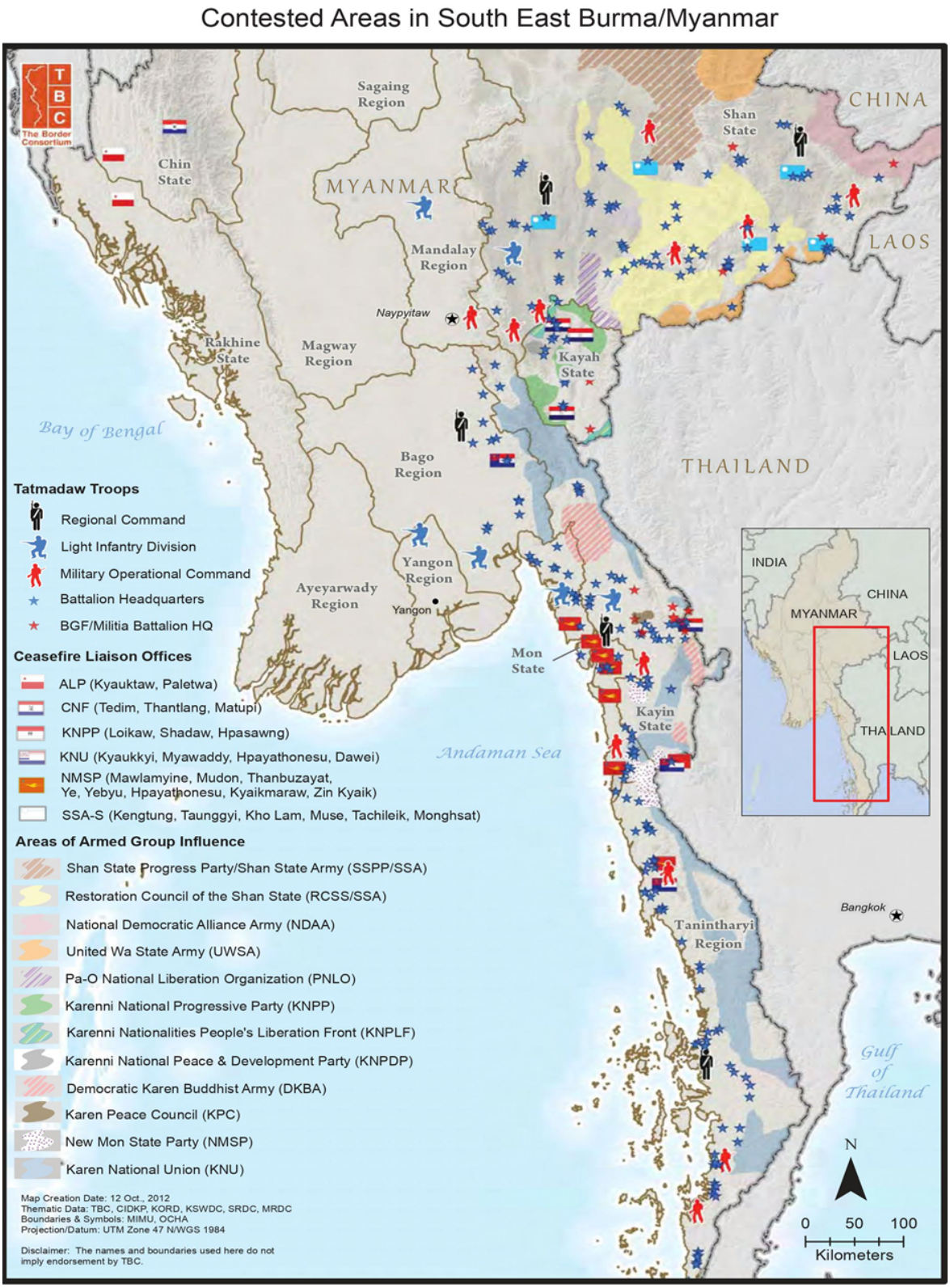

Source: TBC, retrieved from: https://www.theborderconsortium.org/media/12-11-contested-areas-in-south-east-burma-myanmar.pdf [accessed: 04.03.21].

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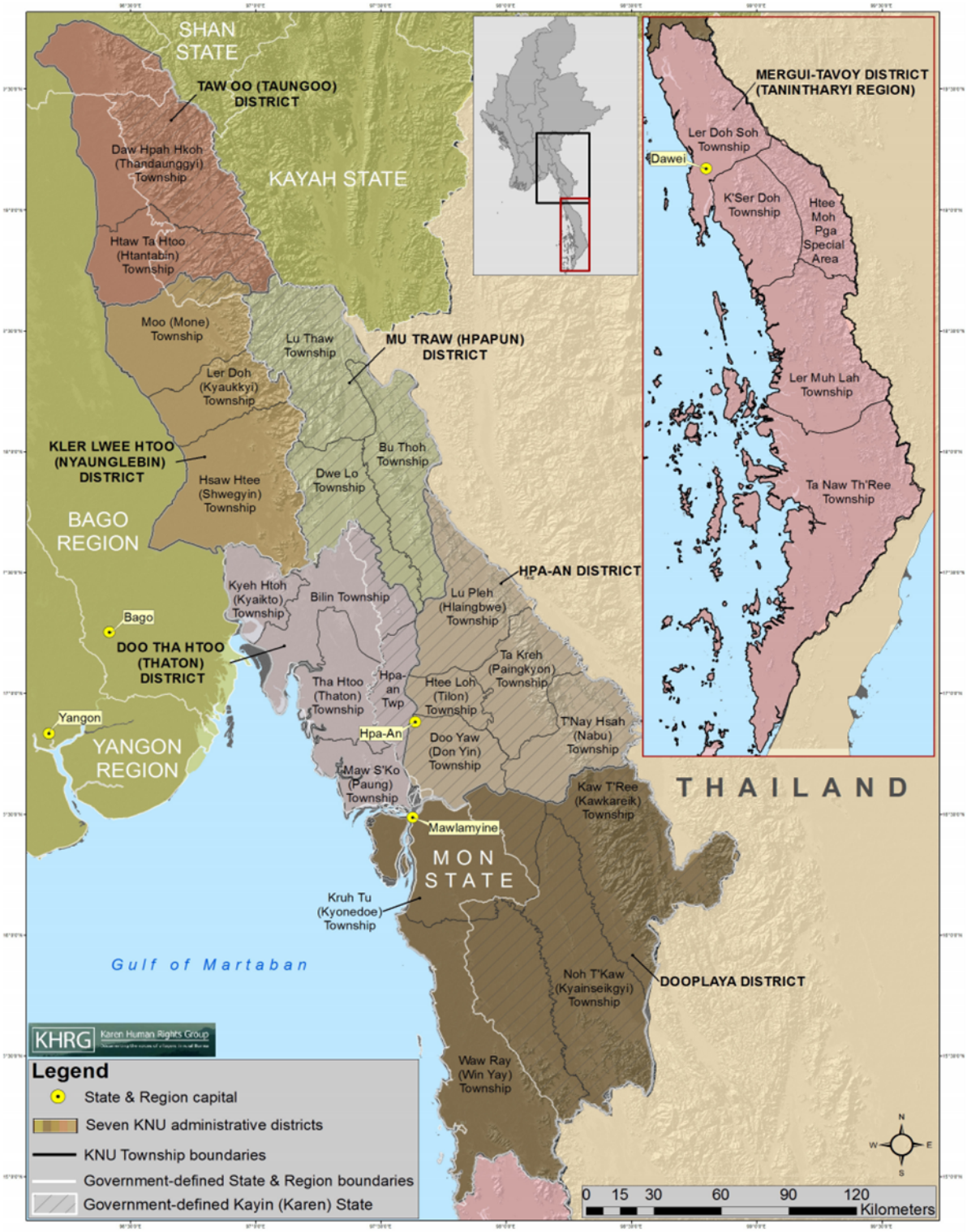

KNU District and Township Names (Source: KHRG)

List of Acronyms

BGF	Border Guard Force
CFA	Ceasefire Agreement
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organization
KDHW	Karen Department of Health and Welfare
KECD	Karen Education and Culture Department
KESAN	Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
KHRG	Karen Human Right Groups
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNU	Karen National Union
KNU/KNLA PC	KNU/KNLA Peace Council
KPSN	Karen Peace Support Network
MOGE	Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NLD	National League for Democracy
Tatmadaw	Myanmar Armed Forces
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
UPC	Union Peace Conference
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

1 Introduction

After over six decades of civil war and half a century of military rule, the initiation of reforms in Myanmar in early 2010s came as a surprise to many, including close observers of a country formerly compared to today's North Korea. Election was held, long-time political prisoners released, freedom of expression restored, democratization process begun, peace negotiations initiated, and more (Lall, 2016). For the first time in many decades, major structural transformations were to take place, or so it seemed. Broadly speaking, three broad processes of change may be identified during the past decade: i) *economic liberalization*, ii) *political democratization*, and iii) *conflict transformation* or *peacebuilding*. Finally, it was Myanmar's turn to transform to become a democratic, peaceful, and prosperous country, many people thought.

About a decade later, as I am finalizing this thesis in late May 2021, Myanmar finds itself at yet another critical crossroads in its modern history. The coup d'état staged by the Burmese military, or Tatmadaw, on the 1st of February has put a halt to the flawed democratization process, stalled the peace processes, and caused havoc to the economy. Hundreds of unarmed protesters have been ruthlessly slaughtered on the streets by the coup makers, as the world community has stood by and watched the events. Key debates center around a few questions, including explanations of why the coup took place, policy advice on how external actors can best assist the country, and predictions of what the outcomes could be. In contrast to the earlier optimism, observers now warn of "*Asia's next failed state*" (The Economist, 2021).

Amidst the chaotic situation, this research project takes a step back and looks critically into parts of the reforms of the 2010s. In fact, it began about a year before the coup with the goal to study one of the aforementioned processes of change, namely that of peacebuilding. In light of the uncertainties brought by the recent coup, regardless of its outcomes in relation to democracy, peace, and development, it is in itself important to rigorously study the peacebuilding process of the past decade, as significant amounts of time, energy, and resources have been invested into it. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, it may also help shed light on the currently unfolding situation in Myanmar and the future prospects of peace and democracy in the country.

1.1 Research Objectives and Questions

There are two specific objectives of this research project. Whereas one objective is to study the case in its own right by seeking to obtain a clear *understanding of parts of the peace process* in Myanmar, as an attempt to add to the empirical knowledge about it, another objective is to use the case to *engage with the broader literature on peacebuilding*, particularly on domestically led peacebuilding. These objectives are important because academic literature on peacebuilding in Myanmar is presently limited. Moreover, although there exist important works assessing the state of the formal peace process and reporting on the changes on the ground, works that engage the case with peace theories and concepts remains limited. Thus, key objectives are to i) add to the empirical understanding and ii) bridge it to broader debates on peacebuilding.

Local Peacebuilding in Kawthoolei

It should be noted from the onset that this project looks specifically at local peacebuilding in southeastern Myanmar, a region that is home to the ethnic Karen nationality and locally known to Karen people as Kawthoolei (Garbani & Walton, 2020). The scope of a master's thesis naturally requires one to limit the focus in order to make it feasible. Particularly true is it for the case of Myanmar, which is home to one of the world's most complex intra-state conflicts and which involve about 20 Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) that have been fighting the government since independence over demands of self-rule (Burke et al., 2017). However, the choices to focus on *Kawthoolei*, instead of other regions in the country, and on *local peacebuilding*, instead of the national level peace negotiations, are made purposively.

The main reason behind the choice of focusing on *Kawthoolei* lies in the fact that, in addition to being home to Myanmar's longest war, it is claimed and represented by Karen National Union (KNU) which is arguably the most important EAO involved in the peace process. Its importance lies not only in its military and civilian size as an EAO, but also in its role as a leader among the EAOs involved in the national peace process. When KNU signed the first preliminary bilateral ceasefire agreement (CFA) in January 2012, it had fought successive governments continuously for 62 years (Keenan, 2012). Three years later, along with seven other EAOs, it

signed the so-called Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Given its staunch position against accepting ceasefire in the 1990s when most other EAOs did, the emergence of KNU 'from the bush to the capitol' as a peace advocate makes it important and interesting to study.

The choice of Kawthoolei and KNU is thus based both on the need for research-based knowledge on this important case, and its centrality in the politics of peace after Myanmar's transition from direct military rule.

The drivers of armed conflict in Myanmar are distinguished between those at the national level where the core causes are i) *civil-military* relations, ii) *state-society* relations, and iii) *central-local* rule, and those at the local level where the proximate causes are i) control over *territories*, ii) authority over *populations*, and iii) access to *resources* (see figure 1). Peacebuilding during the last decade can similarly be distinguished between national and local negotiation and implementation efforts.

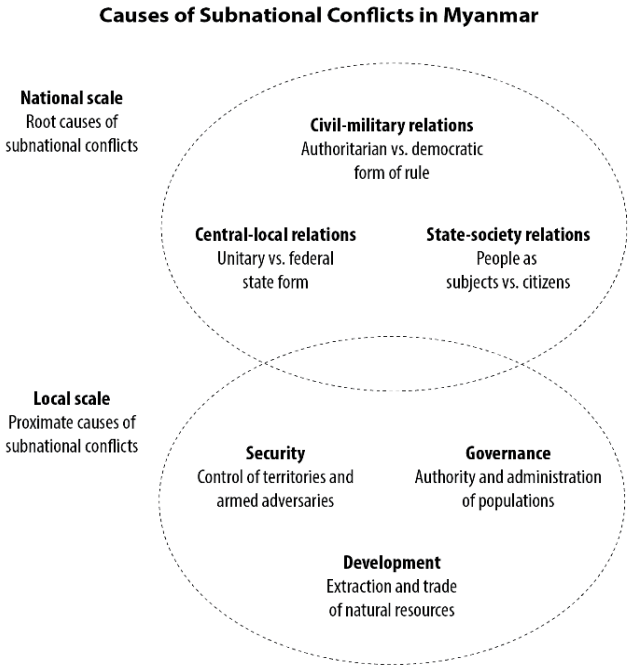

Figure 1: Causes of Conflicts (Based on Burke et al., 2017)

Instead of focusing on KNU's participation in the national level negotiations that sought to resolve the issues of central-local rule or the question of federalism, this project focus primarily on local peacebuilding on the ground where control over territories (security), authority over population (governance), and access to resources (development) are being contested and renegotiated as a way to build peace. Although the scales of peacebuilding are closely interconnected, with the one directly or indirectly affecting the other, the choice to primarily focus on the local is motivated by a key observation.

The observation is that while the negotiations have made little progress towards reaching a political settlement that could put an end to the conflict in Kawthoolei, significant changes and

activities have taken place on the ground during the past decade. In fact, empirical evidence on the ground point to both changes and lack thereof in security, governance, and development, including the persistent militarized presence of Tatmadaw in the war zones, a significant expansion of civilian government structures into ethnic Karen areas, and an increase in economic development activities in Kawthoolei (Jolliffe, 2016). This prompts a number of questions. What does it mean for the quest for peace that the core conflict issue, i.e. federalism, struggles to be addressed in negotiation while realities on the ground are fast-changing in many areas and ways? Do they support the process of peacebuilding, risk prolonging the conflict, or hold neutral effects?

The local level of peacebuilding is generally understudied in Myanmar. While there are multiple analyses of the national level peace negotiations (Kipgen, 2015; Thawnghmung, 2017), there are few if any substantial assessments of peacebuilding at the local level since the ceasefire negotiations in 2012 and onwards. This might have to do with the lack of access to local communities and poor communication due to lack of language competence among researchers. With local language knowledge, I consider myself, therefore, as uniquely positioned to fil the gap in knowledge about peacebuilding at this local level.

Theory Development/Refinement

The case of peacebuilding in Myanmar also represents an opportunity to engage with debates about peacebuilding in general. Since the 1990s, the literature on peacebuilding has been dominated by the so-called liberal peace, which involves joint international efforts to help bring about peace in war-torn countries (Chandler, 2017). The dominance of this form of peacebuilding has neglected the emergence of other alternatives, including domestic peacebuilding where the main actors are local rather than international (de Oliveira, 2011). Although it is important to acknowledge the significant role of international actors, the peace process in Myanmar is mainly a domestic one. Therefore, in addition to studying in its own right, it is also interesting to link it to more general debates about the conditions and ways in which peace can be made by differently situated actors.

Academic works on peacebuilding in Myanmar, as previously mentioned, are limited and few have studied the case with explicit reference to the broader peacebuilding literature. In fact,

the article by McCarthy & Farrelly (2020) titled 'Peri-Conflict Peace: Brokerage, Development, and Illiberal Ceasefires in Myanmar's Borderlands', published as part of a special issue on illiberal peacebuilding in Conflict, Security & Development, is to my knowledge the only work of that kind. While rich in empirical details from which this thesis will partly draw, other works on peace dynamics in Myanmar (Brenner, 2019; Kyed, 2021; Lall and South, 2014) have made little if any reference to the general peacebuilding literature. Thus, building on the existing empirical studies and on the emerging literatures on domestically led peacebuilding, I join a debate on how domestic actors in conflict affected Kawthoolei have attempted to build peace on their own terms.

Research Problem and Questions

To address the above-mentioned knowledge gaps, this thesis is guided by the following research problem statement: The characteristics of local peacebuilding in Kawthoolei during the 2012-2020 period. It seeks to address questions about the form of peace evident on the ground, and the locally embedded strategies, processes, and actors that have combined to produce it. Moreover, as peace is inherently normative, it is important to question the transformative power, or lack thereof, the peacebuilding model has for the creation of a sustainable peace. To break apart the research problem, I have formulated the following research questions (RQs):

1. *What are the peacebuilding strategies of the involved actors?*
2. *What characterizes the form of peace that has been achieved so far?*
3. *What is the sustainability of the peacebuilding model observed?*

These questions are purposefully asked in order to establish factual statements about the strategies involved, the forms of peace achieved, and the sustainability of the form of peacebuilding in Kawthoolei. A predominant focus will be given to the first question. This is because, as the process has yet to be concluded, the outcome remains open-ended and must be understood as the direction towards which it goes. The first and second questions (strategies and outcomes) are closely linked and will be sought answered with reference to theoretical concepts, e.g. whether they are liberal, hybrid, or illiberal in form. The third RQ (sustainability), in contrast, is somewhat normative. It is,

however, important to ask and the answer to it will be based on an overall assessment of the empirical evidence that are generated and of the research participants perceptions about it.

The questions will be answered by looking into local dynamics of peacebuilding in the three key sectors, namely security, governance, and development, which constitute the arenas where the proximate causes of conflict are being battled, renegotiated, and reorganized by the conflict actors. While looking at all three sectors undoubtedly makes this project an ambitious one, I see this brevity not only as feasible but appropriate and even necessary to obtain complete answers to the questions asked. This is because these sectors are intrinsically linked to one another. The construction of a road for development in a Kawthoolei area during the ceasefire, for instance, would inevitably also have important implication for territorial control and population governance.

Moreover, instead of seeking in-depth knowledge of, for example, one specific area within governance (e.g. education) or within development (e.g. agriculture), the goal is rather to identify and make sense of patterns of events and changes on the ground within all three sectors in order to draw conclusions about peacebuilding strategies, outcomes, and sustainability. Finally, although the focus is on the local level peacebuilding between KNU and the state in the 2012-2020 period, the case cannot be studied in isolation. Important factors such as pre-2012 history, national level politics, other local factors (e.g. other armed Karen actors), the role/impact of international actors, and the recent coup situation will be brought up along the way where relevant.

1.2 Theory, Methods, and Limitations

The research project is designed as a theory-informed qualitative case study which entails an in-depth investigation of the phenomena in question. Key concepts within the peacebuilding literature will be used to inform the analysis of the empirical evidence.

Theory

Theoretically, I approach the case mainly through the currently emerging literature on illiberal peacebuilding (Smith et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2018). Illiberal peacebuilding means such as predation, clientelism, cronyism and corruption, though neglected in the literature, have been used by many actors in in conflict affected societies (de Oliveira, 2011; Lewis & Sagnayeva, 2020). In Myanmar as a whole, ceasefires and violent counterinsurgency strategies of the state have historically existed together and continues to do so (Kramer, 2009; Ruzza, 2015). Moreover, the significant increase in economic activities in the region since the 2012 ceasefire calls for a need to study how economic means are combined with military and political strategies in order to contain or resolve armed conflicts. In seeking to understand peacebuilding strategies in Kawthoolei, I examine whether and how violent and economic means have been employed by the state.

In addition, I also draw to a lesser extent on the literature on hybrid peacebuilding (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Although hybrid peace literature emerged as critique of and an alternative approach to peacebuilding, I consider the concept of hybridity as transferable to study domestically led peace processes. It is relevant in this study because local attempts to solve the proximate causes of conflict in Kawthoolei – through hybridization of different interests, institutions, practices, etc. - have so far resulted in some forms of hybrid arrangements in the security, governance, and development sectors. This literature has been used to answer questions about strategies and outcomes by tracing the hybridization processes that have produced the outcomes, and by examining how the factors producing the current form of peace are opening or closing the opportunities for the creation of a more positive form of peace (Galtung, 1964). Chapter 3 provides a more detailed presentation of these theoretical approaches as well as how peace research has been approached by human geographers.

Methods

Methodologically, the case has been approached through a retroductive research strategy that seeks to identify the relations and mechanisms behind observable patterns in the chosen case. Qualitative methods have been most suitable to approach the research questions which concern complex social

processes. I have conducted 13 online semi-structured interviews with key informants, who include top- and local-level KNU and KNLA leaders, civil society organizations, and expert observers, in the period between August 2020 and January 2021. Five additional semi-structured interviews conducted by a PhD candidate have also been used. The length of the interviews varies between 45 and 120 minutes. Additionally, I have used detailed existing document sources which include not only academic works, reports, journalistic articles, but also unique data (e.g. YouTube data) in Karen language which has not previously been made available to international research.

In terms of analysis strategies, I have used process tracing and thematic analysis to analyze the different parts of the data intended to answer different questions. All data have been treated through latent analysis, which involves interpretation beyond what is explicit in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To make sense of the data intended to answer RQ1 and RQ2, process tracing has been an appropriate analytical strategy (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Through identification of strategies and outcomes, and through the construction of causal mechanisms between them, a set of theoretically and empirically grounded explanations – of what happened, how it happened, and what it has led to – has been possible. To analyze the data intended to answer RQ3, I used thematic analysis to look for latent themes in particular aspects of the data and present them as a coherent story (Cope, 2016).

Although the initial plan of conducting fieldwork turned out to be impossible due to Covid-19, the primary interview data and the extensive use of existing data have provided me with a fairly good understanding of the situation. Chapter 4 provides a more detailed presentation and justification of my methodological choices and critically reflect on their strengths and weaknesses.

Limitations

While constantly making sure that the research design and implementation is as rigorous as possible, I also acknowledge important limitations of this thesis research. First, studying the case from a distance without having been to the site necessarily limits the degree of knowledge and understanding I have been able to gain of the complex events and processes that have been taking place on the ground. Second, since the peace process in Myanmar is a broader one, my exclusive

focus on Kawthoolei areas cannot and is not intended to be generalizable about how the peace process has been embodied in other parts of the world. I hope, however, that insights into dynamics of local peacebuilding in this region can shed light on peace processes as a broader phenomenon.

Third, it is a limitation that this study is "Karen-centric" in that perspectives from the government have not been incorporated. Since I at an early stage realized that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for a student researcher from afar to collect primary data from Burmese state officials, I purposely designed this research with a focus on ethnic Karen perceptions and experiences. It is thus a limitation that the state officials have not been given an opportunity to explain and justify their policies and actions. Nevertheless, it remains important to listen to the voices and concerns related to the peace process of Karen actors and civilians on the ground. I should also note that my shared ethnic background with the studied group may have implications for the findings. A critical account of my researcher's role is given in chapter 4.

1.3 Structure

The next chapter present a background analysis of the conflict between the State of Myanmar and KNU, focusing particularly on the cause, emergence, and developments of the conflict since its inception. Chapter 3 presents a review of the peacebuilding literature and the theoretical concepts that will be used to inform the analysis chapters. Three major approaches to peacebuilding, namely the dominant liberal peacebuilding, the recent turn to hybrid peacebuilding, and the emerging illiberal peacebuilding, will be presented. Chapter 4 presents and justifies the methodological choices made throughout the research design and accounts for their strengths and weaknesses. In addition, I also reflect on my role and my own experiences in the research process.

The next five chapters are analytical. Respectively, chapter 5, 6, and 7 critically analyse the peacebuilding strategies of the involved actors in security, governance, and development sectors. Depending on suitability, each of these chapters are organized differently, with the main aim of answering question about strategies. Next, follows chapter 8, which discusses the outcomes of the peace in each sector and the sustainability of the form of peacebuilding. Chapter 9 returns to the literature and discusses the theoretical lessons that can be extracted from the case of at hand.

It discusses how the form of peacebuilding seen in Kawthoolei during the past decade can contribute to our understandings of the conditions under which peace can or cannot be created. Finally, chapter 10 gives a summary of the thesis and answers to the RQs.

2 War and Peace in Kawthoolei

This chapter presents a background analysis of the case in question. I start by briefly presenting Myanmar's post-independence political trajectories. Next, I contextualize the Karen conflict within the broader civil war and describe roughly how the now 72-year long struggle has evolved throughout the decades. Finally, I present an account of the changing post-2012 relations between KNU and the government of Myanmar.

2.1 Myanmar's Post-Colonial Politics

Myanmar, formerly named Burma, has been at war with itself since independence from Britain in 1948, making it one of the world's longest ongoing wars (South, 2011). The Southeast Asian country is diverse in terms of religion, ethnicity, linguistics, and culture. While Bamar is the majority ethnic group, a large number of minority ethnic nationalities groups exists. The largest of these are the Shan, Karen, Kayah, Kachin, Mon, Chin and Arakan people, making up about 1/3 of the 53 million populations (Charney, 2009). Karen is the third largest ethnic group in the country. Administratively, the country is divided in 7 Bamar-dominated regions and 7 ethnic-based states, with an administrative hierarchy that goes from central government, down to the regional/sub-state government, townships, village tracts, and villages.

To fully grasp the modern politics of Myanmar, it is of crucial importance to understand its experience of colonialism, especially in relation to the British employed divide and rule strategy. As noted by Selth (1986, in Garbani & Walton, 2019), it is difficult to overstate how colonialism, including the World War II (WWII), exacerbated interethnic tensions between the Bamar and Karen. Ever since the colonization of Burma in 1885, Karen and other ethnic groups had been made to serve in the colonial administration (including police) and in suppressing Bamar nationalist resistance against British colonial rule (Smith, 1991). The interethnic tensions and intercommunal violence were exacerbated during WWII when the anti-colonial Bamar nationalists for a while sided with the Japanese while Karen fought alongside the British colonial masters.

The periods before prior to and after independence in 1948 were characterized by political instability, and disagreements about how and by whom the country should be governed (Smith, 1991). For instance, while there were opposing communist vs. liberal forces within the Bamar nationalists, within and between the minority ethnic groups, there were differing opinions whether or not independent statehood or federalism should be pursued. In the case of the Karen, the struggle started well before independence. Contrary to popular beliefs, despite different opinions about federalism vs. independence, there was indeed an initial dominant openness to federalism (Garbagni & Walton, 2020). It was only after the escalating intercommunal violence and the massacres committed by Bamar nationalists, which fueled the Karen fear of being marginalized in a future independent Burma, that the Karen leaders leaned more towards independent statehood.

The event of independence in 1948 was shortly after followed by the armed outbreaks by the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and the Karen National Union (KNU) (Lintner, 1991). The move to take up arms, according to popular Karen understanding, was because there were no other alternatives (Garbagni & Walton, 2020). The CPB and KNU, both of whom used to exercise significant influence in the urban power center though in different ways, were now waging a post-colonial war against the central government. By the 1950s, both were forced to retreat to the peripheries. CPB retreated to the northeastern region, while KNU to the southeastern region of the country (Lintner, 1990). For KNU, southeastern Myanmar served in the coming decades as its 'liberated zones' and later the central point for the broader inter-ethnic democracy movement.

The military coup in 1962 marked another dramatic shift in the country's political history. According to the military, also known as the Tatmadaw, the most important reason for the coup was to avoid chaos of potential federalism (Smith, 1991). The 1950s saw growing unrest also by other ethnic groups because the earlier promise of federalism was not honoured as agreed upon in the 1947 Panglong agreement. Several EAOs were formed after the coup in 1962, including the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). The self-perception of the military, which remains well alive today, is that a centralized state and strong military is needed in order to guard the country against disintegration of the union, disintegration of the national unity, and to ensure perpetuation of sovereignty (Callahan, 2003). The complete military rule that followed led to military capture of the state, economy, and all spheres of life.

Led by dictator Ne Win, the military's isolated the country and introduced the so-called *Burmese Way to Socialism* which entailed the nationalization of the economy was nationalized and isolationist policies. However, despite claiming that it intervened in politics to maintain the sovereignty and integrity, Bertil Lintner, a long-time observer of Myanmar's politics, argues that:

> Rather than fighting the rebels, Ne Win and his 4th Burma Rifles spent the latter part of the 1950s building up a power base – and a business empire that in many ways endures today – centered around his regiment … Thus, the power structure that emerged in Myanmar after 1962 had more to do with preserving an order that hugely privileged the military in an otherwise collapsing society than the fact that the officers had seen fierce combat. (Lintner, 2021).

The emergence of the military into politics – soon followed by a repressive economic system, heavy militarization and "Bamarnization" the state, and forced assimilation of ethnic nationalities – had the opposite effect in that it led to increased ethnic grievances about self-determination (Smith, 1991). A number of new ethnic armed organizations emerged, and war intensified in Myanmar's borderlands. There is thus a dialectical relation between the centralized, majoritarian, and militarized state and the emergence of armed movements in the country.

The rule of Ne Win continued until 1988 when Bamar student-led popular uprisings began, triggered by an oppressive economic system and a desire for democracy. These events later led to a "self-coup" within the military and marked a new period (Jones, 2014).

Than Shwe, the new dictator serving as a head of state reform from 1992 to 2011, introduced a partial liberalization of the economy. In addition, the military secured ceasefires with most of the EAOs in the north, which materialized due to constant military offensives and economic development incentives (Sadan, 2016). This also coincided with post-cold war geopolitical changes that led China and Thailand to promote economic cooperation with the regime in Yangon. Avoiding political dialogue, the new regime instead promoted clientelist economic relations with the leaders of the northern EAOs in a process referred to as ceasefire capitalism (Woods, 2011), which involved joint resource extraction between the military, military-cronies, Chinese business actors, and leaders of the EAOs (Kramer, 2009). Through this system which they

created and led, the Tatmadaw further strengthened its military capacities and economic power and enabled the commanders to enrich themselves.

It is from this position of strength and dominance that the military initiated the political changes in the early 2010s through its so-called 'discipline-flourishing democracy' road map, with its self-penned 2008 Constitution as the backbone (Jones, 2014a). The institutionalization of the hybrid political regime that emerged meant that, despite some positive democratic reforms, the military regime continued to enjoy political and economic dominance. The 2008 Constitution guarantees it 25 % of the seats on parliament and control the three most important ministries – Border, Defense, and Home Affairs – regardless of election outcomes (Stokke et al., 2017). Furthermore, the requirement that any constitutional amendments need more than 75 % of the votes ultimately gave the military veto power and meant that they intended to stay in power, politically and economically.

In short, politics in Myanmar has since 1962 been dominated by the military. Creating the image that it is the "savior" of the country's sovereignty while ignoring ethnic minority groups' call for autonomy, the military has hold onto power and gradually become the dominant political and economic force in the country. The country has seen important changes in 1998 and 2011, in relation to partial economic and political liberalization. Yet, the following periods also saw continuity in military dominance of politics and economy. Finally, it should be noted that there are in principle two kinds of conflict in Myanmar, one over state form (central/federal) and one over government form (democracy/authoritarianism), which are closely interwoven.

2.2 The Never-Ending War in Kawthoolei

Starting in 1949, the war in Kawthoolei is Myanmar's longest running war. Karen people number between 3 to 7 million and reside mainly in the southeastern part of the country, but a significant number of them also live in the urban areas like Yangon (Charney, 2009). The group is internally diverse and differs in religion, linguistics, dialectics, education, class, and political convictions. Although the movement's leaders initially called for independence, the call was shortly after changed to autonomy in a federal democratic union (Garbagni & Walton, 2020). The movement

is led by Karen Nation Union (KNU) and its armed wing Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Geographically, Kawthoolei is used to refer to southeastern Myanmar (see map 3).

72 years after it was started by an educated Karen elite who emerged out of the colonial administration, the Karen movement continues to call for self-rule. Although the movement had been driven out of the urban post-colonial power center by the 1950s, KNU remained a politically and militarily strong opponent to the state. It established a sophisticated governance system, including education, health, and justice line departments. With relatively firm territorial control over Southeastern Myanmar, it operated as a de facto government in the decades that followed independence. In the context of the isolationist economy introduced by Ne Win's regime in 1962, KNU's control of the informal Thai-Myanmar border trade enabled it to finance its movement. Tho Doo, a former KNLA leader, now in diaspora, recalled the 1970-1980s as follows:

> In those days, KNU was at its prime of life, economically and militarily strong. Mining, logging, and taxation made it economically strong. Neighboring Thailand also treated KNU with respect. Arms brokers also supplied KNU with surplus arms and ammunitions from the Vietnam and Cambodia civil wars. Strongholds were built along the Moei river and caused a big challenge to the Tatmadaw. (Tho Doo, Interview).

In addition to the relative power, the Karen movement was also at the political forefront in advocating democracy. Particularly after the 1988 uprisings, KNU allied with the ethnic Bamar democracy movement that emerged out of it. KNU's long-time headquarter, Manerplaw, became their operational center. However, this was short-lived as the period was also paralleled by the beginning of a steep decline in the strength of KNU. First, the constant military offensives that had begun in the mid-1980s had weakened the movement militarily (Tho Doo, interview). KNU suffered significantly in this period because the Tatmadaw had had ceasefire agreements with most EAOs by the 1990s and concentrated its attacks on KNU, its arch enemy, who remained as the only sizeable EAO that rejected ceasefire with the military regime (Brenner, 2018).

Second, the simultaneous partial liberalization of the national economy dismantled its smuggling operations and taxation of the border trade, weakening the movement economically. Third, KNU experienced its first mutiny when the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was

formed in 1994, amidst the continuous military defeats of movement, due to grievances that its leaders and members felt towards the Christian-dominated KNU leadership (Charney, 2009). A number of other splits, discussed more in chapter 5, have also taken place since then. The Tatmadaw was quick in taking advantage of this situation and co-opted the DKBA in its fight against KNU. This led to joint attacks against KNU which soon after led to the fall of the movement's long-time headquarters. Describing the fall of Manerplaw as something that was "turning everything upside down", Tho Doo elaborated:

> It was indeed a big blow to Karen Revolution, and the impacts were so huge that KNU was weakened politically, financially, and militarily. KNU lost the headquarter, the territories, the soldiers, and most of all the morale of every individual. The refugee problem and the uprising DKBA problem are not easily subsided. It was causing the KNU a nerve and it was not easily resolved. It also affected the strength and activities of KNU's close allies. (Tho Doo, interview).

Since the fall of Manerplaw, KNU has become significantly weakened in terms of territorial control and military and economic strength. Despite decline in its military strength, KNU remains the dominant non-state political actor and enjoys significant legitimacy among Karen populations in the region (Saferworld & KPSN, 2019). Though varying in degree, it has both civilian and military presence in all seven KNU administrative districts, which together make up Kawthoolei. A general distinction can be made between the northern and southern districts. Whereas the former is more autonomous and military stronger, the latter has since the 1990s lost significant territories and been weakened militarily. I present this in more detail through the analysis.

In short, KNU has travelled a long way since it went underground in 1949. The goal of the movement has been and continues to be autonomy within a federal democratic union of Myanmar. Moreover, KNU has fought the Tatmadaw-allied DKBA and has had a combination of alliance and tension with another EAO, New Mon State Party (NMSP), but the conflict line has always been state-centered.

2.3 Reforms, Ceasefires and Negotiations

The reforms initiated by the military in the early 2010s was enthusiastically welcomed by domestic and well as international actors, with some seeing it as the best opportunity in many decades to achieve peace (South, 2011). The military held elections in 2010 which was won by its own Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). The elections were largely seen as undemocratic as the main opposition party, National League for Myanmar (NLD), boycotted it. However, in the 2015 elections, NLD won a landslide victory, leading to the formation a quasi-civilian government that existed with the military. The reforms have been early supported by the international community who believed that Myanmar was moving towards a full-fledged democratic, peaceful, and prosperous country. Yet, others were more cautious, pointing to the resumption of large-scale fighting in the north between Tatmadaw and KIO (Sadan, 2016).

Within KNU, different opinions have existed between its leaders about the pace and character of negotiations with the government (Gravers, 2016). A general but oversimplified distinction is made between a *critical faction* and a *pro-ceasefire faction*. The former faction, led by leaders like General Baw Kyaw Heh and Padoh Zipporah Sein, related more cautiously to the reforms, favored an incremental approach, and collective political bargaining with all EAOs. The latter faction, led by General Mutu Say Poe and Padoh Kwe Htoo Win, has showed more trust in the potential of the reforms, adopted a pragmatic approach, as exemplified by its choice to leave the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), an EAO-based alliance that initially sought to negotiate with the government collectively. The latter is more open to economic development during the ceasefire. I elaborate on these differences in chapter 7 (development).

It suffices here to say that the movement has since 2012 been led by the pro-ceasefire faction who gained power after the 2012 KNU elections and further consolidated its power in the 2017 elections (Brenner, 2018). Led by General Mutu Say Poe, a KNU negotiation team signed a bilateral ceasefire in 2012. Although the agreement was signed without mandate and was therefore subject to much criticism, it was accepted by organization's leadership for the sake of unity (Jolliffe, 2016). Following the ceasefire, both bilateral and multilateral negotiations was held between KNU, other EAOs, and the government. The negotiations resulted in the so-called Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015, which was signed by KNU and seven others

EAOs (Thawnghmung, 2017). Two more EAOs followed suit in 2018. Since 2015, four rounds of high-level negotiations, called Union Peace Conferences (UPC) has been held between these.

The negotiations have taken place during the NLD period. There is much continuity in the approach to peace from USDP and NLD governments, especially in relation to the importance of securing ceasefires with EAOs, but the introduction of political negotiations during the NLD period was a novelty. That said, however, it is generally accepted that the negotiations have gone slow and made little political progress since its inceptions due to military resistance and constitutional obstacles (Nyein, 2020). Moreover, the peace process has not been inclusive as most of the other major EAOs, making up approximately 80 % of the non-state fighting forces, remained outside the negotiations. Though important, the national level peace process has not succeeded in addressing the cause of conflict. KNU leaders generally acknowledged that no political gains have been achieved since 2012 (Tha Taw; Dah Ler; Tee Kaw; interview).

2.4 Summary

Since independence, the conflict abouts the form of rule (unitary/federal) and form of government (democracy/authoritarianism) has evolved and changed in significant ways, as have the conflict in Kawthoolei. They are highly complex, involving a wide range of actors, but center generally on the state, which has since the 1962 coup been led by the Tatmadaw.

Before proceeding, I shall clarify some terms. First, although distinguishing between the NLD and the military/USDP governments is important at the national level politics, in my study of local peacebuilding, my use of the term *the state* refers mainly to and used interchangeably with the military/Tatmadaw. This is i) because the military is also the dominant actor at local level politics and ii) because little changes of relevance for this study has taken place on the ground since NLD's coming into power in 2016. Second, my use of *Karen actors* refers to all actors in the nationalist movement, including KNU leaders, its line department workers, and the Karen CSOs.

3 Theories of Peacebuilding

This chapters reviews the peacebuilding theories and concepts that will be used to inform the analysis of peacebuilding in Kawthoolei. Selective by necessity due to the vast size of the literature, the review sketches what I identify as the most important approaches to peacebuilding since the 1990s, namely liberal, hybrid, and illiberal peacebuilding. The importance of these approaches lies neither in their normative value nor in nature of their impacts, but primarily in the distinctiveness they each contain. In my review, I draw particular emphasis to the primary actors involved, the main strategies adopted, and the general outcomes achieved in each approach. I also consider critiques against the approaches in order to demonstrate how they, despite being distinctive, together form one and the same debate about peacebuilding.

I start the section below by briefly clarifying some key concepts and reviewing the limited human geographic research on peace. I then present and discuss liberal peacebuilding, which is the dominant form of peacebuilding and around which other bodies of the literature development or contrast. Next, I discuss the recent emergence of hybrid peacebuilding that emerged as a critique of and an alternative to address the limitations of liberal peacebuilding. Finally, I present the currently emerging literature on illiberal forms of peacebuilding, which in fundamental ways break with the two other literatures. I point along the way to the relevance of these literatures to understand the case of Kawthoolei.

Understandings of Peace and Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding refers in general to the resolution of conflict between individuals, groups, and states (Mac Ginty, 2006). In difference to peacemaking and peacekeeping, which respectively seek to change the attitudes and behaviors of parties in a conflict, peacebuilding is more comprehensive in that it seeks to also address and revolve the underlying causes that have led to a conflict in the first place. A general understanding of peace is the classical distinction between negative and positive peace (Galtung, 1964). Whereas the former refers to the mere absence of violence, the

latter refers to a situation where violence is ceased, and the underlying causes of a conflict are resolved. Despite sustained critiques, this definition remains an influential one.

Building on Galtung (1964) to better capture the diverse forms of peace that emerge in post-settlement societies, Höglund and Kovacs (2010) suggests the 'peace triangle', in which peace is measured in the following indicators: the extent to which underlying *issues* behind a conflict, hostile *attitudes* held by, and violent *behaviors* of antagonists are changed. For instance, a peace settlement may cease direct violence, but structural causes and hostile attitudes may remain largely unchanged. Similarly, there can also be situations of 'no war, no peace', which may result from i) geographic containment, ii) ceasefire without peace, and iii) non-implementation of peace agreement (Mac Ginty, 2006). A central point in these conceptualizations is that forms of peace may exist somewhere between war and positive peace. In seeking to identify the form of peace in Kawthoolei, Galtung (1964) and Mac Ginty's (2006) conceptualizations will be used.

It is important to note that actors' understanding of peace not only influence but also determine their choice of peacebuilding actors, strategies, and targeted peace outcomes. That is, the various approaches to peacebuilding may differ in views about the appropriate means and sequences, or *strategies*, through which peace may be made possible. For instance, an authoritarian leader who adopt the meaning of peace as the mere absence of violence or negative peace would normally not seek to address the conflict issues (Lewis et al., 2018). Moreover, differences also exist with regard to who the primary *actors* and what the *outcomes* of peacebuilding should be. Actors, strategies, and outcomes are therefore intrinsically linked. However, it should be noted that there may be combination of different actors and strategies in peacebuilding and things do not always go as planned due to unintended consequences and path dependencies.

Human Geography on Peace and Peacebuilding

Human Geography has made relatively few contributions to the empirical and theoretical literature on peace and peacebuilding. While there is a long tradition for geographical studies of war, including research on the geopolitics of war and security, quantitative research on civil war, and natural resources in war economies (Le Billon, 2012) there are relatively few publications by

geographers that focus explicitly on peace (Koopman, 2018; Megoran, McConnell, & Williams, 2016). Consequently, interdisciplinary peace studies have not paid much attention to the work of geographers. There are, however, a few anthologies that address questions of geography and peace, including contributions to the interdisciplinary critique of liberal peacebuilding (Kobayashi, 2012; Megoran et al., 2016; Stokke & Uyangoda, 2011). There are relatively few publications by geographers on post-liberal forms of peace and peacebuilding, except Megoran's work on illiberal peacebuilding in the form of authoritarian conflict management, which is also an important source of inspiration for this thesis (Lewis, Heathershaw, & Megoran, 2018).

The literature that exists on geography and peace emphasizes that: "Peace is always shaped by the spaces in which it is made, as it too shapes those spaces. Peace means different things to different groups and in different times, spaces, places, and scales. Peace can be created at individual, family, community, national, and other scales, and using the term can foster seeing these scales as intertwined. Peace is a located and spatial process—and as such is necessarily plural" (Koopman, 2018, no page numbers). This resonates well with the aim of the present thesis, to provide a contextual examination of strategies of peacebuilding and its peace outcomes in the case of Kawthoolei. Given the relatively thin literature on geographies of peace, however, the thesis draws more on interdisciplinary theories of peace than peace studies in human geography. But the case study will form a basis for reflecting on theoretical lessons, which also includes how the state uses geographical strategies to contain armed conflicts.

3.1 Liberal Peacebuilding: Rise and Fall

What is known as 'liberal peacebuilding' has dominated the practice of peacebuilding since the 1990s and, consequently, attracted most attention in the academic literature on the topic. Rooted in the ideological thoughts of liberalism, its immediate origins trace back to the end of the Cold War, after which the 'End of History' was declared by Fukuyama (1992). The argument was that human political and ideological development had reached the teleological end-point of history, and that time was ripe for liberalism to be exported. At about the same time, UN introduced An

Agenda for Peace, a comprehensive document calling for the need and laying out the way to strengthen international peacebuilding to go beyond mere peacekeeping (Chandler, 2017).

Beyond this moment of Western triumph, there was also pressing global issues that triggered the emergence of liberal peace, particularly the protracted intra-state conflicts, the unfolding genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica, and mass human rights abuses committed by domestic actors elsewhere (Mac Ginty, 2011). Consequently, renegotiations of state sovereignty and non-interventions principles took place, leading shortly after to the first of many international peacebuilding interventions (Chandler, 2017). It was in this context and for these reasons that liberal peacebuilding emerged; full of political confidence, material resources, assumed competence, and optimism about a better world characterized by liberal order.

Actors and Strategies

Liberal peacebuilding was a project led by international actors, mainly leading western states, including the US, UK, Germany, Canada, and Australia, and international organizations and financial organizations, including UN, World Bank, and IMF (Paris, 2004). Though relatively less powerful as they were funded by the states and international organizations, international non-governmental organization (INGOs) were important implementers of liberal peace policies. In contrast, local actors in the intervened countries were largely excluded (Hughes et al., 2015). Local elites were seen as illegitimate and barriers rather than part of solution to peace, making liberal peace a project that was mainly top-down in character and led by external actors.

The liberal project sought to achieve peace through the reconstruction and transformation of the *states*, *societies*, and *economies* of the intervened countries, all of which were seen as technical tasks that follow linear processes (Paris, 2004). It is deeply influenced by the so-called "democratic peace" and "capitalist peace" which assume democratic and capitalist societies are inherently peaceful (Selby, 2015). Therefore, the assumption was that by crafting democratic states and neoliberal economies, peace would inevitably follow (Herring, 2011).

The first major arena in need of transformation was that of the state, which needed capable and democratic institutions. Three specific components of state reconstruction have, albeit with different weight throughout the 1990s and 2000s, been prioritized: *statebuilding*, *democracy*, and *civil society promotion* (Paris, 2004). Firstly, the troubled societies needed functional states that mirror the Weberian state, characterized by state monopoly of violence, if it was to achieve stability. The social order was to be established through processes that include ceasefire agreements, demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR), security sector reform (SSR), and the promotion of rule of law. Additionally, it was also important to make the state accountable to the citizens, among other ways, by promoting effective public administration that could deliver services to the deprived populations (Selby, 2011).

Secondly, it was important to promote democracy. In line with the democratic peace, the idea was that by promoting free and fair elections, civil and political freedoms, and power-sharing arrangements, peaceful societies would emerge. However, while political liberalization of this kind was highly prioritized in the 1990s, the decade that followed saw a major shift in liberal peacebuilding which is entailed a much greater emphasized on the statebuilding component (Chandler, 2017). Peacebuilding became close to synonymous with statebuilding. This shift resulted from the argument that without effective state institutions to control it, too early liberalization like elections was dangerous and destabilizing for the intervened states. This argument was championed among others by Paris (2004), whose influential "Institutionalization Before Liberalization" (IBL) thesis became the norm of the 2000s.

Thirdly, for democracy to consolidate, civil society promotion was seen as important (Chandler, 2017). The task of civil society was to work between the informal spheres of life, including the family and economy, and the formal sphere of state and government. Through such a mechanism, it would help deepen democracies. It is noted that because it generates diverse interests, civil society was thought to "mitigate polarities of political conflict and develop and democratic culture of tolerance, moderation and compromise" (Diamond, 1994, in Chandler, 2017, p. 96). Beyond deepening democratic institutions and values, civil society, e.g. through local NGOs, was also expected to make the government accountable by voicing societal concerns from below the state level. Last but not least, promotion of civil society was also a way of countering the local elites who were usually seen as illegitimate.

The second major arena in need of transformation was that of the economy. Influenced by the capitalist peace, the idea was that the promotion of neoliberal economic governance – which is characterized by market-led, open economy, small role of state in the economy, and a large private sector – would be in support of peace. An underlying assumption for some liberal actors, influenced by the greed-based understandings of conflict, was that when a society is wealthy there will be little motivations for citizens to take up arms (e.g. Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Moreover, the period of the 1990s was characterized by the global rise of neoliberalism, which was strongly supported by the US, UK, and the international financial institutions, which make it seem as if there was really no other option (Pugh, 2005).

Outcomes of Peace and Critiques

Two decades after the end of the Cold War, it became widely acknowledged that the outcomes of liberal peace are not what were promised (Höglund and Kovacs, 2012). A significant achievement is the reduction of direct violence in the intervened societies. However, rather than democratic, wealthy, and peaceful societies as those known in the West, the forms of peace achieved are mainly of hybrid character. Some have even seen recurrence of violence. Democracies achieved are hybrid character in the "grey zone" (Carothers, 2015), while peace achieved are of "no war, no peace" situations where "peace is poverty, insecurity, and excludes true reconciliation with former antagonists". In response to the "end of history" thesis, a "return of history" is now observed where authoritarian regimes like Russia and China are on the rise and human rights issues that characterized the world order in the 1990s persist (Welsh, 2016).

Widespread critiques of various kinds have been directed at the liberal peacebuilding for its poor performance. Chandler (2017) distinguishes between the '*political'* and '*pragmatist'* critiques, both of which has two variants within it.

The political critiques argue that liberal peacebuilders have acted in self-interests. Influenced by a *neo-Marxist perspective*, the first political critique focuses on the neoliberal component of liberal peace and argues that it serves the interests of the powerful western states and institutions. Because it reproduces power hierarchies and inequalities, these critics argue,

liberal peace has rather invited continued or recurrence of conflict (Chandler, 2017). Adopting a *Foucauldian perspective*, the second political critique focuses on the regulatory interests behind liberal peace policies and argues that the main objective of liberal peacebuilders was to prevent instability in a neoliberal capitalist world order (Duffield, in Chandler, 2017). These two groups of critics see liberal peacebuilding, rather than technical, as highly political and interest based.

The pragmatist critiques question the universal conceptualization of liberal peace itself, but are optimistic about reforming it. The first variant is the *radical pragmatist approach* which, while acknowledging its power- and interest-based nature, argues that the failure of liberal peace lies mainly in its universalist assumptions of peace and the resultant ignorance of local concerns of identity and culture (Richmond, 2016; Mac Ginty, 2011). Therefore, liberal peace can reform by including local actors/concerns in peacebuilding processes. The second variant is the *conservative pragmatist approach*. Recognizing societal differences, it calls mainly for a reconceptualization of the liberal notion of sovereign statehood itself, such as accepting good enough state and reformulating the policies' sequences, such as the IBL approach (Paris, 2004).

Thus, critiques of liberal peace are highly diverse and differ in focus as well as political intentions. While some are pessimistic about policy reforms, others are more optimistic. Regardless, they have been important in problematizing key aspects of liberal peace and explaining why it has not delivered the promised form of peace. Importantly, they also serve as important foundations on which alternative approaches to peacebuilding is based. The next section discusses in more detail the radical pragmatist approach which has gained great attention in recent years.

3.2 Hybrid Peacebuilding: An Alternative?

The failure of liberal peace has triggered critiques as well as solutions. According to its proponents, hybrid peace represents "a critical agenda for peace research" and differ in fundamental ways to the top-down, euro-centric, technocratic, and apolitical liberal peace (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). The core of its critique is that liberal peace had left out crucial local voices in its attempt to impose liberal order in culturally diverse societies. Consequently, they argue, peacebuilding should be a joint project between the international and the local (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015).

Although peacebuilding in Myanmar is domestically led, I find hybrid peace important to present here because i) hybridity as an theoretical concept is transferable to other forms of peacebuilding, ii) international actors are very much involved in Myanmar, albeit indirect, and iii) a broad view of the literature is needed to facilitate a discussion about contemporary peacebuilding.

Actors and Strategies

Hybrid peace calls for more substantive engagement with local actors at all levels, including governments, political parties, municipalities, armed groups, local civil society, businesses, communities, and individuals (Mac Ginty, 2015). In difference to liberal peace, it views local actors as legitimate, agential, and resourceful actors without whom peace cannot be created. For instance, it is noted that the hybrid outcomes of peace observed in the intervened countries are the result of, among other factors, local resistance to liberal peace (Mac Ginty, 2011). Therefore, they need to be included in a way that goes beyond mere rhetoric. International actors' role should be of a supportive and facilitative nature. They should identify local agents of peace, especially at the civil society level, and help remove the obstacles they face, i.e. in their struggle against local elites (Richmond, 2016). Though they are agential and networked, the local actors often lack material capacity. It is therefore the task of international actors to strengthen locals' material capacity.

The main strategy of hybrid peacebuilding is hybridization of liberal international norms and interests and non-liberal local forms of agency and identity (Richmond, 2015). Hybridization is needed because neither liberal nor local actors can build positive forms of peace unilaterally. While the former lacks legitimacy, the latter lacks material power, making them interdependent of each other. Because it rejects universalist assumptions of peace and calls instead for the need to recognize a "plurality of peace", though without accepting cultural relativism (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 11), hybrid peacebuilding expect hybrid rather than liberal outcomes of peace to emerge. In contrast to the illegitimate and accidental hybrid outcomes of liberal peace, such forms of hybrid peace are seen as more legitimate and potentially emancipatory because it is culturally sensitive and addresses local needs and concerns. Thus, it is through hybridization of liberal and non-liberal interests, norms, institutions, and practices that a positive hybrid peace is thought to be possible.

A distinction is made between *positive hybrid peace* and *negative hybrid peace*, which results from "hybrid politics", understood as the arena where international and local norms and interests are negotiated (Richmond, 2015). Positive hybrid peace is defined as a situation where the contradictions between local and international norms are resolved, differences accepted, and inequalities addressed. A negative hybrid peace, on the other side, is understood as one that maintains structural violence, fails to resolve the contradiction between local and international norms, and reflect the outsourcing of colonial style rule (Richmond, 2015). Which of these are likely to emerge depend on the nature of the encounter between the international and the local, i.e. the tenser the relationship, the more likely it will result in the negative form. It is, in fact, noted that the early stage of hybrid peacebuilding will often yield a negative form of peace, meaning that the challenge lies in transforming it to become a more positive form of it.

Hybrid peace posits that peacebuilding should start at the local rather than at the international level, i.e. it goes bottom-up and by asking what the locals needs and negotiating in the so-called hybrid politics. This is in contrast to liberal peace's tendency to overlook the agency, potential, and legitimacy of the subalterns. The necessity for a bottom-up approach, according to hybrid peace, is illustrated by the tensions between *needs* and *rights* (Richmond, 2015). It is observed that local actors see needs provision as a basis for rights, but liberal peace ignored it and instead emphasized rights, e.g. constitutional and property rights. It took for granted that the neoliberal economic markets would, through self-help and the market's 'invisible hand' (Smith, 1759, in Herring, 2011), serve the material needs of people. In addition to being illegitimate, such lack of balance between international and local interests has made liberal peace unattractive. According to the hybrid approach, this illustrates why peacebuilding should start at the local level.

As should be clear by now, proponents of hybrid peace call for a critical need to engage with local actors in ways that go beyond rhetoric. That said, hybrid peace proponents are not anti-liberals (Chandler, 2017). They argue merely that by rejecting universalist assumptions of peace, accepting diverse forms of peace, and engaging with locals, positive form of peace may emerge.

Outcomes and Critiques

Hybrid peacebuilding has yet to cross, or is in the process of doing so, the bridge between academic and policy worlds, meaning that clear outcomes are yet to be seen. However, critiques emerge as soon as the approach was suggested. At the core of the critiques, lies the argument that hybrid peace continues to operate within the framework of liberal peace, reproduces its logics of inclusion and exclusion, and ignores the material power relations between the international and the local (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015). In terms of power relations, for instance, a key question is whether locals can negotiate not to be brought into the globalized market economy. Thus, far from radical, the approach is accused of being a "problem-solving tool for the encompassment and folding into globalizing liberal order of cultural, political, and social orders perceived as radically different and obstructionist to its expansion" (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015, p. 49).

It is noted, moreover, that hybrid peace centers its focus on its rejection of universalism but fails to adequately address the policy practices and discourses of liberal peace. For this reason, it is viewed by critics as being part of the pragmatist project which, along with the conservative pragmatist approach, excuses the failure of liberal peace on the basis that it had been too liberal and that non-liberal societies are not ready for western freedoms (Chandler, 2017). Despite these important critiques, however, hybrid peacebuilding has presented itself and continues to develop as a serious alternative approach to tackle issues in conflict affected societies. As I show throughout the thesis, mostly clearly in chapter 9, hybridity is inherent in all peacebuilding activities and processes, in line with the observation that "we are all hybrids" (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 1). A key question is rather which elements to hybridize and to what consequence for peace.

My assumption is that hybridity as an analytical concept and hybridization as a peacebuilding strategy are transferable to domestically led peacebuilding. That is, domestic actors themselves (in place of international and local) can hybridize their interests, institutions, norms, and practices and produce hybridized forms of peace. The possibility of domestic actors producing such form of peace exist in theory. Whether or not this has been done by the Burmese state and KNU in Kawthoolei will be seen throughout the analysis chapter.

3.3 Illiberal Peacebuilding: Worlds Away

Illiberal peacebuilding is worlds away from the above-discussed approaches. The dominance of liberal peacebuilding has neglected and, according to some (Englebert & Tull, 2008, in de Oliveira, 2011), even prevented the practice of domestic peacebuilding as well as discussion about it in scholarly debates. This has happened in the same way as how the 'naturalization' of neoliberal economic practices to reconstruct societies marginalized discussion about better suited alternatives (Pugh, 2005). Nonetheless, recent years have seen an increased interest in illiberal peacebuilding, a distinct approach that has been used by authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes in various parts of the world since the 1990s (Lewis et al., 2018). Unlike liberal and hybrid approaches, which are inherently normative, illiberal approach to build peace are studied primarily as it is practiced, i.e. it is not actively advocated by scholars. However, if peace is defined as negative peace, or the absence of violence, illiberal peacebuilding is an approach in its own right (Smith, 2014).

Due to the neglected scholarly focus on and the lack of active advocacy for the approach, it follows that there remains some confusion about what illiberal peacebuilding exactly is. This means that is there is not specific sets of strategies or outcomes. However, in an attempt to unpack the complexity surrounding the phenomena, Smith et al. (2020) identifies three key characteristics of illiberal peacebuilding that makes it a distinct approach. First, rather than international, the primary actors are domestic. Second, rather than neoliberal economic governance, it "runs on clientelism, cronyism and corruption" (Smith et al., 2020, p. 4). Third, rather than liberal notions of equality and liberty, it emphasizes inequality and order. Focusing on regime stability and an elite-controlled economy, the goal of the approach is often conflict containment, and not conflict resolution. This approach to peacebuilding has been adopted by both authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Central, South and Southeast Asia.

Although this identification of key characteristics is highly useful in distinguishing illiberal peacebuilding from other approaches, a more critical and detailed discussion is needed because the actual practices of the approach in different contexts are highly variegated.

Actors and Strategies

That it is led by domestic actors is a defining characteristic of illiberal peacebuilding. The domestic actors are both state and non-state elites, including governments, local administrators, community elites, business figures, and militia leaders. These domestic actors can practice illiberal peacebuilding both in authoritarian and semi-democratic context. For instance, whereas the states in Central Asia that have adopted this approach are authoritarian regimes, those in South and Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, are semi-authoritarian regimes. Together, they combine to craft "political settlements that produce seemingly stable forms of order" in fragile and conflict affected context (Smith et al., 2020, p. 5). It is moreover observed that while external actors may to a lesser degree influence the process and possibly outcomes of illiberal peacebuilding, as was the case in Sri Lanka's internationalized peacebuilding, the main actors are domestic elites. Nevertheless, practices of illiberal peacebuilding are highly context specific.

Drawing on different empirical cases, scholars have defined illiberal peacebuilding differently. Looking at the case of Angola, de Oliveira (2011, p. 288) defined the approach as "a process of post-war reconstruction managed by local elites in defiance of liberal peace precepts …, with a view to construct hegemonic order and an elite stranglehold over the political economy". Noting that it deviates from liberal peacebuilding, this definition highlights the importance of a strong state and control over the economy. Looking at Indonesia, Smith (2014) understands illiberal peacebuilding primarily as the use of illiberal institutions, especially predation and corruption, that in neo-patrimonial ways seeks to reduce violence. These definitions focus primarily on the state maintenance of a strong state apparatus and, especially, its use of economic means in the attempts to bring about stability and order.

Authoritarian Conflict Management

Looking at the "hard cases" of conflict management, Lewis et al.'s (2018) adopts a broader conceptualization of illiberal peacebuilding. Particularly, drawing on state responses to conflicts in Russia, Sri Lanka, China, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Turkey, the authors develop a framework called Authoritarian Conflict Management (ACM). The framework is understood as an illiberal

peacebuilding approach which seeks "to prevent, de-escalate or terminate violent conflict within a state through the hegemonic control of public *discourse*, *space* and *economic resources* rather than by liberal model of compromise, negotiations and power-sharing" (Lewis et al., 2018, p. 499).

The ACM framework agrees with previous definitions that illiberal peacebuilding deviates from liberal peace and that it uses *economic means*, e.g. through corruption, to reduce violence. The state seeks hegemonic control of the political economy for two reasons: first, to cut off armed non-state actors' access to resources in order to weaken their capacity to fight and, second, to ensure that loyal clientelist groups are the main actors who benefit from financial flows through conflict zone. However, in difference to other understandings of illiberal peacebuilding, ACM adds additional attention to state hegemonic control of public discourse and spatial control. *Public discourse* control is achieved through state propaganda, information control, and knowledge production. The aim is to delegitimize the opponents and undermine their claims that they are driven by legitimate grievances. For example, this can take place through television propaganda, restriction on freedom of speech, and knowledge production, including in the education realm.

Finally, the third domain through which the state aims to manage conflict is through the hegemonic control of *spatial politics*, understood as both military and civilian modes of controlling and shaping spaces (Lewis et al., 2018). A distinction is made between physical, political, and symbolic control of space. Physical spatial control can be achieved by penetrating, closing or dominating space through military patrols, encampment and occupation, by forced resettlement of civilians, and through construction of major infrastructure projects as well as urban reconstruction. With physical control, comes also spatial political control which is important for a state that seeks to exercise authority. To wipe out local history and signalize state power, the state also seeks to dominate space symbolically, for instance, through construction of statues (e.g. national heroes) and the naming of places. Throughout such processes, in the understanding of ACM, violence remains the primary means which the state uses to manage conflict within its boundaries.

Diversity of Means, Uniformity of Goals?

As evident, different approaches to and understandings of illiberal peacebuilding exist. While some understandings emphasize the use of economic means, others put additional greater attention to more coercive means. This is perfectly understandable as social worlds, of which conflicts are a part, are complex and do not exist to fit academic theories. I have noted that some scholars have conceptualized illiberal peacebuilding as mainly the use of economic means, including through corruption, clientelism, neo-patrimonialism, with the goal to reduce violence (Smith et al., 2020). This may have to do with the fact that empirical evidence to build these theories are drawn from cases of illiberal peacebuilding in transitioning and/or semi-democratic contexts, such as those in South and Southeast Asia. Often, states in this region seek to reduce or escalate violence. In contrast, ACM builds on "hard cases" of more authoritarian states that seek not only to prevent and escalate but to terminate the conflicts.

Such differences in context may explain why certain perspectives give more attention to certain aspects of what is known as illiberal peacebuilding. Nevertheless, it is part of the same broadly defined approach because processes of illiberal peacebuilding are often led primarily by domestic actors, runs of corruption, cronyism and clientelism, and emphasis order and inequality. Importantly, it is also distinguished between thin, medium, and thick variants (Smith et al., 2020). Cases of thin illiberal peacebuilding use illiberal means in order to reach liberal ends, as exemplified by Paris' (2004) IBL approach and the current UK approach which Smith et al. (2020, p. 9) identifies as "elite bargaining before institutionalization before liberalization", an extension of IBL. The medium variant is found when the involved actors are unconcerned about the form of peace outcome, as long as it perpetuates, and territorial integrity is not challenged. Finally, the thick variant is seen when both means and ends are illiberal, as was the case in Sri Lanka.

In terms of outcomes, illiberal peacebuilding tends to produce forms of peace that are of negative character. This is perhaps not surprising because states adopting illiberal peacebuilding approach often share the understanding that conflicts are driven by greed- and opportunity, rather than legitimate grievances (Lewis et al., 2018). Consequently, they do not seek to address causes of conflicts, but only to reduce and/or terminate them. Empirical evidence shows that they do manage to reduce violence in the short- to medium-term but violence tends to recur (Smith et al.,

2020). Seen through the Peace Triangle, it can be observed that although violent behaviors are changed, issues and attitudes of the antagonists struggles to be changed. de Oliveira (2011, p. 189), writes that "while accepting that domestically led illiberal reconstruction is, on its own terms, sustainable in a way that externally led liberal peacebuilding is not", the author is "pessimistic about the extent to which it can deliver 'decent societies' (…) to war-torn countries".

In short, one can generally say that depending on context, illiberal peacebuilders adopt a wide range of strategies that they see as fitted, with the goal to reduce and/or terminate conflicts. One can simplistically say that while there is a diversity of means, a uniformity of goals is shared.

3.4 Summary

As may be clear by now, peacebuilding is a complex phenomenon. The review given in this chapter is admittedly an oversimplified attempt to present three distinct approaches to peacebuilding: liberal, hybrid and illiberal. Despite fundamental differences in their approach to build peace, however defined, they form one and the same decade on peacebuilding.

After the Cold War, liberal peace sought to bring about peace in war-torn societies through the construction of functioning states, democracies, and neoliberal market economies, all of which were thought to be conducive of peace. Nearly three decades later, however, it seems clear that liberal peace has not met the expectations of peace and democracy and is indeed in a state of crisis, driven by rather pragmatic responses to conflicts in the world (Chandler, 2017). Moreover, unlike the 1990s, the world order is now a multipolar one where authoritarianism is on the rise (Carothers, 2015; Stokke, 2012). In this context, emerges radical pragmatist hybrid peacebuilding, the results of which are yet to be seen (if it manages to cross the academic-policy bridge at all). In the meantime, illiberal peacebuilding is on the rise and some even argue that, since the Sri Lanka war, the historical norm of military victory has returned (Kovacs & Svensson, 2013).

Using the theoretical concepts and theories presented, I will examine peacebuilding in Kawthoolei and continuously ask what kind of peacebuilding it is a case of, i.e. liberal, hybrid, or

illiberal. In chapter 9, I return to a more theoretical discussion about what the case can teach us about peacebuilding in the contemporary world.

4 Methodological Choices

This chapter presents the methodological choices made throughout the research process and reflects on their suitability in the design. I start by presenting the overall research design, which includes the research problem, objectives, questions, methodology, strategy, paradigm, and the choices methods and participants. Next, I present and discuss the execution of the research project, which include data collection, handling, analysis, and reporting strategies. Along the way, I account for their methodological, practical, and ethical implications. Finally, I reflect critically on the overall process of conducting the research and evaluate the rigor of the project.

4.1 Overall Research Design

Problem, Objectives, and Questions

As noted in the introduction chapter, the research problem (RP) relates to the characteristics of local peacebuilding in Kawthoolei during the 2012-2020 period. Two main objectives have guided the project: empirical and theoretical advancements. Whereas the former seeks a empirically grounded understanding of the case, the latter seeks to engage with the general debate on peacebuilding. Moreover, a more implicit goal has been to "give voice" to a group whom I consider as historically marginalized, identified by Ragin & Amoroso (2011, p. 36) as one of social research's main goals. It is, however, based on my interpretations that I re-present the voices.

To break apart the RP, I have formulated three research questions (RQs), focusing particularly on i) the peacebuilding strategies of the involved actors, ii) peace outcomes achieved, and iii) sustainability of this form of peacebuilding. As the process became stalled inconclusive, the predominant focus will be on the first RQ. The two other RQs will be discussed as the nature of the achieved peace and the direction towards which it was going. Focusing on peacebuilding in both security, governance, and development sectors, the overall ambition has been to understand the case in its totality and present a nuanced picture of the complex reality in Kawthoolei.

Researcher's Role and Choice of Case

It is at this stage important to open up about who I am and my researcher's role in this process. A former refugee from Myanmar, with most of my life spent first in a Karen refugee camp in Thailand and later in Norway, I interpret my role as an insider (Blaikie, 2007). Despite not having been to Myanmar since after birth and not having had any form of relations to the country, my shared ethnicity with the studied group makes me immersed to their social situation. However, in contrast to Blaikie's (2007, p. 11) distinction between "outside expert" and "inside learner", my position is rather "inside expert" since I enter the field with social scientific tools.

My choice of case resulted from both personal and academic interests. While my background from Myanmar left me with a deep interest in its political affairs, many courses in politics, term papers and a bachelor's thesis about Myanmar, and an interpretive community have sustained and increased this interest. These factors have worked together, "naturally" leading me to study the specific case of peacebuilding in Kawthoolei.

Due to the social nature of qualitative research (Dowling, 2016), I acknowledge that my particular role may have affected the findings and I do not claim it to be objective. Throughout this chapter, however, I intend to show that the research has been conducted in a methodologically rigorous and ethically justifiable manner. To deal with my role and enhance the credibility of the research, I adopted the critical reflexive approach (Dowling, 2016, p. 34) and the checking procedure that involves triangulation of multiple sources, methods, investigators and theories (Baxter & Eyles, 1997, in Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016, p. 127).

Case Study of Domestic Peacebuilding

The research project is designed as a *qualitative theory-informed case study*. This means that, informed by existing theories and concepts, it is an in-depth and intensive study of a concrete phenomenon during a specific time period (Blaike, 2007) – in this case, local peacebuilding in Kawthoolei during the 2012-2020 period. The case study methodology has been suitable because

it enabled me to pursue an in-depth understanding of the empirical case and a broadening of academic understanding the phenomenon in general (Baxter, 2016).

Moreover, the case study is suitably designed as qualitative one because the RQs seek to understand a complex social phenomenon, namely peacebuilding. Winchester & Rofe (2016) identify that social research are concerned primarily with societal structures and/or individual experiences. This case study involves both aspects because it seeks to explain complex structures that produce the outcomes of peace in Kawthoolei and perceptions surrounding these. My approach to the case with theoretical propositions, i.e. whether and how the case of Kawthoolei is liberal, hybrid, or illiberal peacebuilding, means that I also treat the case as a general phenomenon.

That said, however, theoretical propositions are assumed by qualitative researchers as contingent or context dependent, which is to say that concepts such as liberal, hybrid, and illiberal are only "true under certain conditions" (Sayer, 2000, in Baxter, 2016). This means that although the case study is theory-informed and I treat it as a general case of the peacebuilding phenomena, I do not seek to generalize the findings of this study. My position is merely that theoretical concepts can help me approach the case and, in turn, the case can help refine the concepts used.

The case of Kawthoolei is a so-called "typical case" (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016, p. 122) of peacebuilding, a phenomenon also seen in other contexts. Yet it is unique due to the centrality of domestic actors and due to my focus on local level peacebuilding. Thus, it can be characterized as a case of *local peacebuilding where domestic actors renegotiate security, governance, and development sectors in the context of a national level peace process as a way to peace*.

Philosophical Assumptions and Research Strategy

My analysis is influenced by the *depth realist* ontology whose assumptions hold that reality is stratified (into the real, actual, and empirical domains) and exist independently of human preconception (Blaikie, 2007). Relatedly, following the *neo-realism* epistemological assumptions, my position is that a deep understanding and explanation of observable realities can be achieved only by locating the structures and mechanisms that have produced them.

Influenced by these assumptions, it has been most suitable to for me to approach the case through a retroductive research strategy (Blaikie, 2007). The strategy involved a cyclical process between theory and data in order to identify the structure and mechanisms, or peacebuilding strategies, that has been responsible for producing the observed form of peace. This iterative process of wandering between theory and data, the identification of structure and mechanisms, and the focus on participants' perception of the peace process, led me to the choices of process tracing and thematic analysis as analysis strategies, to which I return in the below.

Finally, inspired by the elements of the research paradigm of critical theory (Blaikie, 2007, p. 135), I view that research should be conducted not only for its own sake, but also with an integral emancipatory element and that critique should have an active role in the research process. Thus, in looking beyond the observable and developing explanatory understanding of peacebuilding in Kawthoolei, critique is an intentional and integral element.

Choices of Methods and Participants

Qualitative research methods have, as noted earlier, been most suitable me because the RQs seek to answer questions about complex social phenomena and perceptions. In particular, qualitative interviews have been an outstanding method to collect information about complex behaviors and motivations behind as well as gain information about opinions and events (Dunn, 2016). It has also been a tool that enabled me to show respect to and empower Karen people to voice their concerns related to the peace process in the country. The impossibility of doing fieldwork due to covid-19 has also made it appropriate to use secondary sources. I return to this below.

In terms of participants, I was purposive about who I wanted to involve and why. The selection process was based on a set of criteria, though not strictly followed, which included knowledge about the peace process, its relation to events on the ground, and possession of opinion about these. It followed, moreover, that the participants were to be from various geographical, i.e. KNU districts, and professional areas, i.e. CSOs, KNU and KNLA leaders, various KNU line departments, etc. Though not seeking representativeness, the idea was to get a wide range of perceptions about the peace process and an overview of events on the ground.

Changes in the Research Design

Two changes of major significance have been made throughout the research process. The first is related to the lack of fieldwork, including field interviews and observations, due to the pandemic. I had a small hope that it would be possible some time during autumn 2020 but realized slowly that it could not happened. A methodological implication of this is that, arguably, it negatively impacted my understanding of the case at hand. This is because it prevented me from immersing myself into the social reality in the field, which could have given me a better sense of it. However, I quickly adapted to digital fieldwork by August 2020 and attempted to substitute the lack of field observation with online data, including locally produced documentaries on YouTube.

The second change is related to the research design, specifically the focus on state vs. KNU. I initially intended to study mainly KNU's peacebuilding strategies. However, as I delved into the research process, it became clear to me that it is impossible to do it without also looking at the strategies of the state. During data collection and analysis processes, moreover, it became increasingly clear to me that it is the state that overall has been the most active in the local sectors studied. This is because KNU's strategies are rather passive and reactive to those of the state. For this final reporting, it has meant that a predominant focus is given to the strategies of the state. Despite this, I did not change the first RQ because KNU has not been entirely without agency.

4.2 Data Collection Strategies

My research proposal to the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) has been approved when I started data collection in August 2020. I did some background information work to have an overview of individual positions and, where possible, perspectives about peace process. Part of this is to be confident in the conduct of interview and purposive about who I wanted to involve.

Recruiting Participants

The first contact to participants was made directly through email to the individuals (or in some cases, their organizations) and through a contact in Norway who helped me negotiate two interviews. This was a strategic choice made to triangulate my primary sources. I started sending a letter of introduction, which stated my bona fide, research aims, its importance, and what participation exactly entailed, and rules regarding confidentiality. Updated to fit each participant, it was sent either at first contact or after it. During first oral contact, I repeated the information stated in the letter in Karen language, although most of the participants read English well. In that way, I sought to ensure that the consent given to me was properly informed.

While my background as ethnic Karen and ability to communicate in Karen language have arguably benefited me in recruiting participants, I really sensed that access to information is earned rather than given, as noted by Dunn (2016). I spent hours preparing to convincingly communicate the importance of my research and of each participants' involvement in it. I managed in the end to secure the informed consent and participation of 13 individuals. Most of them explicitly stated their understanding of my research's importance, which was encouraging for me. A number of interviews did not materialize either because some participants did not respond or because we could not find appropriate time. It was an ethical choice to minimize a pressuring environment.

The participants had knowledge about the peace process, it impacts and, except in two cases (they provided mainly factual information), an opinion about these. They include: 2 high-level KNU leaders, 1 high-level KNLA leader, 3 local-level KNU affiliated (working primarily the organization's social service provision), 1 in a humanitarian organization, 2 youth leaders, 1 human rights worker, 1 urban Karen observer, 1 long-time peace and conflict monitor, and 1 former KNLA leader now in diaspora. Except the one in diaspora, all participants are based either inside Myanmar or on the Thai-Myanmar border. Within Myanmar, they are also based in different KNU districts. I have decided not to disclose their names, gender, or locations for security reasons.

In addition to triangulating the data, they provide me with factual and opinion-based information, including backroom accounts about the peace process, changes on the ground in all districts, and various perceptions about the peace process.

Conducting the Interviews

I used a semi-structured schedule with fully worded questions because it allowed me to maintain both control and flexibility during the interviews, e.g. to ask prompts (Dunn, 2016). The in-depth interviews have lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours and was conducted in Sgaw Karen language. It was also useful to have tested the questions with a friend because it helped me to properly formulate the questions in Karen language in an easily understandable way and may help improve the quality of the data. Depending on the information I sought, e.g. social service provision or economic activities, I made different interview guides. The questions asked were a mix of storytelling prompts, contrast and opinions, devil's advocate propositions.

Moreover, I have generally used a pyramid structure of interviewing, starting with questions such as their roles and responsibilities, the changes on the ground in the studied sectors, and moving gradually to more reflexive aspects, including the advantages and disadvantages of the rather controversial peace process. This has been mainly to establish rapport during the interview which in turn may help improve the quality of the data (Dunn, 2016). The first two conducted interviews were with high-level KNU and KNLA leaders. I initially intended to conduct these interviews elite participants (Smith, 2006), i.e. high-level Karen political and military leaders, when I had become more confident in interviewing. However, due to difficulties in the early stage to reach local level participants, I felt a sense of pressure and eagerness to start these. However, they went quite well and, indeed, served as an encouragement for me.

Except one written interview, all other interviews were of oral character. The participant in diaspora prepared the answers in written form in English. An advantage was that it allowed for more reflective answers, but this came at the cost of voice and face expression (Dunn, 2016). However, I considered this highly successful because it provided detailed descriptive information about how situation in central Kawthoolei was before compared to now. For the other 12 interviews, I prepared myself for 1-2 hours before each interview. Understanding the participants were busy people, I conducted about half of interviews in the weekend, sometimes very early in the morning. Nine of the twelve oral interviews were conducted on Zoom, in line with rules set by

NSD, while the three other interviews were conducted in an encrypted app that cannot be specified for security reasons. I was nonetheless constantly aware of and took seriously privacy issues.

The interviews have been recorded in the UiO's Nettskjema-Diktafon App on my phone which safely store the data in Nettskjema. I informed the participants both during first contact and before the interview that the conversation would be recorded and deleted when the project is over. The elite participants were used to research interviews, meaning that it was easier to negotiate the interviews. Others permitted to me in a friendly and relaxed way which may be due to the rapport and trust established, in addition to that I may have been perceived as an insider. I felt, moreover, that recording did not impact the conversation in any way, which may be because it was placed invisibly to the participants during the interviews.

A major challenge I faced during the interviews was the participants' weak internet connection. This problem interrupted about half of the interviews. However, to minimize its negative effects, I noted the last sentence the participant said before the connection was down. In that way, I could remind the participants about where we were in the conversation. I acknowledge, nonetheless, that this could have influenced what or how much they shared compared to what they originally wanted to share.

Additional Interview Data

I have also used 5 primary interviews conducted with villagers and former KNLA soldiers in a Karen village by a Norwegian PhD candidate in March 2019. When helping to translate and transcribe these interviews, I found that they were highly relevant to my research and I was allowed to use them. These life story interviews conducted with villagers in the southernmost KNU district helped me get a close look into their lived experiences during war and perceptions about the current ceasefire. The value of this data includes insights into the participants' war time experiences, including of the forcible relocation by the state as part of the Four-Cuts Strategy, their appreciation of the stability brought by the 2012 ceasefire. These have informed greatly informed my overall understanding of the conflict and its impacts on people.

The interviews belong to an ongoing project conducted by a PhD candidate at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Marianne Mosberg, who is doing research on the politics of climate change, conflict dynamics and vulnerability in Southeastern Myanmar. The interviews were done in March 2019 during a 5-months long fieldwork in various locations of Myanmar. A local translator was used during the interviews, and informed consent was obtained from all research participants. For further information about this research project, please contact Marianne directly or through me.

Document Sources

Beyond interview data, I have also relied extensively on secondary document sources, including reports, academic works, YouTube videos in Karen language. These have been highly useful for me to get a more complete understanding of the complex social realities on the ground. Reports by local Karen NGOs like KHRG, KESAN, KPSN and other provide detailed information, upon which I draw. I am aware that these organizations may be critical of the Burmese government. However, their concerns have also been well documented by reports from other organizations like Asia Foundation, Saferworld, and United States Institute of Peace. Together, these make up valuable data that has been of significant importance for me to better understand the local situation.

Moreover, I have also used YouTube videos in Karen language that constitute a unique body of data (e.g. see KECD KTL; KESAN; KNU Channel, n.d.). The videos include information about the peace process, interviews with key Karen leaders, activities of the different KNU line department, KNU elections, documentaries about effects of increased economic activities, and more. I saved the most relevant videos to a personal YouTube folder and took notes from them. In a situation where physical fieldwork has not been possible, reviewing such material provided me with a virtual and contextualized understanding. Although I also recognize the limits of such information, it has been complementary to my primary data and other written sources.

I paid attention to ethical aspects of using online information. Patterson (2018, p. 760-761) has noted that researchers vary in their view about the use of YouTube data, with some treating it has “nonhuman documents” while others calling for the need to obtain permission. These debates

are mainly about YouTube videos of private users. In my particular case, however, the information used are publicly made available by organizations and features political contents that are meant to be spread. Moreover, in my use of this data, I avoid quoting individuals, unless they are official persons within KNU or another organization. For these reasons, I consider my use of this body of data ethically justifiable without getting the consent of the publishers.

I have, moreover, treated this information with critical eyes and the knowledge that they are made by someone and for some purpose. In addition to showing Karen polity in action, it is also Karen-centric. To ensure data quality, I triangulated the information with other sources, including reports and academic works. Still, my view is that this data is highly valuable on its own because it highlights the views and concerns of a community that should be heard. Finally, in addition to the above presented data, I have also had a number of informal conversations with Karen actors and non-Karen academics in Norway and abroad who have shaped my knowledge. I have also had further contacts with some participants to ask for clarification and details.

4.3 Data Analysis Strategies

Transcribing and Translating

To protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality, I kept the voice recording in Nettskjema. I downloaded each file at a time on my personal computer, to which access is restricted, encrypted the file, and transcribed the data while removing identifiable characteristics, such as names and positions, at the same time. I did this within a week after the interviews. After that, I deleted the file both from my computer and the trash folder, before continuing with the next. Participants were instead given a code number. In this way, I managed to safely anonymize the data.

Transcribing and, while at the same time, translating the data have been very time-consuming. I found it, however, to be a very useful exercise to familiarizing myself with the data and start taking notes of themes. Moreover, I recognized that there is power involved in translation of language

and took seriously the issue and invested large amount of time and energy in it. Still, I acknowledge that some meaning may have been lost in the translation and that others could have translated some words differently. This is because not every words and concepts in Karen can travel in its complete form to a foreign language (Desai & Potter, 2006).

However, I also felt that my professional training and work experience as a freelance interpreter in Norway have helped me in important ways to better pay careful attention to words in the translation process. Moreover, when my basic knowledge in Burmese language could not catch some words expressed in the language, I learnt to say it and sought help from contacts in Norway. Although I kept contact with some participants for other information clarification purposes, I considered such small language issues too minor to "bother" them.

Outcome-Explaining Process Tracing

Process tracing and thematic analysis have been the most suitable strategies to analyse the different parts of data and to answer the different questions. The whole data have been treated through latent analysis, which is to say that analysis entails interpretation beyond what is explicit in the data (Boyatzis, 1998, in Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Process tracing have been an appropriate analysis strategy because it allowed me to identify the causal mechanisms in the single-case case study (George & Bennett, 2005), i.e. the mechanisms between peacebuilding strategies and peace outcomes in Kawthoolei. Because of my retroductive approach to and the theory informed nature of the case study, it has been most suitable to use the *outcome-explaining process tracing*, identified by Beach & Pedersen (2013) as one of three approaches. This meant that rather than mere deductive theory testing or inductive theory development, my analysis has been an iterative process where I want back and forth between data and theory in order to identify the mechanisms that have produced the outcome.

I started by reviewing the peace literature for potential mechanisms that can explain the empirical observations of peacebuilding strategies and outcomes in Kawthoolei. After that, I looked into the case-specific mechanisms that are responsible for producing the outcomes. Having

done that, I returned to the literature to reconceptualize and refine the theories reviewed. This process has been an interactive one. Through this process, a set of theoretically informed and empirically grounded explanations – of what happened, how it happened, and what it has created – has been possible. In addition to the interview data which outline events and changes on the ground, document sources presented above have been used to obtain a complete picture.

For example, to analyze an empirical observation of people being displaced due to fighting, which is a peace outcome, I looked into the cause of it, and armed with theoretical concepts, I sought to identify the mechanisms that triggered it and to understand what might mean for the broader process of peacebuilding.

Theoretical Thematic Analysis

A theoretical thematic analysis has been used to look for analytic codes that may reflect sustainability of this form of peacebuilding and present them as a coherent story. Sustainability in this specific context has been defined as the extent to which the form of peacebuilding seen can provide the Karen movement with its long-desired goal of autonomy and a sustained positive peace. It was formulated as a broad and reflective question that also involved related aspects such as advantages/disadvantages of the ceasefire and the peace process.

Coding has been useful not only to analyze, but also to reduce and organize the data (Cope, 2016). The large amount of the total data made NVivo a highly effective tool in the process. I produced a number of analytic codes, which include optimism, pragmatism, pessimism, and related these to the key theme, namely sustainability. I found this exercise highly useful to make sense of the diverse opinions of the participants. As rightly noted by Cope (2016, p. 381), it also opened opportunity for reflexivity because by looking systematically into participants perceptions about this particular topic, I was able to better grasp the complex reality on the ground.

Results of this analysis is presented as a coherent story or answer in chapter 9. There is no perfect way to local a “genuinely representative statement” of the answer (Cope, 2016), but I

identified a general understanding and a range of opinions. My answer to RQ3 will be based on my analysis of the participants perceptions and of the general findings in the sectors studied.

4.4 Ethics, Power, and Subjectivity

Aware of the fact that research involves and impacts people, either directly or indirectly (Dowling, 2016), I have been highly sensitive about doing ethical research. This has been of significant importance in my case study, which dealt with a conflict affected society. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, I have kept a self-conscious scrutiny of myself and the social nature of research.

Ethics

Throughout the research process, I have been careful about principles of privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, and avoiding harm of any kind to my participants and myself. Both in data collection, data handling, and reporting, I considered to have managed to uphold these principles. I first ensured that their consent is of an informed character and, later in the process of data storage (also in research diary and notebook), that their identities are properly anonymized. Although three elite participants consented to be identified by name, given the current security climate, I have anonymized all participants, including their names, locations, and positions. Instead, I have given pseudonyms that are normal name in Karen society in order to make the research more authentic. I kept in mind and understood that, in addition to work and family, people also had to cope with a pandemic. To ensure ethical research practice, it has been of great importance for me to show understanding in my interactions with the research participants.

Power Relations

I acknowledge that power is necessarily involved in the whole research process and that there are inherent asymmetrical power relations between me and my participants (Dowling, 2016). In

interaction with elite participants, I am in a less powerful position. With some non-elite participants, the relationship may be reversed. Recognizing these issues and their effects on the research process and data quality, however, I felt like we largely managed to create a reciprocal relationship where the elite participants were given the chance to communicate/justify their political positions and where the non-elite were given a chance to voice their opinions/concerns.

Beyond this, there is power in the knowledge I present, either directly through this knowledge production or indirectly through perceptions (Dowling, 2016). For instance, a question I am constantly asking myself is if I am presented what I heard or what I expected to hear. I answer such questions by constantly revisiting my data and talking with my interpretive community. Throughout the process, I have made use of Israel and Hay's (2006, cited in Dowling, 2016, p. 37) notion of "research integrity", which encompasses intellectual honesty, accuracy, fairness, and collegiality. Keeping these in mind, I have been reflexive of my role in the research process.

Subjectivity

Relatedly, I recognize that objectivity is impossible to maintain due to the social nature of qualitative research (Dowling, 2016). My shared ethnicity with the ethnic group at hand, which is a conflict party in Kawthoolei, may have made me somewhat biased and more hostile against the government of Myanmar than an outsider would be. This issue has been dealt with by checking my facts and findings with earlier academic research on the topic. While this was a way to rework my subjectivity, still I may have been subjective in my review of the existing literature. For this reason, I do not claim my analysis to be objective. My inherent worldviews, personal background as a refugee, and experience may affect the research process and findings.

Beyond that, however, I also felt that my insider position may have made both the information I collected and the interpretations I provided more valid. This is, as noted by Dowling (2016), because I sensed that people have talked to me freely and, sharing largely the same outlook on the world, I understand in with clarity what they say. For instance, when they talk about human rights abuses and civilian fear due to Burmese military's persistent militarization, I understand what they refer to because I have heard such experiences from close family members.

That said, however, I did not assume complete insider-ness either. Having followed the peace process since my BA thesis, I was aware that the pro-ceasefire faction of KNU has been critiqued by an internal faction, many Karen CSOs, and the Karen diaspora, among other aspects, for being non-inclusive and non-transparent in decision-making processes. Due to lack of sufficient knowledge, I have not had any strong opinion about the peace process. Recognizing the advantages, especially the stability it brought to civilians, and disadvantages of it, I myself still do not have any clear-cut opinion about whether it was good or bad.

My position is rather that aspects of KNU's engagement, including KNU chairman Mutu's signing of the 2012 ceasefire without consulting the whole organization's leadership, is justifiably subject to criticism. Due to lack of clear-cut opinion, I felt somewhat well positioned to enter the field with an openness and to minimize a threatening environment of such intersubjective issues. I had a genuine interest in hearing what the participants had to say, in learning from it, and in representing it. Finally, against the attitudes found in colonial research, I have constantly reminded myself that I have no "right to research" (Howitt & Stevens, 2016, p. 56). This has been important because despite being an insider, my partial education and upbringing in the western world may have influenced my worldviews and attitudes in ways that I myself may not be conscious of.

4.5 Summary

I have demonstrated throughout this chapter how I have conducted the research during its entire process and my particular role within it. To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, I have incorporated aspects of the triangulation procedure since the beginning of the research process. My sources as well as findings were, beyond written sources, discussed regularly with my supervisors, co-students, and other academics not only in the western world, but also Karen academics in Thailand. Clarifications and new information were also given by some participants.

That said, however, I fully acknowledge the limits of my research and its transferability. The particularities of my topic of Kawthoolei, my research methods, and my subjective self as a researcher have admittedly influenced the research process and outcomes.

Reflecting on the whole process, it has been challenging yet exiting to conduct the research. Beyond producing an academic work, it has been a personal learning process about a conflict of which I am an indirect product, as a refugee. Moreover, as if the pandemic were not enough, the military coup on the 1st of February 2021 impacted me to a personal level. I could only imagine how many times worse it must have been for my participants inside and near Kawthoolei. I kept in touch with some after the coup to hear how they were doing.

It has been mentally exhausting for me as an ethnic member, student, and, above all, human, to observe the slaughtering of youths in the streets and bombing of civilians in Kawthoolei. In late April, feeling hopeless, I distanced myself from the unfolding events in order to focus on the writing. The awful events have, ironically, also given me more motivation to complete this thesis and contribute to a scholarly understanding of parts of Myanmar's complexity.

5 The Security Sector

This chapter is the first of four analysis chapters that seek to answer the RQs. The security sector refers here to the control over territories which is arguably the most important proximate cause of conflict as it is a precondition upon which both governance of populations and access to resources are dependent. This chapter looks at how the antagonistic actors have engaged each other on the ground in the realm of territorial control in the context of the ceasefire in order to identify their strategies and discusses these in relation to the broader process of peacebuilding.

I start by briefly contextualizing the environment in which the involved actors act to secure their interests. Next, I discuss the strategies of the involved actors, starting with those of the state and then moving into those of KNU. Finally, a concluding discussion is given. Throughout this and the next chapters, I will show that all three sectors are intrinsically linked.

5.1 (In)Security in Kawthoolei

Seven decades of conflict have left Kawthoolei a heavily militarized region, with a mosaic of armed actors controlling pockets of territories that are rarely clearly demarcated (Jolliffe, 2015). The security, or rather insecurity, environment differs within and between KNU's seven districts. The 2012 ceasefire has undeniably brought stability for many, but many others such as those in the region's northern part have had to continue living in a war zone, as discussed more below (KHRG, 2016; 2019a). Moreover, while the Tatmadaw and KNLA are the key competing actors who have presence in all KNU districts, there are also six additional Karen armed actors. The latter have either defected from KNU or split from the groups that had done it earlier (see figure, 2). They are mainly based in central Kawthoolei, i.e. brigade 6 and 7 (see map, 3).

A research participant describes that the armed actors in this particular part of the region do not station in specific townships, but they are "just blending in the areas where they have control", with the Tatmadaw being the most powerful actor as they are everywhere (Tho Doo, Interview). The strong presence of the Tatmadaw and the concentration of the other armed Karen groups in this region have important implications for territorial control. Most importantly, it

disadvantages KNU who used to exercise significant, if not complete, control over this region and claims to represent it as part of its nation-building project. The other six Karen armed actors differ in military strengthen, ranging from a few hundred soldiers (including PC and KPF) to thousands of soldiers (including DKBA and BGF) (Buchanan, 2016).

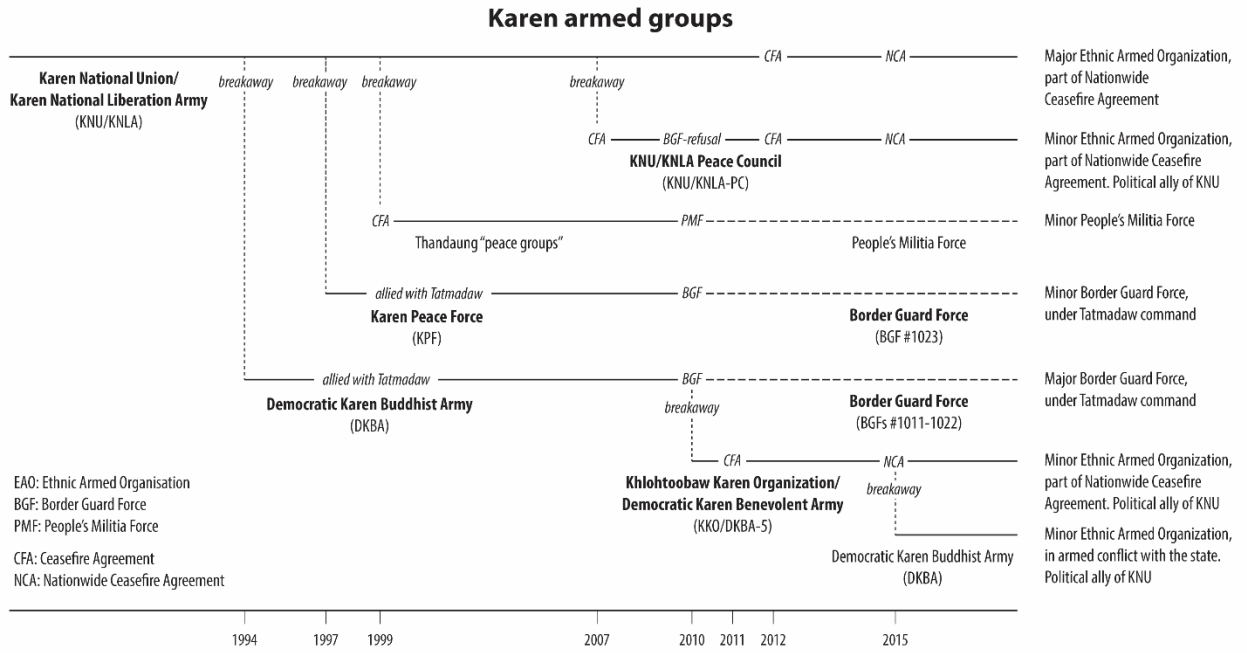

Figure 2: Karen Ethnic Armed Actors (Source: Kristian Stokke)

The relationship of these actors to the state and KNU are highly complex and vary over time (Jolliffe, 2016). For instance, while KKO/DKBA and DKBA previously sided with the state, after the group's own split in 2010, its relations to KNU have improved. The most significant of these non-KNU armed actors is Karen BGF, which split from DKBA in 2010 and formally transformed into the Tatmadaw's system. With over 3000 well-equipped soldiers, the group poses a serious challenge to KNU's territorial control in the central region of Kawthoolei. The other Karen armed groups remain in loose, informal, and shifting relations to the state and KNU. PC and KKO/DKBA are also signatories of NCA. However, without a clear political agenda, these groups are seen mainly as opportunists as they are mainly oriented towards business (Pah Lah, interview).

Nevertheless, these actors are important to be aware of because they are powerholders in their respective pockets of territories and in various ways challenge the authority of KNU. Keeping

in mind their existence, the focus of the below analysis is on the ceasefire interactions between the state and KNU because they are the key competitors.

5.2 Strategies of the State: A Silent War

To understand the strategies of the state, referred in this chapter exclusively as the military, it is of crucial importance to be reminded of Tatmadaw's self-perception and worldview, which namely relate to the narrative that it is a "guardian" of the country's sovereignty (Smith, 1991). EAOs that have called for self-autonomy have historically and contemporarily been met with violent military means, though in shifting degrees and in combination with other means over time (Kramer, 2009). It is by being aware of this, I argue, that one can understand the strategies of the Tatmadaw in Kawthoolei in all the three sectors studied.

Looking critically into the local dynamics, I argue that the strategies of the state in this sector, identified through its actions, has been what I would call a silent war without (much) gunfire. It has taken place in the following manner: Ceasefire, do not withdraw, but expand. This overall strategy, made up of many small moves, is illiberal in character and deviate from both liberal and hybrid forms of peacebuilding. This is to say that instead of conflict resolution, the Tatmadaw has pursued conflict containment and counterinsurgency by waging a silent war in the context of the peace process. The empirical support for this argument lies in what many Karen actors on the ground see, know, and/or experience (Tho Doo, interview).

Non-Withdrawal, Non-Demarcation, and Aggressive Expansion

First, a striking strategy of the state during the past decade has been its *refusal to withdraw* its troops, meaning that its troops stayed in the combat zones in Kawthoolei during the whole peace process. This maintenance of the military camps in these areas, many of which are located in and outside villages, have been a source of mistrust for KNU and civilian fear (KHRG, 2019a; 2019b). Although agreements for the need to stabilize the ceasefire by relocating the troops, clearly

demarcating areas, and strengthening ceasefire code of conduct were reached in the early negotiations in 2012, no such talks have taken place in the nine years that followed (Karen News, 2020a). Dah Ler, a high-level KNU leader who was involved in these negotiations, sense that the military intentionally avoided to talk about military issues. In the participant's words:

> When we brought up military issues, they said "our delegation is not about military affairs. We have military representatives, but they cannot make decision". When it came to military affairs, they did not want to talk about it. (Dah Ler, interview).

This illustrates Tatmadaw's unwillingness to make ceasefire issues a priority. In fact, it is noted that the military negotiation team, led by the Railways Minister Aung Min, a former general, accepted KNU's requests in the 2012 negotiations with little discussion to quickly move forward with the preliminary ceasefire agreements (South et al., 2018, p. 17). This avoidance of discussing such ceasefire issues is also confirmed by Tha Taw, a high-level KNLA leader who has also been involved in negotiations (Tha Taw, Interview). A consequence of this unwillingness to talk about, let alone meet, KNU's request about troops relocation is that Kawthoolei remained highly militarized by the Tatmadaw. The non-withdrawal can thus be seen as a purposive strategy.

Another related strategy of the Tatmadaw has also been their unwillingness to draw clear ceasefire demarcation areas, which involves whose areas are where, which is important to stabilize and implement the ceasefire (Tha Taw, interview). This point, also agreed to be discussed during the early negotiations, is seen as an intentional strategy as well by both Dah Ler and Tha Taw as intentional strategies. This is because when [demarcation] rules do not exist, they cannot be broken. Speaking to me in August, Tha Taw said about the issue as follow:

> Demarcation is something that needs to be discussed. But it has not been discussed, there has not been any agreement reached. Consequently, confrontations take place … When we met them once, they said "there are no ceasefire demarcation yet, therefore we can go and do [as we want]". That is how they want to do things. This means that while we EAOs attempt to push forward to reach a stable agreement as early as possible, … they exploit the opportunities. (Tha Taw, interview).

The research participant refers specifically to Tatmadaw's regular troop movements, which have been enabled by the lack of withdrawal and clear demarcation. In subsequent negotiations through the nine years since 2012, the KNLA leader further noted that when issues of demarcation were brought up, "they pretended that they did not know or hear it, but choose to be deaf" (Tha Taw, interview). A major issue that followed these factors is the expansion of the Tatmadaw into ethnic Karen areas during the ceasefire, not only in troop size, but also in territorial expansion.

On the ground, while not withdrawing its troops to build trust in the peace process and to contribute to civilian safety, the Tatmadaw has built up its military capacities throughout the 2010s. Among other ways, this took place through the reloading of supplies, improvement of helipads, construction of new and improvement of existing military camps, and construction of roads (FBR, 2013; KHRG, 2016; KPSN, 2018a). In a 2020 statement, KNU itself confirmed that the Tatmadaw has taken advantage of the ceasefire, especially in brigade 5 and adjoining brigade 2 and 7 areas, and "doubled their strength in comparison to that of the previous years and has set up new camps" (KNU Statement, 2020). Importantly, Tha Taw also noted that despite some new military camps, if we look at the overall situation, the number remains largely the same "because the same is perfectly enough for them" (Tha Taw, interview).

The military activities of the state have been concentrated in northern Kawthoolei, consisting of brigade 2, 3, and 5. This is no coincidence because the region remains the most autonomous districts of KNU. Particularly, it is brigade 5, known as the "last stronghold" of KNLA, that has seen most Tatmadaw's activities and violent confrontations during the ceasefire (Brenner, 2019, p. 57). Tatmadaw has more than 80 military camps in this brigade alone, number considered to high, given the autonomous character of the brigade (Karen History, April 4, 2021). Moreover, in the same way as its geographical concentration is not coincidental, the violent confrontations did not erupt randomly. Rather, they have been caused by active movements of and aggressive and repeated attempts by to *push for greater territorial control* in these less accessible areas of Kawthoolei. Regular activities include troop movements, surveillance by drones, and aggressive territorial expansion.

The clearest example of these is the Tatmadaw's incursive attempts to build and improve a network of roads connecting Brigade 2, 4, and 5. Despite local resistance and KNU's disapproval

of the road project, the Tatmadaw proceeded with its road construction and argued that it was for development of the local areas (Berenzini, 2020). However, development is not just development in these areas whose nature are politically and militarily contested. To Karen actors, the construction of the road is nothing more than a security plan to access these most inaccessible KNU areas in order to quickly overrun KNLA, in case of war resumption (Dah Ler; Tha Taw, interview). Saw Moo, a participant based in the region and affiliated with a humanitarian organization, has questioned with great doubts the intentions of the Tatmadaw:

> On the one side, they say that they do development for the civilians. But on the other side, if they did not have any soldiers in the mountains, would they also want to build the road? That is what we wonder about. They would not do it. That is what we think. (Saw Moo, Interview).

A part of the controversial road network relates to the attempt to improve a road between two Tatmadaw camps in Brigade 5, locally known as *Bu Sa Kee road* (See figure 3). Initially built during heavy military offensives in 2006/2007, the goal of the Tatmadaw in the post-ceasefire period was to improve this road to that it can be used in all-weather seasons, year-round. The project was approved by the Bago Region parliament in 2016 and, despite immediate local civilian and KNU's opposition, construction began in early 2018. This was in direct violation of NCA (2015, chapter 6, article 25), a point of which states that "projects concerning health, education and socio-economic development of civilians" shall be carried out in coordination with KNU. The construction of this particular road shortly after led to fighting, which forced over 2400 civilians to flee in May 2018 (KPSN, 2018a).

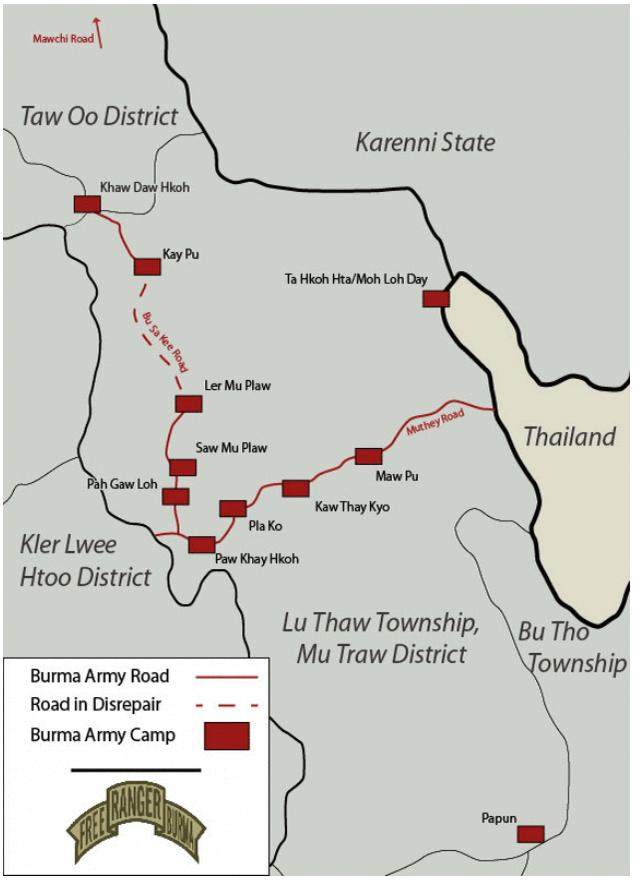

Figure 3: Tatmadaw's Road Network in Northern Kawthoolei (Source: FBR, 2013).

Despite some temporary cessation of it, when construction of roads (and bridges) at another end of the network started in Brigade 3 in January 2019, fighting erupted there and lasted well into mid-2019 (Saw Moo, Interview). In late 2020, over 10 000 Karen civilians protested and called for the withdrawal of the Tatmadaw camps and permanent cessation of the road construction (Karen News, 2020b). Other major protests have taken place throughout the years, including in relation to the unjust killings of a number of civilians by the Tatmadaw soldiers (Mann, 2020). At KNU level, these have also led to decreased trust in the peace process. Commenting on construction of the road network, Padoh Tadoh Moo, KNU's General Secretary, asked "With these kinds of activities, how can we trust them" (cited in Kantar, 2019).

Such was the local peacebuilding strategies of the state in the security sector, characterized by non-withdrawal, non-demarcation, and aggressive expansion. It is clearly in line with illiberal peacebuilding, where coercion rather than compromise is the norm.

Proxy-Militia and Single Army

Further down to central and southern Kawthoolei, consisting of brigade 1, 4, 6, and 7, not much military force has been needed by the Tatmadaw. Since the fall of Manerplaw, most of these territories have become under its reach, directly and indirectly through the proxy-militias over which it formally and informally commands (Buchanan, 2016). Although it may has become "naturalized" that these other Karen armed actors just exist there, they are indeed a part of Tatmadaw's past and present use of *proxy-militia as a counterinsurgency strategy* against KNU. In exchange for not fighting the state, these actors are allowed to retain their arms, control pockets of territories and conduct business activities largely uninterrupted (Tower and Clapp, 2020). For the powerful BGF, this includes taxation of local populations, border trade, natural resources extraction, large-scale agriculture project, and illegal activities such as casinos (South et al., 2018).

Although such clientelist relations between the Tatmadaw and the KNU-defected armed Karen actors were created before the 2012 ceasefire, it remains important to see this as a strategy by the Tatmadaw to contain violence and weaken KNU's influence in the region. This is because by co-opting these KNU-defected armed groups, the military has strengthened its power vis-à-vis

KNU. Through such arrangements, the Tatmadaw manages to control this region directly and indirectly, which explains why the territorial expansion has concentrated in northern Kawthoolei.

Beyond these diverse and locally-embedded strategies on the ground, the Tatmadaw has also attempted to secure its interest in the formal peace negotiations. In particular, it has requested the EAOs, including KNU, to accept the *non-succession* and *single army* concepts. Whereas the former entails a promise to never succeeded from the union, in contrast to what the original 1947 Panglong Agreement allowed (for Shan), the latter refers to the integration of the EAOs into the Tatmadaw system. Issues of such sensitive nature was not included in NCA and initially agreed to be discussed at the final stage (Dah Ler; Tha Taw, interview). However, the state's attempt to secure this interest during the second UPC in 2017 provoked strong reactions from KNU, especially among KNLA commanders. I return to this below.

In sum, the non-withdrawal and non-demarcation strategies of the Tatmadaw, combined with the aggressive territorial expansion, shows that there had been a silent war against KNU during a peace process eagerly funded by the international community (Nyein, 2020). The emphasis on territorial control reflects general strategies of illiberal peacebuilding, particularly ACM's notion of hegemonic control over territories. Its co-optation of proxy-militias, though arranged before 2012, continues to function as a counterinsurgency strategy in its fight against KNU. Together, these lead me to conclude that the strategies have been illiberal with the goal to contain violence during a ceasefire rather than to resolve core cause of conflict.

5.3 Strategies of the KNU: Negotiating with Arms

The strategies of KNU in this sector are passive and reactive rather than proactive, compared to those of the state. Mainly, this has to do with the fact that KNU had hoped for a satisfactory political settlement that would address the core cause of conflict, namely federalism, which in turn may settle the disputes on the ground. However, this does not mean that it has been without agency.

One Struggle, Two Battlefields

If the post-2012 strategy of the state has been to wage a silent war, the strategy of KNU can be characterized as *one struggle, two battlefields*, meaning that it added a new political battlefield in parallel to its existing armed battlefield, without abandoning the latter. Regardless of differing internal opinions, there is a wide consensus within KNU that it cannot lay down its arms (Tha Taw, Saw Moo). Consequently, the one decisive reason that enabled KNU's initial and continued involvement in the peace process through the 2010s was the possibility it was given, unlike earlier rounds of negotiation when disarmament was a precondition, to "negotiate with arms" (Keenan, 2012). General Johnny, former head of KNLA Brigade 7 and now General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC) of the movement's military wing, said:

> This time they didn't ask for us to give up arms, and they just want to work for equal rights for ethnic groups. This time we can trust them. (Johnny, cited in Mizzima, 2012).

This illustrates that the right to retain arms was an important factor, without which it would be difficult to imagine KNU's involvement in the peace process. The GOC's trust in Tatmadaw and optimism, which for him lasted after the signing of NCA, was shared by many but not all of his comrades. For instance, Padoh David Thackerbaw, former head of KNU's Department of Foreign Affairs, questioned why the Tatmadaw's chief negotiator, Aung Min, "was in such a hurry to get a ceasefire with the Karen" (cited in Keenan, 2012, p. 64). Continuing, the veteran of Karen movement said that while rumors about President Thein Sein's good intentions were spreading, "indicators we have say something different", referring to the then Tatmadaw offensives against KIO in the north. Notwithstanding internal opinions, however, KNU was allowed to retain it arms, which then led to the creation of the political battlefield.

Two things are important to note. First, that the two battlefields of KNU have not been equally active. While the political path has undoubtedly been the most active, KNLA has remained largely inactive in the background. It observed the political negotiations, while its units in Brigade 5 and 3 resisted the state's road construction to maintain its territorial integrity. Second, and relatedly, unlike the Tatmadaw's expansion, KNU has had no greater goal during the peace process

than achieving a political agreement (Tha Taw, interview). It is perceived that KNLA is not only necessary for self-defence but also important for KNU to be heard in negotiations (KPSN, 2018b). Therefore, the retainment of arms is a strategy of KNU, albeit one that is passive.

Single-Army Refusal

Issues related to the reorganization of the security sector have been controversial through the ceasefire period. While KNU sought to resolve the core cause of conflict, the actions of the Tatmadaw on the ground has damaged trust-building. In negotiations, as previously mentioned, the military has sought to secure its interest by requesting that the NCA-EAO signatories accept the concept of a "single army". This has provoked strong reactions from leaders of KNLA. The former brigadier general of Brigade 5 and current KNLA Vice Chief of Staff (VCS), General Baw Kyaw Heh, commented that:

> How can we integrate ourselves with them? It can't be. We will still need a lot more time. To do this, we need a truly democratic government without any influence from a military dictatorship. Only then, can we talk about it. Now, the Burma army is a dictator, and the world is harshly criticizing their actions. People are working hard to bring them to International Criminal Court. How can we combine ourselves with them in light of this. (Baw Kyaw Heh, cited in KPSN, 2018).

The statement, generally shared by Karen actors, notes a key contradiction between the conflict parties in question. In addition to persistent lack of respect for human rights, General Baw Kyaw Heh sees the impossibility of integrating with the Tatmadaw as resultant of the very fact that the latter exists on undemocratic and illegitimate grounds. Furthermore, it also demonstrates that EAOs struggle federalism and self-autonomy is in direct, though complex, ways related to the broader struggle for democracy. In the case of KNU, it means in practice that integration of the KNLA into a national federal army cannot take place before "a union based on the principles of democracy and federalism", stated as a goal of NCA (2015, chapter 1, Article 1a), has been achieved. Though reactive in character, KNLA's rejection of this can be seen as a strategy.

Equally skeptical about the request, General Johnny, whose optimism about the peace process seems to have faded, commented as follows:

> The Burma army still holds the power. Burmanization still exist. In their mind, this country belongs to the Burmans and not for the ethnic people. They ceased fire only to trick us in order to wiping us out one day. They usually cause division in the ethnic armed groups. They don't want us to be united. The "single army" issue should be raised only after we have achieved peace … I think that no one wants to serve under the Burma army. (General Johnny, cited in KPSN, 2018).

These words of the GOC are clearly contrasting the optimism and trust in Tatmadaw he once shared prior to and in the early period following the 2015 NCA. Though not seeking to generalize Johnny's views, a general observation I make is that whereas it has become clearer for the skeptics that they were right about Tatmadaw's lack of good intentions, some of the optimists have grown increasingly frustrated about the peace process.

Maintenance of Territories

Beyond refusal to accept the single army request, another strategy of KNU has been to maintain its territorial integrity during the peace process. Its ability and willingness to project force when it is perceived as needed, e.g. during the incursive expansion of the Tatmadaw into inaccessible northern Kawthoolei, demonstrates the workings of KNU's parallel battlefields. The insistence of negotiating with guns serve two purposes. Whereas one is to resist state territorial control during the peace process, another is to be able to protect itself in case war returns. The fact that KNLA has sought to maintain its security clearly illustrated by the December 1st, 2020 statement issued by KNLA headquarter, demanding the withdrawal of Tatmadaw camps in and around villages where civilians live and work (Karen News, December 4, 2020).

The statement was preceded and followed by multiple demonstration held by thousands of Karen villagers who, after a number of civilians killing by the Tatmadaw, felt that they could not and live work peacefully in the militarized presence of the state soldiers (Mann, 23, July 2020;

KHRG, 2019a; 2019b). In an interview with Karen News, a KNLA spokesperson explained the background of the statement as follows:

> Even though we have signed the NCA, there has been no implementation … None of these issues – ceasefire areas, deployment of troops, the common definition of some terms used in the NCA, and the avoidance of using the public spaces mentioned in the NCA as military outposts or encampments – these have never been discussed. The lack of discussion of the interim period […] has led to a decline in trust. In the bilateral meeting […] in 2012, there was a KNLA proposal for the relocation of military bases from civilian areas and troop routes to be moved. We have been waiting for this to happen for more than eight years now, but so far, no action has been taken, so it leaves us in a state of despair. This has been seen as giving the military a huge advantage in the ground. (Tamla Thaw, cited in Karen News, 2020a).

This above description officially expresses KNLA's growing frustration with the lack of NCA implementation. Moreover, in addition to responding to concerns related to civilian safety, it was arguably a culmination of both lack of progress in negotiations and the activities of the Tatmadaw on the ground. The cited spokesperson added that "there must be no troop movements for territorial control. With the withdrawal of military bases in civilian areas, there is no reason for fighting, … and the ceasefire will be strengthened" (Karen News, 2020a). Rather than seeing Tatmadaw's withdrawal, the days and months since the statement has led to resumed fighting in brigade 3 and 5 forcing over 5300 civilians to become by January 2021 (KPSN, 2021a).

Writing about this in January 2021, two individuals who led a local peacebuilding project in the very areas where people now fled again noted that "the Tatmadaw has no interest in keeping peace, let alone addressing the root causes of conflict" and that it "has resumed its old ways, killing civilians and destroying villages" (Petrie and South, 2021). In sum, however, KNU's strategies have been passive and reactive, while "hoping for the best" from the negotiations and "expecting the worst" for what might come.

5.3 Summary

The empirical evidence on the ground shows that the strategies involved deviate from liberal norms of compromise and liberty. Key strategies of the state have been non-withdrawal, non-demarcation, aggressive expansion, use of militia, and attempt to secure its interest in negotiations. I argue that these strategies of the state are fundamentally illiberal in character, with the main goal to achieve more complete territorial control in the region.

Its attempt to hybridize its own and KNLA security systems prior to a political settlement has failed due to KNU's rejection. This means that a domestic hybridization (Tatmadaw/KNU) process has not taken place in Kawthoolei. However, its economic clientelist arrangements with other Karen armed actors, particularly BGF, may be understood as a form of hybridized peace between themselves. Despite the hybrid outcome, their means are illiberal because they include the utilization of economic clientelism, patronage, and networks. Moreover, although the arrangements with actors like BGF function on its own, it is also an indirect strategy against KNU because they limit the latter's influence in the region. I elaborate more on this in chapter 7.

The main illiberalness of Tatmadaw's strategies vis-à-vis KNU in the studied period lies in its inclusive attempts to expand its territorial control over the region. Characterized and facilitated by non-withdrawal and non-demarcation strategies, the silent war has taken place in a coercive manner in the face of local resistance. This leads me to argue that this is a thin case of authoritarian conflict management in the context of a ceasefire. It reflects the state's goal of gaining hegemonic control of space, in line with the ACM conceptualization (Lewis et al., 2018). Overall, the strategy of the state has been to wage a silent war within a different political context, characterized by ceasefire, negotiations, and general stability.

The strategies of KNU, on the other hands, have been passive and reactive and can therefore not be specified as either liberal, hybrid, or illiberal. This is mainly due to the fact that it is in a politically and militarily marginalized position. Regardless, the silent war has now become one that is no longer "silent" since December 2020 but especially since the military coup when large-scale violence, involving multiple heavy Tatmadaw airstrikes, returned. As of late May 2021, 70 000 civilians have been displaced since the military coup and escalating violence (KPSN,

2021b). The silent war waged in the security sector, as I argue in the next chapters, is only one of the arenas through which the state seeks to achieve its form of peace.

6 The Governance Sector

This chapter looks into the dynamics of local peacebuilding in the governance sector. I start by briefly presenting the contested nature of the sector and the complex environment in which the competing actors operate to govern the people in the region. Next, I present and discuss critically the changes that have taken place since the 2012 ceasefire in relation to the broader project of peacebuilding. After that, I take a closer look into the education sector to illustrate what the changing governance realities may mean for peace. A brief conclusion is given at the end.

6.1 Governing the People of Kawthoolei

Governance of populations has always been of importance for the state and KNU (Jolliffe, 2014). Whereas the right to govern is a part of the core conflict causes, the actual practice of governance is a key local proximate cause of conflict on the ground. Moreover, the governance sector is closely related to the security sector because it is dependent upon some degree of territorial control. Historically, the Tatmadaw has used brutal counterinsurgency strategies that targeted civilians (Charney, 2009). Most known is the infamous Four-Cuts Policy that sought to cut EAOs' access to *funding*, *food*, *intelligence*, and *recruits*. It directly targeted civilians because it involved large-scale forced relocation of populations to areas under Tatmadaw's control (KHRG, 2017).

The stories told by villagers in my data set include the burning of villages, the destruction of livelihoods, forcible relocation, forced labor and portering for Tatmadaw and forced participation in paramilitary anti-insurgency People's Militia units (Ker Baw; Kaw Eh; Moo Shee; Poe Noo; Tee Doe, interview). Poe Noo, described that "when we were forced to relocate … we were afraid. We were filled with fear. Even to the point that when the dogs just barked, we did not dare to out outside. We were afraid" (interview).

After decades of such tactics combined with major military offensives and internal defections, KNU have lost much of its territories and populations to the state, fully or partly. In many areas, especially in the central and southern KNU districts, the state has erected military and civilian structures (South et al., 2018). Yet, KNU remains a significant governance actor and

continues to operate as a de facto government in some areas and in parallel to the state in other areas. Governance areas in the region can simplistically be divided into *government*-, *KNU*, and *mixed-control areas* where both actors govern (Jolliffe, 2016). Especially in mixed-control areas, many of which also house the other Karen armed actors, dynamics of governance are highly complex and contested, shifting over time, and varying in space (Burke et al., 2017). Generally, however, KNU and the state are the main competing actors, cooperating sometimes with the smaller armed groups who do not have any comprehensive governance structure.

For instance, while schools under the control areas of BGF uses Burmese curricula and are run in cooperation with the state, those under DKBA control have to a larger extent welcomed KNU education system following improved relations between them (Jolliffe, 2014). In addition to the state and the non-state armed actors, local civil society organization (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) are significant social service providers. Most of these are either affiliated to or cooperating closely with KNU in social service provision. Governance is here understood as interim arrangements which involve "Service delivery and governance in conflict affected areas, including the relationship between EAOs and government systems, during the period between ceasefire and a comprehensive political settlement" (South et al., 2018).

6.2 A Continuation of War by Other Means

The years since 2012 have seen major changes in the governance of populations in Kawthoolei. Particularly, a significant expansion of the state structures through administration and social services has been observed in all KNU districts (Saferworld & KPSN, 2019). At the same time, it has also been observed that the KNU, too, has sought to reconnect with its populations in some areas and strengthen its governance system (Kyed, 2021). The dynamics on the ground in the sector represent what I call a *third battlefield* that automatically followed KNU's decision to enter ceasefire. Although the fight for governance of population had always existed, it has become a new one because the context and environment in which it takes place have changed significantly.

First and foremost, I observe that the rules of the game had changed to a situation where it is no longer guns, but resources (both material and human) that are the decisive means. Second,

new factors and actors, including the international legitimization of the Burmese government and the resultant state-centric aid that followed, have had profound impacts on power relations between the competing actors. It should also be stressed that although both actors are in various ways involved in this new battlefield, it is the case that KNU remains in a marginalized position compared to the state. As repeated, its foremost goal has been to achieve self-rule though the peace process and the creation a federal democratic union. This means that all activities on the ground, in the security, governance, and development sectors, remain secondary to that goal.

Looking critically into dynamics within this third battlefield, I substantiate the argument that there has been a continuation of war by other means *and* that the government has sought to impose its form of statebuilding while actively undermining KNU's call for self-rule. Led and dominated by the state, it is a war for territorial control and population governance.

State Expansion in Kawthoolei

Quite immediately after the ceasefire in 2012, the government started its mission of expanding its state structures into areas where its civilian presence had been weak or absent (South et al., 2018). It started instating village heads, setting police stations, registering land titles, building roads, and expanding its social services such as health and education (Jolliffe, 2016). Introducing much-needed social services to a deprived population is to be welcomed if meant for humanitarian purposes only. However, in the same way as road construction in northern Kawthoolei is likely not done just for "development", services in Kawthoolei cannot be seen as purely apolitical.

The key issues around the state's expansion surround the fact that it ignores the authority of KNU and undermines its present and future right to govern populations in the region. Expressing great sadness over this, a participant I will call Thara, who is a senior leader at KNU's Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD), said that "it seems to us like they want to govern us, … it seems like they don't want us to govern our people" (Thara, interview). As in the security sector, the key enabling factor behind the expansion is the *absence of area demarcation*. Although the NCA vaguely recognizes the KNU as a governance actor, according to Tha Taw, in the absence

of further discussion about its implementation, "they exploit the opportunities … even to the point that when you yourself go, they want to blame you and find you wrong" (Tha Taw, interview).

My data set and online sources elsewhere, e.g. on YouTube where all seven KECD district leaders have been interviewed to talk about the post-ceasefire challenges they face (see KECD KTL, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; 2020e; 2020f; 2020g), deep-seated concerns about the state expansion are held by Karen actors. The significant expansion of the state and the suspicions it brought along are well noted by a number of other studies (Kyed, 2021; Mark, 2021; South et. al, 2018). One of my key findings agrees with a major study of the interim arrangements in Myanmar in general, a part of which states that:

> Several stakeholders expressed fear that the government is delaying meaningful progress towards federalism, while capitalizing on ceasefire to expand the state's military and civilian structures into previously autonomous areas, thus "winning the war by other means" (to quote an EAO leader. (South et al., 2018, p. 19).

The concerns link the security and governance sector as one and the same war. While the silent war in northern Kawthoolei has been about territorial expansion, the war in this sector is about consolidating and expanding state structures in areas that are already under its military outreach. Ethnic Karen actors are aware of this and have expressed that this has led to a decrease in trust in the peace process to produce a satisfactory political settlement (Tha Taw; Dah Ler, interview). Instead of helping reverse a negative trend of mistrust and lack of progress in the negotiations, by genuinely recognizing, if not also promoting, the existing governance system of KNU as a form of promoting "federalism from below" (South et al., 2018, p. 18), the state has done the opposite by expanding its own system and promoting its unitary statebuilding project.

An Evolution of the Four-Cuts Strategy

Based on observations on the ground and local concerns with it, I argue that the overall strategy of the state in this sector constitute an evolution and continuation of the Four-Cuts Policy mentioned above. However, in place of fear and oppression, non-coercive means which by contrast

may be called “love and care” are now used by the state to co-opt Karen populations in Kawthoolei to accept it as a legitimate political authority. For instance, in all KNU districts, the state has sought to “persuade”, or in proper Karen term “Lay Per Saw”, Karen villagers to accepts its social services (KNU Channel, 2020a). In the school sector, for instance, the state has reached out directly to villagers and village heads while ignoring KNU’s authority to persuade them to accept government teachers, improvement of school buildings and construction of new schools, etc.

Although the expansion of the state has taken place in all areas, portion by portion, it has been happening especially in the central and southern KNU districts (Thara; Hsa Dah; Say Htoo, interview). Some villagers have accepted state offers in education services due to lack of material necessities in their villages and desire to have a recognized education, while others have not for reasons that include skepticism about the government’s intentions, fear of Karen language being undermined, and loyalty to KNU and KECD officials (Jolliffe, 2016). Nonetheless, through such services, the state manages to expand its civilian structures.

This can be understood as an evolution of the Four-Cuts Policy for a number of reasons. First, like the brutal counterinsurgency strategy, it also targets civilians, albeit with different means. Second, its serves the same goal, which is namely to promote the state’s ethnocratic and unitary statebuilding project. Third, the establishment of relations with civilians is also a form of counterinsurgency in that it actively undermines KNU’s authority and relation to its populations. It has been observed that through social service provision, but also through direct government administration, like installation of police stations, the state has been able to cement and expand its control into contested and less accessible areas where it previously only had military presence (Jolliffe, 2016; Thara, interview). Such state expansion also helps consolidate and normalize state presence, and thereby materialize its desired form of peace.

In fact, the non-coercive targeting of populations as a form of counterinsurgency is not new. A similar observation is made by Woods (2016, p. 121) who noted the Tatmadaw’s replacement of violent means with socio-economic “development” rhetoric in order to gain control over populations in Kachin State during the 1990s. In the said case, instead of forced relocation, voluntary relocation of some civilians to more easily controlled areas has taken place. What met them has been anything but development though, including forced labor. This was a way to cut

KIO's relations to local communities. In Kawthoolei, the state arguably repeated a similar method, though the geographic and political contexts are considerably different.

The success of the state has arguably been mixed, depending on a number of factors, including the level of KNU's influence in each area. Moreover, although offers social service has been accepted in some areas, a major survey study observed that investments in social services in the region does not necessarily translate to legitimacy for the Burmese state (Saferworld & KPSN, 2019). This means that despite acceptance of services, the public legitimization of the state may not automatically follow. That said, however, a fact remains that the state expansion brings its structures into contested areas and governance dynamics have been altered.

Role and Impacts of International Actors

The state's push for implementing its statebuilding project in Kawthoolei has arguably been supported by international actors, albeit in indirect ways. The normalization of state-state relations, which emerged shortly 2011, has led to a situation where significant amounts of aid have been channeled through the state, while cross-border aid through Thailand to NGOs and ethnic actors operating in the Thai-Myanmar borderlands have seen a steep decline (Jolliffe, 2016; Say Htoo; Tee Kaw, interview). This has helped to exacerbate the power relations between the competitors in this battlefield, in favour of the already well positioned state (Thara, interview). The state-centric aid was informed by the belief that weak institutional capacity is at the core of the conflict, consequently leading to a focus on reinforcing of state institution (South et al., 2018).

However, conflicts in Myanmar are not driven primarily by a weak state or poverty, but they are political in nature, involving questions about the *form of rule* (democracy) and the *right to rule* (federalism) (Park et al., 2013). Promoting a strong and responsive state in cooperation with a state actor who is not liberal, while not giving much if any emphasis to ethnic people's calls for democratic and decentralized forms of government, has the potential of being counterproductive to democratization and peacebuilding (Brenner & Schulman, 2018). The general international state-centric cooperation has, in fact, been criticized by ethnic actors all along

(e.g. KPSN, 2014). The NCA itself allows the EAOs to receive aid, in principle, but in practice the appropriate channels for that have not been created. As a participant puts it:

> Whether or not we should go and pick up money from them, we also have our own criteria and procedures for that. Moreover, a group that we have had to wage war against, … for us now to go ask them from money and let them feed us, we cannot accept that. We just want to build stable arrangement where there is trust between us and them. (Thara, interview).

Aid, it is clear, cannot be apolitical in this context. Receival of aid through the state has a number of political complications, including the fear of being dependent on the state, of legitimizing the military too much, and of the state administrative structure that may come with it. For this reason, despite "giving aid because they are good-hearted", to cite Thara, the international actors have arguably supported the government's statebuilding agenda.

Beyond the mainstream focus on peacebuilding as statebuilding, there has been a somewhat more critical debate calling for attention to local conflict sensitivity and arguing for the instrumentalization of aid for peacebuilding purposes. In particular, a key question centered around the 'convergence' or hybridization of the state and KNU systems. While some emphasize convergence as a tool to meet humanitarian ends, e.g. 'health equity', others see it as a way to build trust and craft joint institutional capacity in the context of the peace process. In the education sector, hybridization of the education systems, through the use of ethnic Karen language in primary school (in 1-7 grades) and Burmese language in upper levels (prepare for further education and work career), has been suggested (Lall & South, 2014).

So far, however, no substantial converged or hybridized forms of governance has been seen (South, 2018). What has been seen is only some 'forced' hybridization in the school system, taking place without KNU's consent, which I return to below. The absence of substantial hybridized outcomes seems to reflect a lack of interest by the competing actors to do so, which itself is a result of the contradiction in the state and KNU's desired form of state. That is, the question of unitary vs. federal state. The third battlefield thus remained an area where the competing systems govern in parallel, in continuous competition with one another.

KNU Reconnecting with Populations

Although its foremost goal has been to reach a political settlement, it should also be noted that KNU has sought to reconnect with lost populations and to strengthen its governance system after 2012 as well (Harrison & Kyed, 2019; Kyed, 2021). The opportunity to do this have, in fact, been pointed out by some to be one of benefits of the ceasefire (KECD KTL, 2020g). KNU's reconnection with its populations has been termed by Harrisson & Kyed (2019) as a process of "*ceasefire state-making*". Through similar processes like that of the state, whose expansion may be termed "ceasefire statebuilding", KNU has sought to strengthen its system, among other ways, by issuing land certificates, promoting its education system, establishing mobile courts, mobile health clinics, and instating village tract heads. This has been observed in the mixed-control areas.

A number of ethnographic studies note that KNU is considered to be a legitimate political actor or 'state-maker' who nurture legitimate authority through reciprocal relations (Brenner, 2019; Harrison & Kyed, 2019; Mark, 2021). Looking at the forging of legitimacy specifically in the mixed-control Kawthoolei areas, a study finds that finds that "although the government is in close competition with the KNU in providing for people's material welfare in these areas, the KNU has an advantage in the ideological dimensions of legitimacy" (Mark, 2021, p. 1). This reflects the values and identity of the villagers. However, it should also be noted that the expansion of KNU has been limited in scope, due to lack of sufficient human and material resources, which has been worsened by the decline in cross-border aid, and official recognition as a governance actor.

Among other effects, the lack of recognition has meant that KNU has been cautious and flexible, as seen in the mobile character of its newly set up clinics and courts, due to the uncertainty of the situation (Harrison & Kyed, 2019). Additionally, the lack of formal recognition has also meant that some villagers, though accepting KNU's authority, prefer legally recognized government's land titles and education. Studies looking into local dynamics of KNU's ceasefire state-making and government ceasefire statebuilding provide important insights into the character of the actors' expansion and the degree to which they are perceived as legitimate. However, a

broader discussion integrating the core cause of conflict and the observable local dynamics into what they mean for the quest for peace is largely absent.

Looking at the ceasefire state-making/statebuilding dynamics in Kawthoolei from a peacebuilding perspective, I suggest that what has been seen represent a case of "*ceasefire war-making*". This is not to say that unavoidable war would follow as result of the state expansion. However, notwithstanding major fragmentation since its inception, the core cause of the Karen revolution has been and continues to be self-rule. The expansion of the state in governance, which ignores local authority and undermines the call for decentralized rule, has the potential to intensify and exacerbate the grievances. By not addressing the core causes of conflict, but by expanding in ways that actively threatens KNU's present and future right to govern, the state has *invited* continued conflict. I illustrate this argument of ceasefire war-making by looking into changes in the education sector.

6.3 Mixing and Ruining Karen Education

Perhaps the most contested frontline, education governance is not only about the *right to rule* but also about the *right to be*. That is, it involves question about ethnic Karen identity which is maintained, preserved, and reproduced through education, including in knowledge production, history teaching, and language learning (South & Lall, 2016). Developed since the colonial era to draw clear ideological, symbolic, and cultural boundaries from the Burmese state (Oh et al., 2019), Karen education has become particularly important in the context of assimilative state policies, which included the banning of ethnic language use in state schools. The comprehensive though poorly funded KECD system, according to its website, administer 1495 schools, 164 875 students, and 11 444 teachers, directly or in cooperation with local communities (http://kecdktl.org). Schools can be divided in *KNU-*, *government-*, and *mixed-administered* school.

Since 2012, a significant expansion has been observed in the education sector, among other ways, through the deployment of government teachers, the construction of new schools, the transformation of KECD-supported schools to partial or complete government ownership, and the "purchase" of teachers formerly supported by the Karen system with greater salary (KNU Channel,

2020a). In the 2012-2016 period alone, government teachers in KECD-supported schools have nearly tripled, from 1,572 to 4,718 (Jolliffe, 2016). The same period saw a significant increase in the number of mixed-administered schools, from 479 to 743, meaning that almost half of the approximately 1500 KECD-supported schools have become mixed with the government system. The number has most likely increased since 2016. The mixing of the competing school systems can be understood as a hybridization process, but one that has been non-inclusive, politically insensitive, and brought forward by means of power rather than by compromise.

The main justification of the above argument is that KNU's voice has been left out in the expansion that has shaken up Karen education by its roots (Thara, interview). In addition to the lack of ceasefire demarcation, I identify two core enabling factors behind the expansion of the state. First, KNU's lack of sufficient financial capacity has led to a situation where some villagers and teachers have accepted the offers of the state, and thereby welcoming the state structures into these areas. Second, villagers acceptance of the state's legally recognized education system is arguably also a result of the benefits associated with it, especially the opportunities it provides for work career and further studies, e.g. state universities. This has led to a situation where "though armed, you [KNU] are on the loser's side" (Pah Lah, interview). These two enabling factors ultimately reflect the power of the state.

Feeling powerlessness, Thara shared that "we [Karen leaders] are sad about the state expansion but cannot do anything about it … to do like the Burmese do., we don't have the strength for it either" (interview). Evidently, the third battlefield takes place to KNU's disadvantage.

Ceasefire Statebuilding, Ceasefire War-Making

Beyond the physical expansion of state administrative structure, which seriously threatens KNU's right to rule, the ceasefire statebuilding as ceasefire war-making argument lies also in the fact that it endangers the Karen's right to be. In particular, a slow assimilation or Burmanization of Karen communities can be said to be taking place. The degrees to which it is intentional, or how far-reaching assimilative it intends to be, remain uncertain. However, in the process of expanding and undermining KNU's actual rule and its right to rule, the state's expansion also carries with it

assimilative aspects of past policies. Among other areas, this is seen in the observation that, despite policy rhetoric of promoting ethnic languages, the implementation of the language policies continues to favor the dominance of the state education system.

First, while Burmese language is medium of instruction in state schools, ethnic languages are taught as only as a subject. In some Kawthoolei areas, it has been documented that the teaching of Karen language has been allowed only after school time, which means that the students are longer motivated to learn (KECD KTL, 2020a). Second, many government teachers do not speak Karen language, a factor that both harms students' learning, threatens the survival of Karen language (both Sgaw and Pwo), and increase the perception of Burmanization. Others do speak some Karen language, but do not master it. "Just ruining people's language", comments Thara and continues, "If they are clear-hearted, come invite us and discuss with us, we will provide them with our teachers … But they just develop their language-teaching on their own", before concluding that "to put it straight, they don't want to teach Karen language" (Thara, Interview).

This feeling of exclusion is supported by Lall & South (2018, p. 482) who note that, in formulating education policies in Myanmar, "powerful actors such as the government and international agencies frame policy in ways that often exclude the concerns and aspirations of education users" and failed to sufficiently take into consideration the contested nature of education/language and its connection the conflict. Noting the lack of attention to education reforms in the peace negotiation and the non-inclusive formulation and implementation on the ground, critics rightly refer to these as "missed opportunities" to link peacebuilding and education reforms (Lall & South, 2018, p. 482; Wong, 2019, p. 63). It is thus clear the nature of and ways in which the state education expansion system has taken place has not contributed to peacebuilding. On the contrary, it has reduced trust in the peace process and arguably increased grievances.

Seeing the broader picture – including the state's historical practices of Burmanization, the unwillingness to meet democracy and federalism demands, and the continuous silent war in the security sector – it seems that the missed opportunities may not have been accidental but intentional. This represents not only a continuation of war by other means but also ceasefire war-making. That is, when the Karen's grievances about self-determination and cultural preservation – the very factors that caused the conflict in the first place – are being ignored, undermined, and

intensified, the invitation to and conditions for a continued war are actively being produced. Rather than improved, this has arguably worsened the conditions for peace. Regardless of whether actual violent war recures in large-scale, this process of unitary, ethnocratic and militarised statebuilding can be described as ceasefire war-making because it reinforces conditions for war.

6.4 Summary

The strategies of the state in this sector can be best described as illiberal. This is because, rather than conflict resolution, as would be the case in liberal or hybrid peace literature, it has been mainly to gain hegemonic control over territories and populations. It is illiberal not only because it excludes the other conflict party, but also because power is involved. By avoiding the clear demarcation of territorial boundaries, the state has mobilized its material and judicial power in order to expand and deepen its statebuilding, while undermining KNU's call for decentralized rule.

While waiting for resolution in the national level negotiations, KNU's has also attempted to reconnect with lost populations, but it has been impeded by a lack of material as well as structural power. It has mainly been on the defensive while observing parts of its impoverished populations and former co-workers accepting the state offers which also welcomes state structures. Through an evolution of the Four-Cuts Policy, wherein fear and oppression are replaced with "love" and "care", as reflected in the provision of social services, the civilians are directly targeted as an enabler of the state expansion.

Taking a broader and more critical view, I argue that this ceasefire statebuilding/state-making competition can also amount to ceasefire war-making. The argument is supported by two mutually destructive developments during the process: i) the peace-preventive actions of the Tatmadaw in negotiations, i.e. their unwillingness to discuss political causes of the conflict, and ii) the peace-destructive actions taken by the state on the ground. Rather than addressing the grievances, the state has arguably intensified them. For this reason, whether or not war recurs, the conditions for it are constantly present.

7 The Development Sector

This chapter looks into the dynamics of peacebuilding in the development sector. I start by presenting some key highlights of Myanmar's national development plan and contextualizing the place of Kawthoolei within it. Next, I demonstrate how the state's hegemonic control over and use of economic resources have been used in order to pacify KNU. After that, I discuss how the state has sought weaken KNU more substantially since 2012 through the economic development means.

7.1 Developing Myanmar and Kawthoolei?

Development in Kawthoolei after the political opening from 2011 has largely come to mean the processes of extraction and trade of natural resources. Access to and control of resources is one of the proximate causes of conflict in the region. Though closely related to other sectors, however, it can be said that access to resources is secondary to and a reflection of the contestation over territories. This is because resource exploitation is preconditioned by territorial control.

To understand peacebuilding in this sector, it is useful with a short overview of Myanmar's economy since Tatmadaw entered politics. The economy since 1962 can be divided into three distinct periods: The Burmese Way to Socialism (1962-1988), the partially liberalized economy (1988-2011), and the fuller liberalized economy (2011-present). These changes in the economy have followed broader national and regional political changes. For example, whereas the change in 1988 was initiated in order to tackle the stagnant economy of the failed state socialism, the change in the 2010s emerged along with the broader political liberalization.

During the Burmese Way to Socialism, the economy was characterized by labor-repressive agriculture. It is described by (Bello, 2019, p. 12) as a system that was "production oriented, with the principle being that the higher output, the higher surplus that could be extracted for industrial investment and for consumption in the urban sector, the most favored groups being the military and civil servants". The state was the main economic actor and economic growth depended upon repressive exploitation of the poor farmers. One of the main ways in which the system worked was that the people were given the right to keep some of the products they produced, e.g. rice, but had

to sell most of these to the government to a low price. The system became increasingly unpopular and led to events in 1988 that eroded the legitimacy and the subsequent fall of Ne Win.

Following the popular uprisings, the regime staged a self-coup, replaced Ne Win and started a process of partial liberalization to deal with the stagnant economy. Bello (2019) identifies four characteristics of the new economy that developed. First, there was *inconsistent application* of the coercive policies of the socialist period, including continued mandatory sale of rice, making the economic liberalization only partial. Second, the period saw a rise of *military-crony capitalism* wherein private national investors teamed up with the military regime, jointly dominating the economy at the exploitation of the ordinary people. Third, so-called *ceasefire capitalism* emerged, a new form of economic cooperation between the military regime, the military-cronies, Chinese investors, and leaders of EAOs that had signed ceasefire. Finally, the period saw *worsened conditions* of the landless labor, which resulted from large-scale land grabs.

Along with the broader reforms in 2011, came a fuller liberalization of the economy, which marked a new distinct period, characterized by economic neoliberalism (Buchanan et al., 2013). The new development model was, in cooperation with the USDP-government, crafted by international financial institutions, particularly the World Bank, Asia Development Bank, and Japan. Reviewing key development policy documents, Bello (2019) identifies five mains characteristics of the state's development model. First, emphasizing that Myanmar was far behind the development process, the involved actors argued that rapid GDP growth was needed. Second, key areas such as the lack of road infrastructure and the shortage of power generation facilities had to be addressed with urgency. Third, for Myanmar to reach its development goals, it would need to be connected to the regional economy through a process of *connectivity*.

Fourth, the rapid economic growth would be successful only by promoting *export-oriented growth*. Fifth, and finally, it was going to be *foreign investment* that would be the central driver of the development process. In order to achieve rapid development, defined as growth in GDP, the job was then to attract foreign investment, build road networks within Myanmar and across the region, construct hydropower plants, and export goods in the global value chains. This process of development would not only involve but be partly dependent upon the ethnic regions because the

majority of the natural resources, e.g. rivers for dam, exists there and because regional connectivity has to pass through the ethnic-controlled areas (Buchanan et al., 2013).

Kawthoolei: A Battlefield-Turned-Marketplace

Since 2012, Kawthoolei has been, at least partly, transformed "from a battlefield to a marketplace" (KPSN, 2020). Strategically located between Myanmar and Thailand, it had for a long time prevented regional connectivity due to active conflict and is, like other ethnic borderlands in Myanmar, some of the last remaining resource-rich areas in Asia (Buchanan et al., 2013). With reforms under way, foreign investors near and afar looked to Myanmar to extract from the natural resources wealth. Consequently, roads have been constructed, mega-dam projects proposed, so-called special economic zones designed, construction of industrial cities began, concessions for commercial agriculture, logging, and mining granted, and more. Although the major projects have yet to begin or be completed, the effects on the ground are widely seen and experienced.

A complex set of actors, operating with different interests and motivations, can be identified. Unlike what was the case in the governance sector, the involvement of international actors is direct. International actors themselves are also highly diverse, differing in geographical origins and organizational character. In general, however, the justifications for getting involved in "developing" Kawthoolei may include factors like i) the people in the region need development, ii) development may contribute to peace (capitalist peace), and iii) there are profits to gain. These motivations and interests may, perhaps more often than not, also be combined. In addition, national and local actors, including the government itself, Tatmadaw, crony companies, some leaders of EAOs and business-oriented militias, are also important actors on the ground.

The goal of this chapter is not to survey the roles and interests of all involved actors, but rather to discuss how the state of Myanmar, with backing from various actors, has sought to instrumentalize development as a way for peacebuilding. In analyzing the strategies of the involved actors, the focus is centered on the state. This is because, having had little or no say in the development policy debates, the strategies of KNU are mostly passive and reactive to the circumstances to which it is presented, although it is not entirely without agency.

7.2 Commercialization of Counterinsurgency

Looking critically into the dynamics of peacebuilding in the development sector, I argue that through a "commercialization of counterinsurgency" (Woods, 2016), the state has sought to pacify, weaken and ultimately defeat KNU, again, in a continuation of war by other means. Though this may not be clear from the outlook, the military's use of economic development as a means to fight EAOs is not new (Ruzza, 2015). To further explore this, it is useful to first, revisit northern Myanmar in the 1990s and, second, the state of the Karen movement in 2012.

Tatmadaw's Politics of Counterinsurgency

The 1990s was the period when the state added economic means in its fight against EAOs. Specifically, by co-opting leaders of the northern EAOs into "ceasefire capitalism", the state transformed its "battlefield enemies" to "business bedfellows" (Woods, 2011; 2016, p. 114). The period was characterized by the partial liberalization of the economy, and the fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) (due to ceased Chinese support), which fragmented and weakened the military strength of the EAOs in the region (Lintner, 1991). In this context, Tatmadaw used two strategies, military pressures (sticks) and economic incentives (carrots) that managed to pacify these EAOs through ceasefires and co-optation in the emerging ceasefire capitalism (Kramer, 2009). The capitalism involved mass natural resource exploitation carried out by Tatmadaw, its cronies, Chinese businessmen, and EAOs.

The military regime promised to hold political dialogue once power was transferred to a civilian government, something that did not take place before 2011 (Sadan, 2016). In the meantime, intensive resource exploitation was taking place in the region, carrying with it major implications for people, politics, and economy within and beyond northern Myanmar. First, the capitalism benefited the involved actors, but at the expense of the environment and the people in the region, many of whom have had their land forcibly confiscated (LIOH, 2015). The Tatmadaw managed not only to pacify the EAOs by co-opting its leaders through illiberal economic clientelist

networks, while concentrating its offensives in Kawthoolei. The regime also generated much-needed profits to sustain its system, to enrich its personnel, and to build up its military. In addition to the purchase of modern Chinese weapons, the Tatmadaw also increased its total number of soldiers from 180 000 in 1988 to 400 000 in the mid-1990s (Callahan, 2007, p. 36).

Second – of equal if not more significance – was the fact that the state succeeded in expanding its military and administrative control over territories, people and resources in a region that it previously could not access. Ceasefire allocations of lands illustrates the workings of this form of illiberal peacebuilding (Woods, 2016). For instance, when an area has been allocated by the state for large-scale extraction project (e.g. mining, logging, agriculture), not only this area but large and far areas surrounding it become militarized and policed by the state to protect the area for the investors. While many people have been displaced from their ancestral lands, those still remaining in the concession areas have to relate to entirely new authorities. Such changes, and additional factors immigrant workers, have also had dramatic effects on the populations dynamics.

Thus, military pressure and economic incentives enabled ceasefire capitalism, which enabled Tatmadaw's statebuilding in a contested region. Despite the relative stability it brought, limits inherent in this form of peacebuilding were apparent in the 2010s, when none of these former ceasefire EAOs, including Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and United Wa State Army (UWSA), were included in the NCA framework. Contrary to the earlier promise of political dialogue, when the USDP government took office in 2011, these ceasefire groups were ordered to integrate into the Tatmadaw system through the BGF scheme (Brenner, 2015). When it was not accepted, the military launched heavy attacks on some of these EAOs, triggering large-scale war in the north for the first time in decades. Dissatisfied with the form of "development" brought to them, many civilians supported the reemergence of armed conflict (Brenner, 2019).

Commercialization of Counterinsurgency 2.0

If Tatmadaw's strategy in the 1990s was a commercialization of counterinsurgency, I argue that its strategy in the 2010s in Kawthoolei may be called "commercialization of counterinsurgency 2.0". While referring to the same marketization of the former combat zones in order to pacify and

weaken the EAOs, the strategy has advanced in important ways. Most importantly, it has advanced in that it: i) includes a form of political dialogue, ii) takes place within a hybrid political order, and iii) involves more economic actors in the neoliberalized market. Thus, the war by other means in Kawthoolei takes place in a fundamentally new context and with additional actors. The relative success of the Tatmadaw to pacify KNU and to further weaken it, in this particular context and at this particular time, is informed by historical factors that trace at least back to the 1990s.

Tatmadaw's economic counterinsurgency can be divided into two parts. Whereas one is to incentivize EAOs to sign ceasefire, and thereby *pacify* it, the other is to use economic means to further *weaken* and ultimately *defeat* them. The degree to which this can be successful is also influenced by the pre-ceasefire order, especially in terms of military balance, and often also by external factors such as broader political and/or geopolitical changes.

7.3 Pacifying Revolutionaries: Sticks and Carrots

To understand Tatmadaw's stick and carrot strategy in Kawthoolei, it is crucial to recall the state of the Karen movement in 2012. Continuous military defeats and territorial loss since the 1990s have weakened KNU significantly. Taking into consideration that the pro-ceasefire faction within KNU tends to be leaders from the central and southern districts (bridge 4, 6, and 7), which have suffered most severely from the defeats, it is reasonable to assume that the uneven military strength of KNU vis-à-vis the Tatmadaw has been an important factor motivating KNU to enter ceasefire.

Tho Doo greatly doubts that KNU would enter the ceasefire, had it not been weakened significantly (Interview, 00). In fact, recognizing a 'mutually hurting stalemate' (Zartman, 2000), General Johnny of KNLA has explicitly noted that the war cannot be won militarily (Kipho Mora, 2015). Once the strongest of all brigades, Johnny's home district (Brigade 7) is now home to five other Karen armed groups, including the BGF militia which split from DKBA in 2010 (see figure). The decay of the Karen movement has been caused also in parallel by the liberalization of the economy and broader geopolitical changes.

First, the post-1998 regime's liberalization of trade, which dismantled the smuggling operation of KNU, cut off KNU's major source of revenue (Brenner, 2018). Second, the improved relations between Bangkok and Yangon in the post-cold war period soon led to economic cooperation between the two nations. Two of the most prominent pro-ceasefire KNU leaders, chairperson Mutu Say Poe and vice-chairperson Padoh Kwe Htoo Win who has led the Karen movement since 2012, emerged as leaders from the southern Brigade 6 and 4, respectively. In addition to military offensives from Tatmadaw and its co-opted militias, significant harm to these districts was caused by the growing joint Tatmadaw-Thai resource extraction.

This is clearly illustrated by the construction of the infamous Yadana gas pipeline, a consortium composed of French Total, US UNOCAL, Thai PTT-EP and Myanmar's MOGE, which sought to transport gas from the Gulf of Martaban to Thailand through KNLA brigade 4 (Brenner, 2019). Although Brigade 4 agreed to give way to the interests of these powerful actors and negotiated its strategic withdrawal into demarcated areas, the Tatmadaw ignored the informal deal and launched a major offensive with 21 000 soldiers in 1997 (Brenner, 2018). Killing 'two birds with one stone', the Tatmadaw advanced far beyond the pipeline's corridor, securing the construction areas and forcing Brigade 4 further east to the Thai border. The government has set up its administrative presence in the district (KNU Channel, 2020b).

Put simply, the longstanding military offensives and the geopolitical changes have weakened the central and southern brigades most severely. In comparison, the northern brigades (particularly brigade 2, 3, and 5) have been little affected by these changes. This is to not to say that offensives did not take place nor that the civilians there did not suffer inhuman treatment. However, less affected by the military offensives and the geopolitical changes, they remain more autonomous and militarily stronger than the southern and central districts.

Exhaust, Divide, and Defeat: Ceasefire and Development

The different realities of the KNU districts, particularly between the north and the south, have triggered the movement to respond differently to ceasefire in 2012 (Brenner, 2019). KNU as a whole agrees that the political problem requires a political solution. The differences, however, lies

in the pace and character of ceasefire and negotiation. Whereas the pro-ceasefire faction, who also tend to be pro-development, has been proactive in seeking rapprochement with Naypyidaw, the critical faction has been critical to ceasefire and development-led development (Dah Ler, interview). Moreover, whereas the former has been pragmatic and agreed to move the process quickly forward, the latter has called for a slow approach, and alliance and collective bargaining with all EAOs. The movement has since 2012 been led by the pro-ceasefire faction.

Considering the nature of different realities in the different districts, it seems to be the case that, ultimately, the divide is a historical result of and a means in the Tatmadaw's overall counterinsurgency against KNU. After having weakened, exhausted, and virtually defeated parts of the Karen movement, the Tatmadaw managed to bring KNU into the peace process to "finish the job" in a war by other means. This war by other means, as discussed in previous chapters, unfold in multiple battlefields and with different means, depending to some extent on the types of territories in which is take place.

In the development sector, the core focus of this chapter, the state has attempted to co-opt KNU leaders into the ceasefire capitalism of the 2010s. Although the extent to which this has been successful is a matter of debate and future investigation, it remains a fact that the state has used economic incentives to pacify KNU and to weaken it even further. Dah Ler, who has been involved in early negotiations, described the approach of the military-backed USDP government as follows:

> We had to be alert that they would do economic development first, so that KNU would forget its political struggle and become more interested in development in their areas. Indeed, we saw them carrying out this policy and did development right away. They did it right away because immediately after KNU signed the preliminary ceasefire, what followed was that the Burmese approached us, the companies came, they wanted to meet us, they wanted to meet me. They came to meet us, brigadier leaders, district leaders, and then they started their work. "What should we do? What do you want to do? How should we help you?" … (Dah Ler, interview).

By identifying "who is interested in what", the state has sought to incentivize individuals to accept ceasefire and state-led development int their areas. According to the participant, economic

incentives were accompanied by pressures and even threats to the KNU, including statements like "this opportunity is open only now. Be very quick. If not, the opportunity will no longer be there" and that "if you don't do this, we will do that to you" (Dah Ler, Interview). This approach, involving incentives, pressures, and threats, was the most trust-damaging for the participant who questioned the sincerity of the government. Moreover, the participant added that "I think that some leaders, when they are told like that, they might have been afraid. They feared that they if did not do it, this opportunity would not be there later … It was like that" (Dah Ler, interview).

Seen in light of the steep decline of KNU's strength since the 1990s, affecting most severely the home districts of the pro-ceasefire leaders, this support the argument that war fatigue and a hurting stalemate was an important factor. Commenting further on the response of some KNU leaders, assumedly pointing to the pro-ceasefire leaders, the above-quoted participant says:

> What I want to say is that they [government representatives] had these plans. Therefore, it became a problem, a problem that dragged some leaders' thinking, thinking that, instead of only political issues, they also included development. This also created thinking that "our people are exhausted. Therefore, we have to do development for them". When such development come, as known, the other side become dragged down. The Burmese use this. (Dah Ler, interview).

Tha Taw also explicitly confirmed that the military has used development as a strategy to fight KNU (interview, 00). It remains uncertain exactly in what ways and to what extent some KNU leaders have been successfully co-opted into ceasefire capitalism. Nevertheless, two things are certain. One is, as the data above shows, the military has used economic incentives to pacify KNU leaders by gaining their support for the ceasefire. Another is the fact that the pro-ceasefire leaders of KNU, including chairman Mutu Say Poe and vice-chairman Padoh Kwe Htoo Win, are more open to development (Brenner, 2019). However, although the literature often refers to them as pro-development, it is also uncertain to what extent they are that by choice, by force, or a combination of those. According to Padoh Kwe Htoo Win, there is not much of a choice left. In his words:

> Some people blame us and say 'hey, you revolutionary, you should not do any business', But we have to do that … The bigger countries are playing the tune. We have to dance to it. (Kwe Htoo Win, cited in Brenner 2019, p. 62).

The opinion of the current vice-chairperson is that it is necessary to engage with the economic forces which are too powerful to resist. Brigadier General of Brigade 4 has explicitly said that – after the 2012 ceasefire which allowed them to return to some of the areas from which they left after the 1997 offensive – they have had to create "mutual understanding" with the Burmese authorities that had established themselves there and with the incoming Thai investors (KNU Channel, 2020b). That there is little choice for some districts is confirmed by Tho Doo who, though arguing a political settlement should be the first priority, acknowledges that some local leaders may not have a choice (interview).

Regardless of that, the actions of KNU's chairman, vice-chairman, and other pro-ceasefire leaders support the argument that they are pro-development, in one way or another, and proactively seek to secure a stake in the increasingly growing ceasefire economy. A KNU policy is that major development projects that would harm the EAO's security in the interim period should not be allowed (Dah Ler, interview). However, when chairman Mutu Say Poe signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2016 with multiple trading companies, in relation to two major industrial and energy projects in Brigade 4, he was heavily criticized by 17 Karen CSOs in a letter, endorsed by over 300 other CSOs, for lack of transparency and democratic accountability (Naing, 2016). Even Padoh Zipporah Sein, then vice-chairperson of KNU, did not know about the project. Similar critiques about lack of transparency, particularly in relation to the negotiations, has been frustratingly expressed by VCS Baw Kyaw Heh in a speech (Faithful Servant, 2017).

Although much can be said about the complex internal relations within KNU's leadership, the point here is that it was the pro-ceasefire and pro-development faction that has led the movement since 2012, with a strong opposition which include a more critical faction who, along with Karen CSOs, called for a political settlement first. Regardless of differences, however, KNU as an organization cannot be reduced to economic rebellion because the organization has a clear political agenda, because there is an internal strong opposition against development activities, because the pro-ceasefire leaders has also actively "fought" in the political battlefield. In addition,

the ceasefire has arguably also resulted from humanitarian concerns, war fatigue, a hurting stalemate and the belief in the good intentions of the Tatmadaw to reform (Jones, 2014b). Defending the pro-ceasefire leaders from criticism, Thara says:

> To be honest, our leaders want to try their best so that the soldiers would no longer have to die, so that the civilian villagers would no longer have to worry but to sustain their livelihoods peacefully. That is the hope of the leaders. If the Burmese [Tatmadaw] says "yes", then it will be ok. Everything will work. Because instead of saying "yes", they say "oh, wait a little, wait a little", then wait, wait, wait, wait, and then, years pass by. Slowly, taking a lot of time. It is because the Burmese has their plan, and our desire, we want to realize it, but it is not possible. Our leaders have no faults. They stand for the good. (Thara, interview).

While not excusing the reportedly non-transparent and non-inclusive moves of some KNU leaders, when looking into the situation in its historical and contemporary contexts, I argue that divide within KNU regarding ceasefire and development ultimately reflects Tatmadaw's counterinsurgency strategy. Specifically, it is the latter's use of sticks and carrots that has managed to pacify KNU through i) military pressure, ii) optimism about a political solution, and iii) promise of economic development. Rather than separate, these factors have arguably worked together in bringing the pro-ceasefire leaders from the bush to the capitol. It is noted that due to humanitarian concerns for Karen civilians and to a hurting military stalemate, these leaders wanted to conclude a ceasefire already back in the mid-2000s (Keenan, 2012). Arguably, the promise of immediate political dialogue and the prospects of economic development have in the context of national reforms been the final ingredients in Tatmadaw's trap to pacify KNU.

In short, the state has arguably used *development as a carrot* beside optimism about a political settlement and military pressure to pacify the KNU. What significance it has had in bringing KNU to negotiation compared to the two other factors cannot be specified. However, reflecting on this question in light of the pro-active engagement of these leaders in the ceasefire capitalism of the 2010s, it is reasonable to believe that economic incentives has been a contributory factor. Two related reasons may be said to support this. First, there existed in the pre-ceasefire period a form of capitalism, wherein the breakaway Karen armed actors, Tatmadaw, and Thai

investors jointly extracted from the natural resources while weakening KNU in the process. According to Tho Doo, the resultant situation for some leaders is "follow my rules and do business or go against my will and you will pay a heavy consequence" (interview). Second, and relatedly, with the knowledge that such economic activities would only intensify, KNU established an Economic Committee to deal with the question of development (Brenner, 2019).

In this sense, these incumbent leaders have been co-opted into the ceasefire capitalism, although the nature and extent of the co-optation as well as whether it was triggered by necessity or opportunism remains a matter of debate. An observable fact, nevertheless, remains that economic development activities have significantly increased in Kawthoolei since the ceasefire. Reflecting on KNU ceasefire, it seems that the "cut" between KNU leaders which resulted from military, economic, and political means, and which led to ceasefire and development was the "father of all cuts", in reference to the Four-Cuts Policy. This is because it pacified KNU through the 2012 ceasefire which in turn facilitated "a war by other means in all possible battlefields with all means", as seen in the security, governance, and development sectors since then.

7.4 Weakening A Movement Through "Development"

The other aspect of Tatmadaw's commercialization of counterinsurgency lies in the further weakening of KNU through economic development means once the latter has been pacified. As noted, economic development activities have increased significantly in Kawthoolei since the ceasefire. And like what has been the case in northern Myanmar during the 1990s, they carry significant security, governance, and political implications. The transformation of the battlefield to marketplace has arguably further weakened KNU and enabled the state to consolidate and expand its rules into contested ethnic borderlands of Kawthoolei.

Road Infrastructure: For Prosperity or War?

One of the ways through which the state has sought to gain hegemonic dominance of space through development is through the construction of road networks. Since 2012, a number of roads have been constructed and/or improved, in response to the national plan of achieving domestic and regional connectivity. The most known is the Asia Highway in central Kawthoolei which, funded by ADB and the Thai government, is part of the regional Greater Mekong Subregion East-West Economic Corridor, connecting Myanmar through central Kawthoolei and Thailand to Vietnam (KHRG & KESAN, 2016).

Construction of roads have taken place in all districts of KNU, including the remote Brigade 5, but mostly in the central and southern brigades. Pah Lah, a peace and conflict monitor with 15 years of profession experience, said that the construction of roads depend on the attitudes of local district leaders, i.e. whether of not they give permission (interview). Commenting further on the construction of this road and about development in general, the participant says:

> If we look at the thinking of some KNU leaders, they may think that this is for the sake of peace. “For the sake of peace, we will just give it away, the Burmese government will make peace and create development. If we resist, armed conflict will resume, and the negotiations will be ruined. We cannot risk that". Maybe they have thought like that. My opinion is that in all works of the Burmese government, they have their political goals. It is not that they are purely good-hearted … Every step in their work has political aims to destroy the Karen revolution. (Pah Lah, interview)

The “for the sake of peace” observation implies an unwillingness to fight, which may be due to related factors like military strength, war fatigue, humanitarian consideration, etc. Like the critical faction within KNU and Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN), the largest network of Karen CSOs, Pah Lah holds the opinion that the state instrumentalizes economic development as a political weapon to destroy the Karen movement (interview). These concerns are indeed well founded because networks of road in politically and militarily contested areas unavoidably have important implications. Beyond enabling economic activities, it may facilitate the expansion and consolidation of the state administrative, governance, and military structures in contested or

previously less accessible areas. Due to the roads constructed, for instance, even the headquarter of Brigade 6 can be accessed without having to pass a KNU checkpoint, leaving Tatmadaw with "no worries" if war breaks out again (Pah Lah, interview).

Additionally, the warnings about dangers posed by development projects to the peace process are real. Increased state militarization and fighting have been documented around economically strategies areas, including on Asia Highway and around the planned Hat Gyi dam in Salween rivers, leaving forcing thousands of civilians to flee (KHRG, 2018a). In sum, it can be said that road construction, framed as part of the broader project of development, has been one of the ways in which the state has sought to expand its system in the ethnic populated borderlands. Rather than withdrawing and devolving power to KNU through constitutional arrangement to determine the form of development it desires, the state has remained in the areas and strengthened its presence as if there was no other alternative.

Legal Weapons in the War by Other Means

Another way in which the commercialization of counterinsurgency not only continued but has advanced is, as observed by Tom Kramer (2021), through the deliberate use of legal framework to penetrate and dominate ethnic areas. The author notes in particular that "the ceasefires and economic reforms strengthen the central government and Tatmadaw's military, political and economic control over ethnic borderlands" (Kramer, 2021, p. 477). The reforms mentioned refer specifically to the *Farmland Law* and the *Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Land Management Law* (VFV Law) passed by the government in 2012. The former law criminalizes millions of people over night for living in their ancestral lands for not having government land certificates. The VFV law allows the state to allocate lands to national and international investors.

Additionally, the government's Investment Laws also provide incentives and special privileges to investors seeking to invest in conflict affected areas, e.g. in form of reduced tax (Pah Lah, interview). These laws do not recognize ethnic Karen traditional customary and communal tenure system, upon which KNU policy is based. They have also been endorsed and implemented by the NLD government, whose regional Karen State minister, in disregard to ethnic Karen

governance, said in 2017 that "there is only one [land] policy" (Nyein, 2017). Such denial of recognition to KNU's governance system is one of the reasons why Karen actors have lost faith in the NLD to address their grievances (Dah Ler, interview). About these laws, Pah Lah says:

> They call it vacant land. But these lands are the land of our Karen people. Because of war, they have become IDPs and fled to Thailand. These people, one day when they to return to Myanmar, they would not have any land anymore … permanently disappeared. To be honest, in the past, even when you had to flee, you still had land. But now, because economic forces come in, when you return from fleeing, you would no longer have land. (Pah Lah, interview)

These statements illustrate the devastating consequences of these land laws for civilians. Heh Wah, a research participant in this study working with a major human rights organization, noted that land grabs are a source of human rights abuses since the ceasefire (KHRG, 2018b). The phenomena are directly related to the increase in economic development and the use of the new land laws. Villagers have even had to sell their labor in the very land they owned, after their whole village and livelihood areas have been granted to Thai investors (Ehnadoh, 2013). Beyond disastrous effects on families and communities, when seeing these laws from the lens of peacebuilding, it is a "Declaration of War" against ethnic groups, as an ethnic commentator accurately put it (TNI, 2019). Through these lands, the state intentionally ignores the fact that land – upon which ethnic territories, populations, and resources stand – is at the heart of the conflicts in Kawthoolei and Myanmar in general. For this reason, in the same way as the opportunities for linking education and peace is missed, the connection between land governance and peace is missed.

In the pre-NCA 2012 negotiations, the government had indeed agreed to talk about IDPs and land issues but, like other important matters, this has not been addressed (Dah Ler, interview). Not unlike northern Myanmar during the 1990s, widespread land grabs, militarization, and destructions of environment, culture, and livelihoods are some of the characteristics of current peacebuilding. With the state extending its military and administrative systems, and exploiting through legal means the natural resources of the region in the context of a ceasefire, it is clear that this represents a continuation of and advancement of the form of counterinsurgency in the 1990s.

Tatmadaw-Integrated Militia: A Business Haven

A third way through which the state has commercialized counterinsurgency in Kawthoolei is through the use of non-KNU Karen armed groups (Buchanan, 2016). Through illiberal economic clientelist relations, the state managed to control these militias through formal and informal channels. Most prominent is the Karen BGF who receives salary, weapons, and other equipment from and is under Tatmadaw's direct command. Beyond challenging KNU's territorial authority, especially but not limited to that of Brigade 7, the BGF is also involved in economic activities that in indirect ways strengthens the state's authority and further weaken KNU power in the areas.

Instead of being signs of state failure, the Tatmadaw-militias relations in Kawthoolei actually works to challenge the main enemy and helps extend the state's outreach. A notable project involving BGF business activities is the Shwe Kokko new city, a 15-billion UD dollar project in Brigade 7, that is carried out in cooperation with a complex network of Chinese investors, some of whom are connected to transnational criminal networks (Tower & Clapp, 2020). Although the formal government permit approved the construction of 59 luxury villas on 22.5 acres of land, the actual project is planned to cover nearly 30, 000 acres. The core of the project is said to include a $25 billion-a-year online gambling and other illicit activities. Following mass attention in late 2020 and an official Chinese statement that the project was not part of its Belt and Road Initiative, which forced the government and Tatmadaw to intervene, the project is temporarily suspended.

In a report titled "Gambling Away Our Lands", KPSN (2020, p. 5) describes this project as a "win-win" situation for both the BGF and the Tatmadaw because it is "cementing control of these contested Karen territories, while gaining huge financial rewards". Despite Tatmadaw putting the sole blame on BGF over these irregularities, the Karen network argues it is disingenuous because the latter is under the former's command and has a Tatmadaw deputy commander within each of the 12 BGF battalions (KPSN, 2020). Looking at the scale and value of the project, it is indeed difficult to imagine it being implementing without the blessing of the Tatmadaw. Moreover, it was only after heavy international criticism that the Tatmadaw intervened, demanding the resignation of the leader Chit Thu from BGF.

It seemed for a moment that the patron-client relations between the two actors were ending. However, in light of today's post-coup situation, where the BGF is reportedly assisting the Tatmadaw in its mobilization and attack against KNLA Brigade 5 in exchange for permission to resume the controversial businesses (Frontier Myanmar, 2021), the opposite seems to be true.

The case illustrates how ancestral territories are "gambled away" in the context the political reforms, economic liberalization, and peace process. Lands have been appropriated, populations displaced, while the military and state structures as well as criminal networks find their home and/or business haven in the former stronghold of the Karen movement. Population dynamics had also altered dramatically. Locals estimate about 10 000 Chinese worked in the construction site when it was active (KPSN, 2020). Recalling the influx of Bamar people to these areas in the 1990s and observing the recent influx of the Chinese, Tho Doo states that although some people may see it as a development process, it is "indeed a sad story for our Karen people" (interview). In Pah Dah's own words, the BGF is used by the state to "kick away KNU" (interview).

Other smaller business-oriented actors, including PC and DKBA, are similarly continuing to challenge the authority of KNU. Although the relations between these actors and Tatmadaw on the ground are constantly changing, it seems to be the case that they continue to hold close clientelist relations. For instance, while the people of Myanmar across ethnic and religious lines protested against the coup, leaders of PC and DKBA visited Naypyidaw and signed agreements with Tatmadaw to promote "regional peace, stability, and development" (Thein, 2021). In sum, through illiberal economic clientelism and through the intensified economic activities, the state manages to cement and expand its control over contested Kawthoolei areas directly and indirectly.

7.5 Summary

I have demonstrated that the strategies of the state in the development sector in Kawthoolei must be understood in its proper historical context, particularly since the partial liberalization of the economy in the 1990s. Having weakened KNU through military means and through the dismantling of KNU's smuggling routes, the state succeeded in gaining hegemonic control over the economic resources. This control over the economy has then been used in a number of direct

and indirect ways, in order to pacify and further weaken the Karen movement. First, through clientelist economic means, the state managed to co-opt breakaway Karen armed actors. This has in turn presented major territorial and military challenges to KNU, while strengthening the control of the state into previously inaccessible areas.

Second, by defeating parts of the Karen movement and by dividing it, the state managed to bring KNU into negotiation through a combination of military pressures, economic development incentives, and some optimism about a political settlement. A combination of these in the changed political context, I argue, was close to an unavoidable trap in which KNU fell. In difference to the ceasefires of the 1990s, the inclusion of political dialogue in the case of KNU was the factor that advanced the state economic counterinsurgency of the state. Due to lack of data, I have stressed that there remains uncertainty about how economic incentives worked on KNU. However, the openness to economic development of some leaders shows that it may have worked to some extent in the pacification of KNU. By and large, its strategies have been passive and reactive.

Third, during the fuller economic liberalization since 2011, the state has turned the battlefield to a marketplace that include the participation of powerful international actors and institutions, including World Bank, ADB, ASEAN, China, and Japan. I have shown that this economic globalization of this scale carry, as illustrated by road infrastructure construction, both military, political, and economic implications. Moreover, in this process of accumulation by dispossession, the state has used a legal land framework in order to expand its military, governance, and economic control into areas contested and formerly inaccessible. Thus, the strategy of the state in Kawthoolei has been a commercialization of counterinsurgency 2.0.

In short, through the hegemonic control and use of economic means, the state has sought to counter KNU in a continuation of war by other means. To fully understand this Tatmadaw-led war, it is necessary to look at it in combination with the parallel wars in the security and governance sector. It takes place in a wide range of arenas, uses various means, and involves a large number of actors. Thus, through a process of encroachment on Karen territories, populations, and resources, the state has sought to consolidate and expand its form of statebuilding.

8 Outcomes and Sustainability

Having discussed the strategies of the involved actors, this chapter now turns to a discussion about the *outcomes* of peacebuilding and the *sustainability* of this form of peace. The recent military coup left the peacebuilding process inconclusive. Yet, these two questions remain important to critically scrutinize in order to draw empirical and theoretical lessons from the case studied. I start by discussing the form of peace achieved in the different sectors at the local level. Next, I discuss the sustainability of this form of peace by also including the participants' perceptions.

8.1 Negative Peace through Dual Systems

The outcomes of peacebuilding that have been achieved in the sectors studied are characterized by in-betweenness, not in the sense of liberal/illiberal hybridization as understood in the hybrid peace literature (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013), but in the meaning that the armed conflict is neither active nor resolved and that the conflicting systems continue to exist in parallel and competition to one another. It is a situation where armed conflict is contained through dual structures rather than hybrid arrangements for security, governance, and development.

The potential for more real peace at the local level is found to be limited. This is mainly due to the fact that the restructuring and reorganization of the sectors at the local level have been secondary to the national peace process, which was supposed to, but failed, to address the core political grievances of the KNU. In the absence of political conflict resolution at the national level, local dual structures for security, governance and development persist, with blurred and contested boundaries between state-controlled areas and institutions and KNU-controlled areas and systems. In this situation, the state has sought to expand its control in all three sectors while KNU has sought to defend its own interests against state expansion.

As such, the period since 2012 has been characterized by conflict containment but not resolution – a situation that can be described as 'negative peace' (Galtung, 1964) or 'no war, no peace' (Mac Ginty, 2006) – and a continuation of war by other means in each of the three sectors that have been analyzed in the preceding chapters. That said, the security, governance, and

development sectors in Kawthoolei have seen major developments and changes following the 2012 ceasefire, with some areas such as education being shaken up to its roots. Most strikingly, the peace achieved is one that is, rather than static, continuously contested.

Security Sector: Silent War, No Peace

The illiberal strategies of the state have produced a negative peace, i.e. a form of peace that manages to reduce violence but fails to address the core cause of conflict. It has a dual character in the sense that two systems persist in parallel and with tense relations to one another. However, the analysis of Kawthoolei during ceasefire also challenges the notion of "no war, no peace" situation formulated by Mac Ginty (2006). The hidden and active, though low in intensity, silent war in northern Kawthoolei is more accurately described as a "silent war, no peace", to rephrase the above-mentioned author. Although the concepts refer to the same negative peace, characterized by reduced violence but unresolved conflict, the latter highlights that it is not a static one.

Though having taken place without much gunfire, the silent war, no peace situation achieved in Kawthoolei has also been violent. Its militarized and conflictual character is an inherent result of the Tatmadaw's unwillingness to withdraw or relocate its troops. However, its violent character followed contradictions in the involved actors' understanding of how this form of peace should be governed. The motivation of the state underlying the silent war, no peace situation has been to gain greater territorial control of KNU areas, in the context of a peace process where it has also attempted to formally obtain the EAO's acceptance of the single army concept. When the Tatmadaw proceeded with the road construction in northern Kawthoolei despite KNU's disproval, the violent character of the negative peace became visible.

It is the structurally contradicted interests of the actors – with the state seeking to monopolize violence in a Weberian sense, while KNLA is seeking to protect its ancestral lands – that make the form of peace one that is negative in character and violent in nature. The form of peace achieved has remained fragile since its inception. And as explicitly expressed by a participant, it is just a break from the war, while they follow the political scenes in Naypyidaw (Saw Moo, interview). As of May 2021, when fighting resumed between Tatmadaw and KNLA

units in large-scale, including airstrikes by the former for the first time in two decades, it is evident that the form of peace achieved has existed in contradiction all along. To many Karen observers, including two research participants in this study, the recurrence of violence was self-evident.

A former KNLA leader himself, Tho Doo observed that, learning from the past, it was clear to him that the Tatmadaw "always repeat its old method", referring to its lack of interest to take seriously what the KNU brought to the table and the former's desire to always have the upper hand (interview). Consequently, he argued, "anything [war recurrence] can happen at any time". Pah Lah, who has also monitored the situation closely, even postulated that after the possibility of a larger war recurrence after the November 2020 elections was more likely than not (interview). Although the currently escalating return of violence may have resulted partly from the coup and the growing unrest elsewhere in the country, it is important to stress that violent conflict had been on in northern Kawthoolei since 2018, with the end of 2020 seeing an intensification of it.

Thus, the outcome of peace in the security sector is a silent war, no peace situation, where violence has decreased substantially but the antagonistic attitudes of the actors have persisted, and the cause of conflict remained unresolved. In this situation, although violence existed at a relatively low level, the possibility of it was constantly present. It is important to also note that there are differences between the individual brigades of KNLA in their relations to the Tatmadaw, as seen in the observation that fighting has been and continues to be concentrated in the northern parts of Kawthoolei. This may reflect a number of factors, including military power balance and the autonomous nature of the northern region which makes it more protected but also more important for the state to seek over control. Overall, however, the peace is one of a negative character.

For the people on the ground, the peace that has been achieved vary in space and time. While stability has been brought to many areas in Kawthoolei, particularly in central and southern districts, people in the northern part of the region have had to continue living in fear and experienced displacement throughout the decade. This has been due to the Tatmadaw's militarized presence, its unjust killing of a number of civilians, its attempts to expand into the areas, and the fighting that followed. Throughout the decades, civilians have also protested in large numbers, calling for Tatmadaw's withdrawal. The peace achieved for civilians is thus of pluralized.

In summary, the outcome of peace in the security sector is continued existence of parallel systems and persistently tense relations. The ceasefire itself has not been stable and, due to current recurrence of large-scale violence, it seems to be seriously harmed, if not already destroyed. It is important to note that ceasefire rules were repeatedly broken long before the coup. Moreover, a form of institutional hybridization has taken place between the Tatmadaw and BGF systems. Such attempts have been initiated by the state to formally co-opt the northern EAOs (in early 2010s) and to co-opt KNU through negotiations, but this has not been accepted. The Tatmadaw has then fought KNU in a war by other means to consolidate its presence in inaccessible borderlands.

Governance Sector: Ceasefire War-Making

The outcome of peace in the governance sector is also of a negative and dual character, in the sense that the systems exist in parallel but also in tension to one another. Constitutional steps to address the contradictions within the conflict parties have largely been absent (South et al., 2018). This is due to the fact that both governments, during the USDP and NLD periods, have not been concerned with implementation of the interim arrangements, as agreed upon in the NCA document. Moreover, in the absence of clear ceasefire demarcation, the state has expanded its system into previously inaccessible or less accessible areas. The lack of constitutional efforts to address the core causes of conflict compounded by the expansion of the state has frustrated many Karen actors on the ground, whose goal to represent and govern its people became increasingly threatened.

Therefore, like what is the case in the security sector, the fact that the resultant outcome is a contained conflict does not mean that it is static, uncontested, and unchanging. On the contrary, active moves have been taken by both sides to promote their respective forms of statebuilding while negotiations took place at the national level. In terms of institutions, some hybridized outcomes of peace have been seen, as seen in the increasing number of mixed schools. However, rather than being local solutions for peace, such hybridized outcomes observed in Kaawthoolei are rather expressions of power. Moreover, in addition to being negative in character and continuously contested, the form of peace achieved in the governance sector has also been violent at times, as seen in the clashes in relation to the competition over covid-19 governance.

The encounter between the government ceasefire statebuilding and KNU's ceasefire state-making makes up what I have called "ceasefire war-making". Rather than being a process of peacebuilding, which in this case would be a process that moves towards addressing the cause of conflict, this is a process of ceasefire war-making because, ultimately, it remains a war by other means waged by the actors on the ground. The state's mobilization of power, in the form of human and material resources, and its privileged possession of law has made it the stronger party in comparison to KECD. The resultant outcome of peace is therefore one than is a process that is constantly contested, renegotiated, and therefore subject to change. What may have been a dual peace arrangement yesterday, e.g. education systems existing side by side (physically and/or system-wise), can transform to become anything but peace today.

In fact, examples of the changing character of the negative peace in the governance sector are already seen in today's northern Kawthoolei. While KECD schools in Brigade 5 existed as a parallel system during the previous decade, two of their high schools have now been levelled to the ground by recent Tatmadaw airstrikes and bombing, forcing thousands of students into the forests to hide (KHRG, 2021). This is what is meant by ceasefire war-making. The attacks were not caused directly by disputes in the education sector nor were they only aimed at the schools. However, they illustrate the horizontal cross-sector (security, governance, and development linkages) and the vertical cross-scale (national and local level peacebuilding efforts) effects of the Tatmadaw-led peacebuilding. When the state's statebuilding efforts undermined local calls for decentralized ethnic self-rule, the risks of violent resumption are constantly present.

Thus, the peace achieved is one that does not resolve the conflict's structural cause but exaggerates ethnic grievances, and therefore one that is at constant risk of being broken into parts. The parallel character of the systems is also seen in the fact that many villages in the mixed areas have two village heads, one for government, and the other for KNU. For people on the ground, this means having to continue living in a limbo and always navigate between different authorities. The militarized environment and contested nature of governance in the region makes the peace delivered to people one that is characterized by persistent uncertainty and insecurity. However, as observed by KHRG (2018b), they are also agential actors who exercise their form of power in responding to the authorities. For instance, they may prefer KNU's judicial system to solve cases, while state education may be preferred because it may enable further opportunities.

Development Sector: War of Greed

The outcome of peace in the development sector is also of negative dual character. There has not been created any official cooperation between the two parties in the areas of accumulation, resource governance, extraction, and economic development. This is due to the fact that, as with the other sectors, KNU has expected to agree on such resource sharing issues through the extra-parliamentary peace negotiations. Therefore, in the meantime, the form of peace achieved is one of negative character. Like the above sector, however, this form of peace achieved in the development sector has been all but static. The significant increase in economic activities has arguably benefited the actors involved, including the government, Tatmadaw, the military cronies, foreign investors, as well as armed Karen actors on the ground.

Politically, however, the form of peace achieved in this sector also pushes the Karen movement's goals of autonomy and self-determination further away into the unknown. The state's push for development in Kawthoolei, during a ceasefire where there are no mechanisms for power and resource sharing arrangements through federalism, has enabled it to consolidate and expand its power. With national and foreign companies flowing in, registering their projects mainly with the state, KNU as a non-state actor have largely had to stand on the side. While some of its leaders have arguably been co-opted into the state-led economic development process and "dance to the tune" of the powerful actors, either by force or by will, the movement's desire of resource self-determination on its ancestral lands are sidelined.

Therefore, the form of peace achieved in the development sector is politically contested. With the law against it, moreover, the Karen movement as a whole has had to watch its ancestral and claimed lands being allocated by the state to various companies seeking their fortunes in the region (Kramer, 2021). This has in turn led to displacement of the people, militarization of the areas, and destruction of local ancestral lands, livelihoods, and culture. Although ceasefires have frozen a dual structure, it is the case that one system dominates and threatens the very existence of the other. Against the mainstream development paradigm and against some of the pro-ceasefire KNU leaders, Karen CSOs, and Karen civilians (e.g. KESAN Channel, 2020) have called for the

necessity of a political settlement that would guarantee a form of resource management that protects the environment, local livelihoods, and culture.

Considering the exclusion of local actors, it is reasonable to argue that the government and international actors' push for development as well as environmental conservation in the conflict affected region of Kawthoolei has been synonymous with forcing the region and its people to "develop" (Woods & Naimark, 2020). The resultant situation for people on the ground in Kawthoolei is "a war of all against Karen people" – in a Hobbesian sense of 'war of all against all' – where there are laws, but they not only ignore, but actively undermine a group of people's calls for self-determination. In a context where the state has been unable and unwilling to address the core cause of the conflict, the promotion of large-scale economic development in the region has done little to address the ethnic grievances.

8.2 Sustainability of Peace in Kawthoolei

The question of sustainability of this form of peacebuilding and peace outcomes is a normative but important one to ask. Importantly, this sub-chapter highlights the views and perceptions of the participant on the peacebuilding process and relates these to the overall findings of local peacebuilding in Kawthoolei. The overall finding is that although the participants possess a wide range of opinions for various reasons, they largely unite in their perception that the state, particularly the military, is not sincere in its promise about peace. Seeing these in light findings in the previous chapter, it is clear that the prospects for positive and sustainable peace remain limited.

Stability Appreciation and Persistent Mistrust

The participants appreciate the relative stability brought by the ceasefire and the peace process. Freedom of movement, association, and to lead a more stable life is perhaps the biggest benefits (Heh Wah, interview). With important exceptions of those impacted by persistent militarization, continued fighting, and land confiscations, many people in Kawthoolei have had the freedom to

move around and sustain their livelihoods in a more peaceful way. For the Karen political movement, the opportunity of association and cooperation within and beyond Kawthoolei without being persecuted has been a privilege that did not exist prior to 2012 (Tee Kaw, interview). Many Karen in urban areas, such as Yangon, has therefore become more interested and politically active in the ethnic movement (Ker Paw, interview). These opportunities are rare and highly appreciated.

However, strong mistrust in the military persists. Nearly all participants, including those whose perceptions have been collected by another researcher, have explicitly expressed mistrust in the Tatmadaw's sincerity to create a genuine federal democratic union that would meet the political demands of the Karen and other ethnic movements. For instance, some of their voices go as follows: "in reality, the military does not even want to build a federal country" (Tha Taw, interview), "they hold onto NCA and they will end you" (Dah Ler, interview), "they are not in good faith" (Saw Moo, interview). "what we ask, they will not give, that is for sure" (Hsa Dah, interview), "honesty does not exist" (Say Htoo, interview), "they don't have sincerity" (Ker Paw, interview), and "they don't have solidarity for us" (Tee Kaw, interview).

Other participants express similar views along these lines (Thara, Pah Lah, Thoe Doo, interview). The mistrust can indeed not be overstated. It is arguably a result of the lack of progress in negotiations and the actions of the state on the ground. An interesting story behind the negotiations shared by Tha Taw who, as noted in the first quotation above, described that the military accepted NCA out of necessity, not sincerity, because it was a demand that could not be lowered by the EAOs but needed to be accepted for the NCA to be signed. While this was seen as a small moment of success in the early negotiations, it is in itself also a confirmation that supports the general argument that federalism is not really on the table for the Tatmadaw.

In terms of sustainability, the mere fact that the participants are mistrustful and doubtful about the sincerity of the Tatmadaw rejects the form of peacebuilding to be sustainable. This is because when the dominant political actor in the country is perceived as uninterested in genuinely addressing the Karen desire of self-determination, it goes without saying that peacebuilding of the past decade cannot be said to be perceived as sustainable. Moreover, seeing this general perception in light of the concerns expressed about the local peacebuilding dynamics discussed in the previous

chapters, the unresolved conflict causes, and the currently escalating violence in Kawthoolei following the coup, it is with clarity that this form of peacebuilding is not sustainable.

Uniting in Mistrust, Diverging in Opinions

While emphasizing that the military is perceived as uninterested in resolving the conflict, it is also worth noting that the participants hold different views about the peace process. An interesting observation is that some of those who are most doubtful about the sincerity the state is also those most willing to engage the state in negotiations and on the ground. My intention is not to strictly categorize the highly complex views of the participants. This would be neither ethically nor methodologically justifiable. However, in spite of mistrust, I observe in the data set that the participants different views held for various reasons. Two main positions can be located.

First, while mistrustful of the Tatmadaw and concerned about the changes on the ground, a group of participants emphasize opportunities in impossibilities (Tha Taw; Saw Moo; Hsa Dah; Ker Paw, interview). Seeing benefits with the ceasefire, they highlight, for instance, that the existence of NCA, the NLD government, and international observation of Myanmar also restrict the military to act as it wants. The international action taken in ICJ over the mistreatment of Rohingya has been pointed out as an example. Moreover, whereas Saw Moo reasoned his support of the ceasefire as an opportunity to prepare militarily, Has Dah called for the need to unite Karen people, seek cooperation with other EAOs, and to "destroy the enemy [Tatmadaw]" one day (interview). As for other participants, a benefit is seen in the right to organize the Karen movement.

Although they do not believe that the state is willing to address their cause, they see ceasefire as a means to strengthen the movement, both politically and militarily. The proposed strategies are rather survival strategies in the context of political structures that do not favor them. This shows that support for a ceasefire and a peace process exist not necessarily because it is perceived as sustainable such that it would address the root cause of conflict. The support of ceasefire as a preparation for a future a war can hardly be taken as a sign of the form of peacebuilding being sustainable. Rather, these are alternative strategies that outline opportunities

in difficulties. In sum, their position seems to imply that, although the form of peacebuilding is not sustainable, the ceasefire is a means that can be used to gain other benefits.

Second, equally mistrustful and concerned about the state's actions on the ground, another group of participants are critical about the potential of negotiations and recognizes the incapacities of KNU to compete against the state on the ground (Dah Ler; Pah Lah, interview). They note that because the negotiation within the NCA framework takes place under the 2008 constitution, the Karen goal of proper autonomy cannot be realized. Importantly, the pessimism is reasoned by the fact that the Union Peace Accord (the peace process' final stage) will have to be ratified by the parliament where the Tatmadaw has the right to veto anything, including federalism, that contrasts its interests. Dah Ler noted illustratively that when the schools have become government or mixed schools, the roads and the cities are built, there would be no point in negotiation (interview).

This group of participants are highly critical about the possibilities of achieving substantial gains under the political structures dictated by the military through its constitution. Interesting though not surprising, they do not imply a desire of a return to active conflict either. Their position is merely that, in facing the military, little can be done to achieved political goals.

Some of the other participants, including Tho Doo, Thara, and Tee Kaw, while concerned about the developments on the ground since 2012, refrained from expressing any strong opinion, arguing that the leaders know best what they do (interview). For instance, while feeling powerless over the expansion of the state in the education system, Thara defends KNU leaders from criticism, arguing that they are trying their best. Villagers in the data set unsurprisingly expressed most appreciation about the stability achieved (Kwe Baw; Kaw Eh; Moo Shee; Poe Noo; Tee Doe, interview). In comparison to earlier decades, the 2010s has been characterized by rare stability. Though proud and satisfied of seeing his children getting educated at government schools, Tee Doe acknowledges that there is no equality between he Karen and the Burmese (interview).

Needless to say, this overview does not capture the participants' complex perceptions about the peacebuilding process. However, it shows two things. First, and for obvious reasons, it shows that war is an undesirable option. The research participants do indeed long for peace and stability. Second, although opinions vary about what and how much can be done, trust in the peace process

to address the causes of the conflict remains limited. Ultimately, this highlights that, in the perceptions of the participants, this form of peacebuilding has not been about tackling the root causes of conflict and it is therefore not sustainable.

8.3 Summary

In sum, the overall outcome of peace on the ground in the studied sectors can be characterized as a negative peace that maintains structural violence and fails to resolve the contractions. The security, governance, and development systems of the actors continue to exist in parallel to one another. It is important to state, however, that the form of peace has not been static but in constant challenge to one another. The recent coup has left the peacebuilding process inconclusive and, and with the escalation of violence, the local negative peace, if even still existent, more "negative" and violent than ever during the past decade.

In agreement with the participants' mistrust about the state's willingness to resolve the conflict, the preceding chapters analyzed that the form of peacebuilding in the security, governance, and development sectors has not been about support for federalism from below. Rather, they show that the state's persistent militarization, incursive attempts to expand territorial control, expansion in governance sector, and use of economic counterinsurgency have been about the enlarging and strengthening of a unitary statebuilding project. Enabled by its unwillingness to demarcate areas and relocate its troops, for instance, the actions of the state in the security and governance sector have instead prevented trust-building.

This form of peacebuilding can therefore not be considered as sustainable. On the contrary, I have argued that due to the frustration, powerlessness, and decreased it has created, it can even amount ceasefire war-making. This is because while not resolving it, it invites a continuation of conflict. In the specific context of Myanmar, there are rich examples shifting geographies of war and peace. Looking at the KIO ceasefire of the 1990s, for instance, Brenner (2015, p. 339) observes that it "left underlying grievances unaddressed and planted the seeds of new ones …". Above all, regardless of conflict recurrence, this form of peacebuilding is not sustainable because it fails to resolve the core cause of conflict and maintains structural violence.

9 Theoretical Lessons

It has been an objective of this thesis to engage with the literature not only to understand the case itself but also to learn from it by discussing the phenomena of peacebuilding. In my attempt to extract theoretical lessons, I identify three notable contributions of the case. One is related to the nuancing of the still immature theoretical conceptualizations and understandings of illiberal peacebuilding. A second lesson is the challenge the case presents to the notion of hybrid peace. A third lesson relates to illiberal international peacebuilding. I discuss each of these in turn.

9.1 Peacebuilding in a Changing World

The case of Kawthoolei supports the general observation that illiberal peacebuilding is on the rise, while liberal peacebuilding is in in decline (Smith et al., 2020; Kovacs & Svensson, 2013). It clearly deviates from the latter because it has been led by domestic actors, run to some extent on corruption, cronyism, and clientelism, and sought to achieve order rather than liberty.

Notwithstanding its existence, the peace process has not resulted in genuine compromise, negotiation, and power-sharing arrangements. Rather, the Tatmadaw – the dominant actor who initiated and led the process – has sought to achieve order, stability, and further dominance. My study shows that an illiberal actor has utilised illiberal means towards an illiberal peace outcome. As such, it could be described as 'thick illiberal peacebuilding' (Smith et al., 2020). However, based on the empirical analysis, I argue that the specific case of Kawthoolei can be best understood through the conceptual framework of authoritarian conflict management (ACM). Two factors support this argument: i) illiberal means beyond economic resources have been used by the state, and ii) illiberal goals beyond mere stability and violence reduction have been sought. In this case, the state has primarily relied on coercive means to expand state control, with economic concessions and co-optation as a subordinate strategy to divide and control the opposition.

Despite providing important conceptual pointers, the predominant focus on the use of economic means in the general illiberal peacebuilding literature does not capture the persistence of violence in northern Kawthoolei during a time where negotiations took place. Nor can it account

for the co-optation of populations in the governance sector or the expansion of the state in the development sector through major infrastructure construction and large-scale land allocations. To be sure, economic clientelism has been used to co-opt other Karen militias into Tatmadaw's single-patronal system which in turn disadvantages KNU's power on the ground. However, the state's military and civilian expansion into KNU areas and the deep-seated concerns about this among Karen actors prove that this is not a case of medium version of illiberal peacebuilding, understood as a situation where the involved actors are unconcerned about the outcomes of peace as long as it perpetuates stability, and territorial integrity is not challenged (Smith et al., 2020).

I should make it clear that the empirical evidence support for this argument is drawn from the specific case of Kawthoolei and can therefore not be taken as generalizable for other regions in Myanmar or other cases of illiberal peacebuilding elsewhere.

Authoritarian Conflict Management in Kawthoolei

The subordinate role of economic strategies and the primacy of coercive means means that ACM is a more useful conceptual framework. Usually used to study "hard cases" of authoritarian conflict management, the framework adopts a broader understanding of illiberal peacebuilding. It holds specifically that states attempt to manage conflict and build peace first and foremost through violence, but this is supported and complemented also by gaining hegemonic control of *public discourse*, *space*, and *economy*. During the past decade of peacebuilding in Kawthoolei, all elements of these have been used by the state, though in varying and changing degree. It is important to stress that Tatmadaw's ACM has not yet reached illiberal peace outcomes. My observation is merely that it was on the path of a thick process of illiberal peacebuilding which had not ended. Nevertheless, all elements of ACM have been observed, albeit to varying degree.

The use of *violence* in the region and in the country needs to be understood in its geographical, historical, and temporal contexts. Although overall violence has been reduced in Kawthoolei during the 2010s, it cannot be said that violence as a strategy was abandoned by the state. The state has merely complemented it with other strategies. That it was not abandoned is clearly illustrated by the changing geography of war and peace from eastern to northern Myanmar

following the transition in 2011, the crackdown on the Rohingya minority, and the recurrence of large-scale violence in Kawthoolei prior to and after the coup. Internally in Kawthoolei throughout the 2010s, coercive strategies have been used by the state both directly as seen in its aggressive road construction and indirectly as seen in its use of militias, for instance, to clear the economic site around Hat Gyi dam. Thus, although it has not been actively used to a large extent in Kawthoolei during the 2010s, violence remained an important strategy for the state in its attempt to build peace in the region.

Beyond the persistent but decreased use of violence, the state has sought to manage conflict by attempting to gain hegemonic control of mainly two arenas: space and economy. First, the state has sought to dominate *space*, both physically, politically, and symbolically. The state attempted to dominate space in all three aspects of the notion, as seen throughout the previous chapters. Whereas territorial expansion into accessible areas represent the physical aspect of spatial dominance, the construction of schools and hospitals signalizes state political authority over a given space. Symbolic dominance is exemplified by the removal of Karen nationalist hero statue and Karen flag in the school garden (KHRG, 2020). Rather than separate, these are mutually reinforcing one another. In agreement with ACM, therefore, the state of Myanmar has actively sought to penetrate, shape, and dominate space.

Moreover, the state of Myanmar has also sought to manage conflict by controlling and using *economic resources* towards political ends. This should also be understood in its historical context because KNU's economic resources have been severely cut off by the state's liberalization of the economy and by loss of territorial control since the 1990s. After having gained control over the economy, the state has started to use economic means through clientelist relations, e.g. with BGF, PC, DKBA, for political ends. Through such arrangements, it has successfully managed to indirectly weaken its key opponent, KNU. Attempts have also been made to co-opt elements of KNU into business, but the form and extent of success of such arrangements is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, the state's attempt to gain hegemonic control of the economy and to instrumentalize it strongly supports the general argument of the illiberal peacebuilding literature that economic means are actively controlled and used in this form of peacebuilding.

In contrast, *public discourse* dominance as understood by ACM has not been found in the case study. However, an important note that can nuance the ACM framework is that authoritarian hegemons can use public discourse to its own benefit, without restricting information flows. In the quite unique case of Kawthoolei, the state has used a form of propaganda to promote the peace process to domestic and international audiences. Key actors within KNU are aware of this issue, specifically related to the conventions of meetings, conferences such as the UPC, and the signing of agreements. For instance, the fourth UPC convened in August 2020 was largely symbolic after a long delay partly to show that the peace process was still alive and that it would continue after the November 2020 elections (Tha Taw, interview). KNU had no expectation of achieving anything in that high-level conference, except that it would continue after the elections. In the words of a local health worker "there is no progress, only process" (Say Htoo, interview).

Another example is what is commonly referred to as the 2012 ceasefire. The state branded it to much international praise as a ceasefire, although it was signed by a faction of KNU without mandate and that it was simply an agreement to talk about ceasing fire (Faithful Servant, 2017). General perceptions are that conferences and meetings are held with the purpose to show that the peace process is advancing, although the outcomes of these have little substance (Dah Ler; Say Htoo, interview). Thus, unlike ACM's understanding of discourse dominance as the delegitimization of the non-state armed actors, e.g. by labelling them as terrorists, the case shows that a state can steer public discourse to their benefit without necessarily excluding other actors. In actuality, the state promoted KNU as a negotiation partner, but for the purpose of fighting it in the war by other means. This observation nuances ACM as an analytical framework and calls for greater contextual attention to how states use public discourse to fight non-state armed actors.

In sum, while the case supports the observation that illiberal peacebuilding is on the rise, it is important to also specify that it is of a thick version. This is the reason why ACM is a more appropriate framework compared to the economic-oriented analysis of illiberal peacebuilding. First, a thick form of peacebuilding in this context means that instead of using only a few means, e.g. economic clientelism, the state has used a wide range of means, including the introduction of contestation over space in an entirely new political and economic context. Second, instead of seeking only to achieve stability, the state is actively working to further weaken and ultimately defeat KNU. The case is thus a unique one compared to other cases of illiberal peacebuilding

across South and Southeast Asia, which are of medium versions. Having noted these key points, two even more significant contributions to the illiberal peacebuilding literature can be highlighted, namely i) the co-optation of populations through governance and ii) the semi-authoritarian context in which it takes place.

A 4th Component: Co-Optation of People

The pre-dominant focus on the roles of elites in illiberal peacebuilding misses the fact that there are citizens, ordinary people, who live and dwell in contexts where such processes take place. The literature, including ACM, has not properly and explicitly addressed the question of population co-optation as a strategy in its own right to fight non-state actors. Studies on counterinsurgency and rebellion have long noted that states attempt to cut relations between rebels and populations (e.g. Staniland, 2014), exemplified by the Tatmadaw's Four-Cuts Policy. The rationale of such strategies is that if the relations between rebel authorities and populations are cut, the rebellions in question will in the long run be disabled to fight the state. ACM importantly notes that space represents contested sites in which conflictual actors compete and of which they shape to meet their benefits. However, like the general illiberal peacebuilding literature, it treats such contested space of illiberal peacebuilding as if they were people-less and empty spaces.

The case of Kawthoolei, where the state actively seeks to cut rebel-populations ties and to generate its own authority and legitimacy during ceasefire, shows that it is not only violence, economic concessions, spatial control, and discourse that are important means. In fact, *co-optation of civilians* is actively used as a means and brought into the war by other means for political ends. Although KNU has the advantage of shared identity with the populations, such attempt by the state has shaken up the social relations between the EAO and its populations. This observation calls for closer attention to how the state uses non-coercive populations control in ceasefire time, as opposed to violent strategies like forced relocation, to delegitimize its opponent. As an already broad framework, ACM can thus be refined for the purpose of better capturing the diversity of illiberal peacebuilding strategies by adding a fourth component, namely population co-optation.

The lack of attention to this seems to result from the fact that ACM draws empirical evidence from authoritarian contexts where violent strategies are more prevalent.

Theoretically, the case of Kawthoolei contributes to a more complete understanding of how illiberal peacebuilding works in different contexts. The control of populations, not only physically, but also politically through state-society relations can be a form of counterinsurgency. It is important to note, however, that the success of these is closely linked to other factors, including the hegemonic control of space and the political economy, without whom the state cannot operate. Moreover, co-optation of populations is not an end-state in itself but, in the case in question, a means towards the goal of building a militarized and ethnocentric state.

Semi-Authoritarian Conflict Management?

The question of violent/non-violent illiberal strategies leads to the case's second contribution to the literature, namely the political context within which such processes take place. During the period of peacebuilding in Kawthoolei, Myanmar was formally a semi-democracy, had an ongoing peace process, and received material as well as political support from international actors. How then can a thick version of illiberal peacebuilding take place in such a context? It is a difficult, if not impossible, task to theorize answers to this question as generalizable statements, due to the complexity of processes and contexts in each case.

However, in the specific case of Myanmar, it was possible for two reasons. First, despite the domestic and international depiction of Myanmar as a country undergoing a democratic transition, it has been highly authoritarian due to Tatmadaw's continued control of state power and the economy (Stokke & Aung, 2020). The Tatmadaw has been in the political driver's seat all along, as powerfully demonstrated by the coup. Second, it was possible because KNU, led by a certain faction, entered the peace process from a position of weakness. It is difficult to imagine the peace process to be considered as legitimate, had KNU not been involved in it. This is due to the political and military importance of KNU as a foremost ethnic armed organization throughout Myanmar's postcolonial period.

These two conditions, the appearance of a 'democratic transition' and a parallel 'peace process', allowed the Tatmadaw to wage a war by other means not only in front of but with the support of the international community (Roy, 2020; Roy et al., 2021). In terms of theoretical contribution, the case shows that ACM or thick versions of illiberal peacebuilding can indeed take place in semi-democratic context. Although they themselves draw evidence from authoritarian contexts, authors of ACM have in fact acknowledged that, in theory, this may be possible. At the same time, the case also warns against drawing sharp theoretical distinctions between semi-democratic and authoritarian contexts and calls instead for closer contextual analysis of each case.

To nuance the debates on illiberal peacebuilding based on the case of Kawthoolei, it may therefore be useful in some cases to operate with a framework of "semi-authoritarian conflict management" (SACM). Despite referring to the same processes as the original literature, such a reformulation may enable scholars to better be aware of contextual factors. This is because it highlights explicitly that ACM can take place in seemingly less authoritarian or semi-democratic environments. The case could also be theorized as a "semi-democratic conflict management", but this would fail to sufficiently capture the authoritarian character of Tatmadaw. Thus, an SACM framework, which also recognizes the use of civilians as a means, may be useful to better understand the diversity of strategies, contexts, and outcomes of the rising illiberal peacebuilding.

9.2 The Danger of a Negative Peace

As may be evident throughout, the case of Kawthoolei is not a case of hybrid peacebuilding, as understood in the general hybrid peace literature (Richmond, 2015). It is not a case where international actors hybridize liberal norms, institutions, and practices with those of the non-liberal local. The case is initiated and led by a dominant actor, the Burmese military. Thus, the possibility that the case could have been one of hybrid peacebuilding (international/local) is rejected.

However, the case shows that domestic actors using illiberal peacebuilding strategies can also produce negative forms of peace. As noted in the previous chapters, the outcome achieved is negative peace where violence is ceased to some extent but where the structural or core cause of conflict remains unresolved. It is thus marked by in-betweenness in the sense of 'no war, no peace',

but is not a hybrid liberal/illiberal peace. This proves that forms of hybridity can also be produced through illiberal peacebuilding strategies. Drawing on cases from Indonesia and Nepal, Smith (2014) and Jarvis (2020) have in fact noted that illiberal peacebuilding may sometimes be more effective than liberal peace in reducing violence and bringing about form of negative peace.

In the case of Kawthoolei, rather than being jointly led by international and local actors, the central state has been at the forefront in producing the negative peace. Hybridization processes have been involved and taken place at two levels: at the national level and at the local level.

At the national level, the state of Myanmar hybridized democratic and authoritarian elements of rule and introduced the formally semi-democratic order. This is the overarching form of governance under which all social, political, and economic activities in the country take place. Although the form of government contains liberal elements, such as space of some civilian rule and freedom of speech, it has been brought forward by an authoritarian hegemon. At the local level, the state produced a negative peace through the ceasefire with KNU. The hybridized peace outcome consists of a 'no war, no peace' situation at the local level, that exist within the broader hybrid political order. As noted earlier, two competing state/KNU systems for security, governance and development exist on the ground, though in competition and tension, side by side in parallel to one another. The persistent tensions make up the negative character of the peace.

There are also some examples of hybridization of these systems, particularly in the education sector. However, this form of hybridization has taken place in a way that has not been culturally and politically sensitive but rather forced. It has led to decrease in trust of the peace process and exaggerated perceptions of grievances among Karen actors, as discussed in chapter 6. It can thus be seen as a form of counterinsurgency that in hidden ways repeat the rationale behind the Four-Cuts Strategy. This shows that hybridization as a tool can be adopted by illiberal actors for illiberal goals, and promote conflict containment rather than conflict resolution.

The negative peace outcome and the relatively stable semi-authoritarian political order in the pre-coup period raise critical questions about the possibilities for a more substantive peace process and positive peace outcome. In international/local hybrid peacebuilding, a distinction is made between negative hybrid peace and positive hybrid peace (Richmond, 2015), with the

assumption that the former is normally to be expected in the early stage and that the latter may be possible with time. In Myanmar, some observers have held the view that the peace had either yet to reach a more positive character (through the national level negotiations) or that it would be made normalized with time in its current form.

However, the case of Kawthoolei's negative peace and Myanmar's stable semi-authoritarian political order warns against any temptation to assume or romanticise that a negative peace would inevitably remain static or that it would with time become a more positive one.

Negative Peace as a Stopover?

The danger of the negative peace achieved in Kawthoolei lies in the two mutually destructive factors that risk making it a stopover towards the opposite direction a positive peace. First, the hybrid peace achieved is not emancipatory because the contractions inherent in the conflict, i.e. federalism, is not addressed. Second, the form of peace is continuously contested by the actors in ways that invite recurrence of violence. As noted throughout the analytical chapters, critical Karen observers on the ground are worried about the civilian and military expansion of the state, seeing the peace process as a trap. Their fear is that it is designed to secure the authority of the centralized and Bamar-dominated unitary state, at the expense of ethnic nationalities and their struggle for self-determination and federalism. Drawing explicit comparison to the victor's peace or military victory in Sri Lanka and the role of international actors in that case, Pah Lah says as follows:

> It is difficult to have fairness in the peace process due to the plan of the Burmese government and due to the plan of the internationals. The one that donate most money is the government of Norway. The model of Norway, such as in Sri Lanka, because Norway assisted there, the Tamil Tiger rebellion got destroyed. Their peace deal is ruined because Norway assisted, if you research on why the peace process in Sri Lanka failed. Therefore, such concerns have emerged among the EAOs here, so the EAOs who have not signed the agreement, they don't dare to sign it. They don't dare to go into political negotiation. And for those who signed, it is difficult to go out of, and it is difficult to go forward. Deadlocked,

you see. To leave behind the agreement, people will say that you don't love peace. You are in a state where you cannot move. (Pah Lah, interview).

Although I do not draw direct comparison to external cases, this shows the degree of powerlessness and frustration among many Karen actors on the ground. The above-cited participant ended the interview with me by stressing that the (pre-coup) situation was not good for the Karen movement (interview). It was a dangerous situation. The victor's peace in Sri Lanka has also been explicitly referred to by General Baw Kyaw Heh of Brigade 5 in a speech (Faithful Servant, 2017). Based on the observations I made on the ground in the studied sectors, I argue that the concerns of Karen actors in Kawthoolei are well founded.

The escalating violence in the post-coup situation in northern Myanmar, the last stronghold of KNLA and the areas where Tatmadaw have concentrated its activities throughout the 2010s, support local Karen actors' concern that the present negative peace was for the Tatmadaw a stopover on the way towards a consolidated illiberal form of peace. All in all, the case shows that domestic actors can also produce negative forms of peace within hybrid order that are seemingly stable. Moreover, the observation on the ground also challenges assumptions that peacebuilding processes are linear in their direction. Rather, it seems, forms of negative peace may be instrumentalized as a stopover for illiberal forms of peace in the future.

9.3 Illiberal International Peacebuilding

The roles of international actors have so far been referred to as indirect. However, the fact that the peacebuilding process in Myanmar has been led by domestic actors cannot act as an apologia for a critical scrutiny of the role played by international actors. The scope of this thesis does not allow for a detailed analysis of the topic. Nonetheless, some points can be made about international democracy and peace support to Myanmar in general during the past decade, which in turn affected dynamics of peacebuilding processes and power relations on the ground in Kawthoolei.

International engagement in Myanmar has been problematic for peacebuilding for a number of reasons. Western actors who have engaged in Myanmar have been based on, as Brenner

& Schulman (2019, p. 17) formulate it, "what they misunderstood as a remarkable instance of democratization". Based on this understanding, the authors observe, they "shifted funds from grass-roots networks to the militarized state bureaucracies that seek to co-opt peace-building and development projects for the purpose of ethnocratic state-building and counterinsurgency" (Ibid). The argument of the authors, part of whose evidence is drawn from Kayah State, resonates with the arguments in this thesis, namely that international actors have aided semi-authoritarianism.

Likewise, debating changes in international development aid sector in general, with a focus on Myanmar, Bachtold (2015) argues that there has been a turn towards an "anti-politics machinery" that increasingly sees development works as if they were technical tasks. The indirect but significant peacebuilding efforts have not been sufficiently politically sensitive. An interesting observation is thus that, in contrast to the much-critiqued tendency of liberal actors to impose its values (e.g. Nadarajah and Rampton, 2015), western actors have in Myanmar legitimized illiberal values and an authoritarian militarized and ethnocratic statebuilding project. Following Smith's conceptualization, it is arguably the case that western peace efforts in Myanmar can be termed as a version of thin illiberal peacebuilding that legitimizes and supports the statebuilding project of a semi-authoritarian regime with the hope that it would end reach liberal ends.

Similarly, regional actors' push for regional connectivity has acted in ignorance of the fact that the conflict has yet to be resolved (KPSN, 2014). In cooperation with the government, these actors have pursued a development model that is rightly described as "accumulation by dispossession", a process that is "creating wealth and accumulation for a few and poverty and dispossession for many" (Bello, 2019, p. 60). Driven by geopolitical and economic interests, these actors have been satisfied with stability, regardless of whether underlying political issues are addressed (Pah Lah, interview). Local Karen CSOs and villagers' voices have been largely, if not completely, left out in the major development projects planned and carried out in the region. Together, such actions may be understood as an illiberal form of international peacebuilding.

The roles and impacts of international peacebuilding in Myanmar thus need to be critically problematized as it has been problematic in various ways at various levels. It is more complex and multi-faced than outlined above. The point, however, is that in the context of rising illiberal peacebuilding and declining liberal peacebuilding, some well-intentioned efforts have in this

empirical context come to mean illiberal international peacebuilding. A more detailed account of the topic is, however, beyond the scope of the present thesis.

9.4 Summary

The case of Kawthoolei supports the observation that illiberal peacebuilding is on the rise, but it also contributes to theoretical understanding of peacebuilding in a number of ways. While positing that it is a case of conflict management, I have also demonstrated that the case can nuance the ACM framework. First, ACM can indeed take place in a semi-authoritarian context. This is an observation that calls for closer attention to contextual factors. Second, and relatedly, ACM can take place without the state necessarily having to restrict public discourse. In Kawthoolei, rather than delegitimizing KNU, the state has actively promoted it as a negotiation partner. Third, ACM can also include a fourth component, population co-optation, in order to reach political ends.

Beyond illiberal peacebuilding literature, the case in question notes that domestic and illiberal actors can also hybridize political rule and produce forms of negative peace. However, against the hybrid peace proposed in the liberal/illiberal literature, it shows that political processes of this nature cannot be understood as linear in direction. In the presence of small-scale and the constant threat of large-scale violence recurrence, a negative peace or ‘no war, no peace’ is constantly challenge. Finally, while it has not been a focus of this thesis, evidence from the ground calls for a need to scrutinize the role of international actors in Myanmar’s peace process.

10 Conclusions

This theory-informed qualitative case study has sought to answer questions about the strategies, outcomes, and sustainability of peacebuilding, with the predominant focus on the first question. I have looked particularly into local level peacebuilding in the security governance, and development sectors. Moreover, as KNU's strategies at the local level have been largely passive and reactive, a predominant focus has been given to the state. In this final chapter, I give a concluding discussion while answering the questions asked.

Local Peacebuilding in Kawthoolei

The general stability brought to Kawthoolei since the 2012 ceasefire is a significant achievement that unquestionably should be recognized. However, in terms of peacebuilding and conflict resolution, my overall analysis observes that there has been much less to celebrate. Based on primary interview and secondary literature data, I have demonstrated that the Tatmadaw-led peacebuilding process have been fundamentally illiberal as it sought to contain rather than resolve the conflict in question. Looking into the security, governance, and development sectors, I identify a somewhat hidden and slow continuation of war by means waged by the state in all sectors.

At the core of this argument is the observation that the state has sought to gain territorial control, monopolize violence, and impose a unitary state at the expense of ethnic Karen call for a self-rule in Kawthoolei. To reach these goals, the state mobilized its power in all three sectors. First, having achieved significant control over the central and southern KNU districts since the 1990s, both directly and through its proxy-militias, the Tatmadaw has capitalized on the ceasefire to expand its territorial control into the less accessible northern Kawthoolei. Enabled by strategic choices of not relocating or drawing clear demarcations, such acts reflect what ACM theory understands as the attempt by states to achieve hegemonic control over physical space.

Second, through government structures such as administrative offices and social service provision, the state has sought to consolidate and expand its territorial and political control over contested areas. Although peacebuilding strategies of this character have not been emphasized by

the elite-, violence, and economic-centered illiberal peacebuilding literature, they can be understood as illiberal because of they emphasize exclusion and dominance over inclusion and compromise. Questioning the contrasting "faces" of the state – i.e. while civilians in in the central and southern KNU districts were offered free social services, others in the northern districts have had their villages shelled Tatmadaw's mortars – I have argued that the civilian-targeted strategy represent an evolution of previous counterinsurgency known as the Four-Cuts Policy.

Third, by opening the battlefield to the capitalist forces, allocating ethnic lands through the use of land law, and continuously using proxy-militias through economic clientelist networks, the state has managed to create an accumulation system that benefitted the involved parties but one that undermined the ethnic Karen people's calls for self-determination over its ancestral lands. The Tatmadaw's relative success in using economic means in Kawthoolei during the 2010s have been preconditioned by historically informed factors as well as contemporary political reforms during the 2020s that made it seem as if there were no alternatives for the involved actors, e.g. KNU and international actors, to choose otherwise.

These strategies are in their fundamental illiberal because, in addition to involving the use of illiberal means such as coercion, economic means, and the state's inherent power, they also serve the political goal of the state to impose its long-desired goal of unitary state. On its side, while hoping for a political settlement, KNU has mainly remained passive and, at best, reactive to its circumstances in order to protect its land. Ultimately, I argue, the strategies of the competing actors reflect their contradictory understands of peace and goals for the peace process. That is, while KNU's understanding of peace entails a centralized form of rule, the Tatmadaw's preferred form of peace a unitary form of rule. Thus, the Tatmadaw-led local peacebuilding in Kawthoolei have been characterized by illiberal strategies in order reach an illiberal goal.

Outcomes and Sustainability

The outcomes of local peacebuilding in the security, governance, and development sectors are mainly of negative and dual characters which is to say that the competing systems of KNU and the state persist in parallel to one another with blurred and contested boundaries. Some domestically

produced hybridized form of peace have been observed in the education sector, but these are rather forced, if not accidental, outcomes. In terms of sustainability, empirical evidence on the ground and perceptions held by the research participants as well as others unite in the conclusion that this form of peacebuilding has not been about conflict resolution and can therefore be said to have limited potential to produce a more positive, inclusive, and emancipatory forms of peace.

Rather, the mutually destructive developments in the overall peacebuilding process – i.e. the unwillingness to resolve the conflict at the national level and the military and civilian expansion of the state on the ground – have decreased trust in the peace process and arguably invited continued conflict. The quick escalation of violence in Kawthoolei prior to and, especially, after the military coup testified that such a form of peace can change dramatically in the course of a short time. The inability of the form of peace achieved to sustain and transform to a positive peace is, however, inherent in its own DNA because produced by an authoritarian hegemon who is unlikely to be genuinely committed to addressing the causes of conflict.

Empirical, Theoretical, and Disciplinary Contributions

Empirically, this research contributes to a grounded understanding of local peacebuilding politics in Kawthoolei that transcends the tides of optimism and standstill at the national level negotiations. First, it uncovers that instead of actual peacebuilding that would help resolve the conflict, a hidden war by other means has continued in both security, governance, and development sectors. This means that to understand complex peacebuilding processes of this nature, it is necessary to continuously thrive for a local and contextualized understanding. Second, the study has noted that for many people in Kawthoolei, the peace achieved has meant some rare stability, but also persistent injustice, poverty, continued fear, and forced displacements due not only to armed conflicts in some areas but also to land confiscations in the name of development.

While answering some questions, this research also calls for the need of further research about peacebuilding in Kawthoolei and Myanmar. As I have approached the case from a distance, my understanding of the complex realities in the region is necessarily limited. A closer focus on the internal politics within and between the Karen armed actors may help provide a more complete

understanding peacebuilding in the region. Comparative studies of local peacebuilding in different ethnic regions may also shed clearer light on the strategies of the peacebuilders involved in the complex processes. Moreover, a there remains a need to critically problematize the indirect and significant role of international actors involved. Thus, future research would benefit from thriving for a contextualized understanding and giving attention actors within and beyond Kawthoolei.

Theoretically, as discussed more in depth in the previous chapter, the case lend support to the general observation that illiberal peacebuilding is on the rise on contemporary world. Beyond that, it contributes mainly to the still immature illiberal peacebuilding literature. First, it has shown that thick forms of illiberal peacebuilding can indeed take place within semi-authoritarian contexts, without much violence, and without dominating public discourse. To better capture the diversity of illiberal peacebuilding strategies, it thus proposed the semi-authoritarian conflict management (SACM) to refine the original framework while also warning against strict categorization of regime types. Second, it contributed to the literature by having shown that authoritarian hegemons can also target civilians through non-coercive means to achieve its political goals.

Third, it also contributes to general peacebuilding literature by warning that a negative peace or 'no war, no peace' situation, as observed in Kawthoolei, cannot understood as static or be romanticised as a form of peace that unavoidably has yet to reach a more positive character. In short, it rejects a linear understanding of such complex political processes.

In terms of disciplinary contributions, because geographic research on peace remains limited, I have approached this case mainly through the multidisciplinary peace research. A few contributions to human geography can nevertheless be located. First, the case demonstrates that *territory* plays a role in processes of peacebuilding. As seen in the state's territorial expansion through all three sectors, it has been actively used to promote certain forms of statebuilding. It lends strong support to the argument that, as noted among others by authors of ACM, territories and space are not fixed, but rather continuously contested and reshaped. Second, the case shows that *scale* can also be used to limit peacebuilding to the local level. Having introduced a hybrid regime at the national scale, the military then limited peacebuilding to the local scale where a war by other means was fought. Geography is used is actively used by actors to achieve political goals.

Third, and most importantly, it shows that geography can be *strategically used* to prevent possibilities for genuine conflict resolution. In the case of Myanmar, it has rather been used to contain conflict in ways that are not sustainable to peacebuilding. Armed with concepts like place, space, territory, and scale, geographers are thus well position to study the question of peace.

Final Reflections

While I was in the process of completing this thesis, Myanmar entered a new phase in its modern history following the military coup. Kawthoolei, like other parts of the country, has since then seen increase instability and an escalation of violence, especially in its northern part.

Linking the current chaotic political situation in the country and insights from the local peacebuilding in Kawthoolei during the past decade, it seems likely that the welcomed political transition and peace process of the 2010s have not intended to produce forms of democracy and peace that go beyond somewhere of hybrids – between democracy/authoritarian and between war and peace, or a negative peace. Unlike the first coup in 1962, which was justified by the perceived threats ethnic groups posed to the country's sovereignty, the Tatmadaw's justification for the current coup, though without evidence, was that the NLD had won the election by fraud.

In this context, the future of peace and democracy in Kawthoolei and Myanmar now depends on the outcomes of the current situation. While it is unfortunate that direct military rule has once again haunted the country, it is to me also encouraging to see the more united coalition between the actors on the ground across ethnic and religious lines, calling for the need of a genuine federal democratic union that guarantees a place for the diverse people of Myanmar.

KNU is once again taking a leading role in condemning the coup and sheltering the democracy activists who have fled the regime. The outcomes of this will depend on a number of factors. Due to the high uncertainties of the situation, however, I shall refrain from formulating any policy advice and hope only for the best for the people of Myanmar.

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Appendix 1: KNU Districts Names

District (Sgaw language)	District (Myanmar language)	Corresponding Brigade
Taw Oo	Taungoo	Brigade 2
Mu Traw	Hpapun	Brigade 5
Doo Tha Htoo	Thaton	Brigade 1
Kler Lwee Htoo	Nyaunglebin	Brigade 3
Hpa-An	Hpa-An	Brigade 7
Dooplaya	Dooplaya	Brigade 6
Mergui Tavoy	Myeik-Dawei	Brigade 4

(KNU Administrative District Names and Corresponding Brigade Number. Jolliffe, 2016)

Appendix 2: Profile of Participants

Pseudonyms	Participant Description	Date
1, Tha Taw	High-level KNLA leader. Involvement in the peace negotiations.	24.08.2020.
2, Dah Ler	High-level KNU leader. Involvement in the peace negotiations.	28.08.2020.
3, Saw Moo	Senior leader in local humanitarian organization. Former KNLA soldier.	04.09.2020.
4, Hsa Dah	Leader of a youth organization. Administrative support to KNU in peace process.	24.09.2020.
5, Say Htoo	Local health worker. Also involved in youth political activities.	02.10.2020.
6, Kwe Paw	Urban Karen. Observer of the peace process. Active in organizing of political activities.	02.10.2020.
7, Kwa Poe	Leader of a youth organization. In-depth knowledge about the northern Myanmar.	11.10.2020.
8, Thara	Senior leader in KECD. Decades of experience in Karen education provision.	15.10.2020.
9, Heh Wah	Karen human rights organization. Documenting abuses and advocating rights.	27.10.2020.
10, Tee Kaw	High-level KNU leader. Working with social service provision.	01.11.2020.
11, Pah Lah	Long-time peace and conflict monitor. In-depth knowledge about economic activities.	02.11.2020.
12, Lah Say	Assisting a district headquarters. Experience as a former teacher.	02.12.2020.
13, Tho Doo	Former KNLA soldier now in diaspora. In-depth knowledge about central Kawthoolei.	09.01.2021.

Interview Data by the PhD Candidate (see chapter 4).

14, Ker Baw	Retired KNLA soldier.	March 2019
15, Kaw Eh	Villager. Experience of experience of force relocation, forced labor, forced portering in the frontline.	March 2019
16, Moo Shee	Village leader. Experience of forced relocation and forced labor.	March 2019
17, Poe Noo	Villager. Experience of forced relocation, forced labor, and forced service in Tatmadaw's People's Militia	March 2019
18, Tee Doe	Villager. Experience of forced relocation and forced labor.	March 2019

Appendix 3: Information Letter

Are You Interested in Taking Part in the Research Project *"The Quest for Peace in Kawthoolei: The Strategies, Outcomes, and Sustainability of Peacebuilding in Southeastern Myanmar, 2012-2020"*?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to analyse local dynamics of the current peacebuilding between the State of Myanmar and Karen National Union (KNU). In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

Eight years after KNU signed a ceasefire agreement with the central state in 2012, it remains uncertain which course the peace process is heading and to which conclusion. This project seeks to analyse the *strategies*, *outcomes,* and *sustainability* of the ongoing peacebuilding by looking at the local dynamics of security, governance, and development in Karen State in the period between 2012 and 2020. The project is led by three specific research questions:

4. *What are the peacebuilding strategies of the involved actors?*
5. *What characterizes the form of peace that has been achieved so far?*
6. *What is the sustainability of the peacebuilding model observed?*

In place of the formal negotiations at the national level, this project focuses primarily on peacebuilding at the local level where the proximate causes of the conflict, which are control over territories, populations, and resources, are being negotiated and contested. Through empirical evidence and engagement with the theoretical literature on peacebuilding, the project aims to provide a theoretically informed and grounded understanding of peacebuilding in Kawthoolei.

The project will result in a master's thesis at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography at the University of Oslo in Norway.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Oslo (UiO), Norway's oldest and highest ranked university, is the institution responsible for the project. Professor Kristian Stokke (UiO) is the official project leader and supervises Klo Kwe Moo Kham (UiO), the MA student authoring the project. In addition, the project is carried out in collaboration with Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), a prestigious and internationally renowned institution, which provides the student with a workplace and a second supervisor, Marte Nilsen (PRIO). However, UiO remains the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are being asked to participate because of your in-depth knowledge about the peacebuilding process. Your participation will be of great value for us to fully understand and accurately represent

the peace process in its entirety. By participating, moreover, we believe that you may help us move away from a state-centric view of the process towards addressing the often-neglected focus on non-state actors in peace processes.

What does participation involve for you?

If you choose to take part in the project, this will involve that you have an interview conversation with the student. It will take place on Zoom, last for approximately 1 hour, and will be conducted in Karen language. The interview includes questions about local dynamics of security, governance, and development as well as about your overall perception about the peacebuilding process in Karen State since 2012. Your answers will be recorded electronically and stored securely.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – How we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purposes specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

The student is the only person who will have access to your personal data. To prevent unauthorized persons to access your personal data, we will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contacts details and respective codes will be store separately from the rest of the collected data. Moreover, we will store the data on a research server, locked away/encrypted. UiO Nettskjema-Dictaphone will be used to safely record the data. Finally, the participants will not be recognizable in the publications.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end on the 1st of June 2021. All personal data, including names, background data, audio recording will be deleted, and the collected data will be properly anonymized after this date.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?
We will process your personal data based on your consent. Based on an agreement with the University of Oslo, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?
If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- University of Oslo via Klo Kwe Moo Kham by email: (kkkham@student.sv.uio.no) or by telephone +47 90 22 28 82; or via Professor Kristian Stokke by email: (kristian.stokke@sosgeo.uio.no) or by telephone: +47 97 01 41 68.
- Our Data Protection Officer via Roger Markgrad-Bye by email: (personvernombud@uio.no) or by telephone +47 90 82 28 26.
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Kristian Stokke
Professor, University of Oslo

Klo Kwe Moo Kham
MA Student, University of Oslo

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project "*The Quest for Peace in Kawthoolei: The Strategies, Outcomes, and Sustainability of Peacebuilding in Southeastern Myanmar, 2012-2020*"" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

☐ to participate in an interview

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 1st of June 2021.

(Signed by participant, date)