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Genocide in Burma: the Forgotten Tragedy

The Karen uprising, which began in 1949, is the “oldest continuous, ethnic revolt in the world” (Thomson, 1995, p. 274). The Karen, one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Burma, have been fighting for sovereignty since the country gained independence from Britain. The Burmese military junta, made up of leaders from the majority Burman ethnic group, has long been intent on unifying the country under one Burmese national identity, specifically that of the Burman majority. Fearing a loss of cultural identity and autonomy, ethnic minority groups such as the Karen have been fiercely resistant to the junta's vision. In its campaign to eliminate the Karen insurgency, Burma's armed forces, also known as the *Tatmadaw*, have engaged in gross human rights violations against the Karen. The large-scale military offensive against Karen fighters in 2006-2007 included the burning of villages, forced relocations, executions, mine-laying in civilian areas, as well as mass rapes (Niksch, 2008, p. 57).

As part of my analysis, I will use social identity theory to lay the groundwork for understanding the salience of ethnic identity in the conflict. Burton's Human Needs Theory will be important for explaining why the situation in Burma has become a protracted social conflict. Even though the international community has not defined it as such, the mass killings, forced relocations, and rapes committed by the *Tatmadaw* constitute genocide. These genocidal acts go beyond the designation of “human rights violations;” they are crimes against humanity. In this paper, I will be using Dr. Gregory Stanton's Eight Stages of Genocide framework to illustrate that what is occurring in Burma is genocide. The paper's conclusion will explore the consequences of war on the Karen ethnic community, and it will provide an intervention framework designed to end the genocide and transform the conflict towards peacebuilding.

My Motivation

My interest in Burma is rooted in my concern for ethnic minority groups as they face state-sponsored persecution and oppression. I can trace this back to my first experience learning about the Holocaust. I remember being in the seventh grade and feeling completely overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the genocide. Being half-Jewish, I was filled with horror as I read about the persecution and destruction of European Jewry. Genocide is an extreme example of group violence; it is precipitated by the creation of an “us vs. them” dichotomy that leads to the dehumanization of the “other.” Genocide is predicated on the subversion of identity, whether that identity is ethnic, religious, or political. I have always been interested in issues of identity, which is a large part of the reason why I was drawn to the conflict in Burma.

Throughout my studies at ICAR, I have focused on identity-based social conflicts and the civil war in Burma, at its core, is about the struggle of ethnic minority groups to gain their right to self-determination. Identity is also closely linked to the military junta’s justification for the use of mass violence. The *Tatmadaw* continues to engage in ethnicity-based assaults through its military assaults on ethnic minority groups such as the Karen. I have decided to focus specifically on the Karen because the Karen National Union (KNA) remains the most significant group still fighting the Burmese government and is therefore, the main target of the *Tatmadaw’s* assaults (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 25).

Today, Burma remains the longest-running ethnic conflict in the world, and part of its tragedy lies in the international community’s lack of interest and concern, particularly for the plight of Burma’s many ethnic minorities. In 2005, Human Rights Watch released a report stating that, “While the nonviolent struggle of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi against the Burmese military government’s continuing repression has captured the world’s attention, the profound human rights and humanitarian crisis endured by Burma’s ethnic minority communities has largely been ignored” (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 6). My aim with this paper is to shed light on this sadly neglected aspect of the Burmese conflict.

Social Identity Theory and the Karen

Burma is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. The Burmese government recognizes 135 distinct ethnic groups out of a population of roughly 55 million. The Burman majority ethnic group comprises an estimated 68% of the population while the Karen make up 7% (Royce, 2008, p. 33). Burma is divided into seven states and seven divisions: the divisions are predominantly Burman, while the states are home to particular ethnic minorities. These include: Chin State, Kachin State, Karen State, Karenni State, Mon State, Rakhine State, and Shan State. The Karen have historically inhabited the hills and plains along the frontier between Burma and Thailand. The Karen actually belong to several different but related cultural and language groups (Hayami and Darlington, 2000, p. 138) and as such, did not always share a Karen ethnic consciousness. Many scholars argue that Karen group identity did not begin to form until the British colonization of Burma (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 76).

Social identity theory, as developed by Tajfel and Turner, posits that group membership is an important part of a person's self-concept and identity. Part of maintaining a positive group identity involves developing an ingroup bias. Favoring one's own group helps to increase self-esteem, but it also often leads to negative perceptions of the outgroup. Social identity forms along the boundaries or borders that groups create to stress an "us vs. them" dichotomy (Korostelina, 2007, p. 29). The border is based on intergroup differences and becomes a mechanism that defines systems of inclusion and exclusion. The British government and Christian missionaries in Burma helped to create a border between the Karen and Burman majority by privileging the Karen during the colonial period.

The relatively privileged treatment that the Karen received was due in large part to the group's higher conversion rate to Christianity. Some scholars speculate that the Karen's openness to Christianity may be linked to old Karen myths about the Book of Life, which predicted that the White Man would someday return to give the Book to the Karen (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 77). The Burmans, meanwhile, remained largely resistant to Christianity. Missionaries established schools in Karen communities and soon, every Karen field developed a system of Christian schools. In order to help spread Christian

beliefs and practices, the missionaries invented the written Karen language. This was a particularly significant development because its use helped to promote the reconstruction of Karen history, traditions, and culture (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 79). This reconstruction included the claim that Karen settlement in Burma predated the arrival of the Burmans. The British colonial government tacitly legitimated this claim by declaring Karen New Year's a national holiday, an important occasion accompanied by the raising of the Karen flag and dancing in traditional costumes. Throughout the one hundred years of colonial occupation, the British actively endorsed the ethnic and religious identity of the Karen minority.

Kwanchewan Buadaeng defines ethnic identity as “a constructed expression, communicated through textual descriptions, symbols, public displays, rituals, and other practices, which is intended to or acts to differentiate a group from other groups” (2007, p. 74). Under the British, the Karen developed a sense of shared culture, history, and destiny. Buadaeng goes on to say that, “ethnic identity is shaped from within the group by common experiences and heritage, and from without by the larger society's system of ethnic relations” (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 74). This means that Karen ethnic identity formed in part due to the group's shared experience of living under British rule and from their privileged status in society vis-à-vis the Burman majority. This privileged status helped to foster the self-esteem of the Karen ingroup, which was essential for strengthening its collective identity.

British colonization profoundly changed power relations within Burma, and it created deep cleavages between the Karen and the Burman majority. The British found the Karen to be dependable allies as Karen served in the British Army, helped put down frequent Burman revolts, and fought against the Japanese during World War II. Buadaeng writes that, “decades of Karen service in the British Army left a legacy of hatred, mistrust, and deep conflict between Burmans and Karens” (2007, p. 79). During British rule, more Karen than Burmans held high-ranking positions in the Burmese government despite their smaller share of the population. Feelings of relative deprivation and frustration led to Burman resentment of not only the British but of the Karen. The Burman majority came to see the Karen as an enemy outgroup.

Human Needs Theory and Karen Nationalism

Following the end of World War II, Burman nationalists began a serious push for independence. The Karen worried that their people would suffer severe repression if the British left. Being a hated minority group, the Karen feared that the Burman majority would encroach on the rights and privileges that it had enjoyed during colonial rule. Under British occupation, the Karen had rapidly developed an ethnic national consciousness. In early 1947, Karen leaders met to form the Karen National Union (KNU), which campaigned for the establishment of a separate, autonomous Karen state. The KNU has continuously argued that the Karen were a nation, with all of the essential qualities of a nation including its own history, language, culture, land, and economic system (KNU).

General Aung San, the most widely respected Burmese nationalist leader at the time, tried to reach out to the ethnic minority groups by convening the Panglong Conference in February 1947. Representatives from several of the ethnic minority groups including the Shan, Kachin, and Chin agreed to stay together as the Union of Burma as long as they were guaranteed autonomy over their internal affairs and received an equal share of the country's future economic prosperity. The Karen did not sign on to the Panglong agreement, hoping that the British would still grant them an independent state (Kipgen, 2010). That summer, General Aung San was assassinated. The Burmese leaders who replaced General Aung San did not share his vision of engagement, effectively torpedoing the likelihood of a legitimate resolution from being reached.

The KNU continued to ask for self-determination after Britain granted independence to Burma on January 4, 1948. Karen and Burman leaders were unable to agree on the boundaries of a new Karen State, and mounting communal tensions soon led to the decision by the Karen leadership to take up arms against the Burmese government on January 31, 1949 (Fink, 2009, p. 19). The KNU has been fighting ever since. Autonomy has long been a core demand of the Karen, and it continues to remain the fundamental issue in the on-going conflict in Burma. Why do the Karen, even after sixty years of heavy losses to the Burmese military regime, continue their struggle? Burton's Human Needs Theory provides one piece of the puzzle.

John Burton's Human Needs Theory establishes the link between human needs and conflict. When people are not able to meet their basic human needs, conflict ensues as they try to satisfy those needs. Burton identified certain needs as being ontological, or non-negotiable, meaning that people would pursue the satisfaction of these needs even at great cost. The needs are ontological because they are believed to be universal in human nature. According to Burton, these fundamental needs include: control, security, justice, stimulation, response, meaning, rationality, and esteem/recognition. In the case of the Karen, they are fighting to meet some of these basic human needs, most notably the need for security, identity, and recognition. Burton writes that the drive to meet these ontological needs are very strong: "there are some human needs, such as those of individual and group identity and recognition that will be pursued regardless of cost and consequences. They are ontological and not within control of the individual or identity group" (Burton 2001). According to social identity theory, when a person's group identity becomes the most salient or important, that group's goals and interests take center stage (Korostelina, 2007, p. 73). For the Karen, their ethnic identity is salient and has been used to unite the group to work towards the collective goal of self-determination.

The Karen are willing to continue their struggle, even in the face of deep adversity and loss, to satisfy their basic human needs for autonomy and recognition. Johan Galtung has proposed a typology of basic human needs, choosing to group needs under larger categories such as security, welfare, identity, and freedom. Security needs deal with issues of survival against individual and collective violence. Welfare or sufficiency needs include basic physiological needs such as those for shelter, food, and water. Identity needs meanwhile deal with meaning, belongingness, and self-esteem (Galtung, 1990b, p. 309). For Burton, the basic human needs that underlie destructive social conflicts are identity, recognition, security, and personal development. In Burma, these four needs are closely intertwined as the Karen fight for the right to be recognized as an autonomous ethnic group. Issues of security greatly impede human development as *Tatmadaw* assaults against Karen villages have created a severe refugee crisis with dire health and economic consequences. Burton came to believe in the central importance of identity, that "the

failure of existing state systems to satisfy the need for identity” was the “primary source of modern ethno-nationalist struggles” (Rubenstein, 2001).

The Karen’s armed struggle fits under Edward Azar’s definition of a protracted social conflict: it involves the “prolonged and often violent struggle” by the Karen for “such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation” (as cited in Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, 2005, p. 84). Azar identified the deprivation of human needs as the underlying source of protracted social conflicts. Protracted social conflicts are most often about the fraught relationship between an identity group and the state, as exemplified in Burma.

For the Karen, the maintenance of their cultural and ethnic identity is of paramount importance. The KNU has stated its belief that the Karen way of life would always be threatened under Burman rule, and that the two cultures cannot co-exist: “It is extremely difficult for the Karens and the Burmans, two peoples with diametrically opposite views, outlooks, attitudes, and mentalities, to yoke together...Unless we control a state of our own, we will never experience a life of peace and decency, free from persecution and oppression” (KNU). This is a strong statement that clearly conveys the Karen desire for self-determination and ethnic preservation. The four aims that the KNU adopted at the 1956 KNU Congress still remain in effect today. The KNU seeks: 1) the establishment of a Karen State (Kawthoolei) with the right to self-determination, 2) the setting up of “national states” for all other ethnic minorities in Burma, 3) the creation of a genuine Federal Union of Burma with all states having equal rights, and 4) the establishment of a policy of national democracy (KNU). All of this, of course, first rests on the cessation of fighting and direct violence.

Since the establishment of military rule in 1962, every Burmese regime has worked to suppress the Karen and other ethnic minorities. The Karen and other “insurgent” minority groups are perceived as a serious security threat to the military regime. This has driven the regime’s policy of bringing Karen-dominated border areas under its tight control. The aims of this strategy are twofold with both military and ethnic repercussions: breaking up ethnic minority communities and weakening their ability to resist allows the regime to pursue a policy of state-sponsored “Burmanization.” Burmanization entails eradicating

minority cultures, histories, and political aspirations in favor of creating a Burman national identity (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 17). Each successive military regime has stressed the importance of Burman culture, history, and Buddhism to Burmese national identity. This constitutes a form of cultural violence (Galtung, 1990a) as ethnic-Burman supremacy and ideals of national unity are used as justification for suppressing minority cultures and legitimating mass violence.

The threat of Burmanization lies at the core of the Karen demand for self-determination. The KNU states, “We are concerned that the tactics of annihilation, absorption, and assimilation, which have been practiced in the past upon all other nationalities by the Burman rulers, will be continued by the Burman of the future as long as they are in power” (KNU). The KNU seeks to honor the memory of Saw Ba U Gyi, the founder and President of the KNU who was killed by the Burmese Army in 1950, by following the four principles he laid out for the organization: 1) Surrender is out of the question, 2) An autonomous Karen State must be recognized, 3) The Karen will retain their arms, and 4) The Karen shall decide our own political destiny (Karen National Union). The Karen’s armed struggle is intricately tied to their need for identity, recognition, and now most importantly, for survival.

Genocide in Burma

The Burmese military government continues to engage in asymmetrical warfare against the Karen. The KNU suffered a serious setback in 1994-1995 when a Buddhist faction, the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA), seceded from the Christian-dominated KNU. The DKBA subsequently helped the *Tatmadaw* to capture Manerplaw, the KNU’s most important base camp. The capture of Manerplaw was devastating for the KNU because it was seen at the time as the physical and symbolic center of the democracy movement in areas still held by the Karen (Pedersen, 2008, p. 146). The DKBA has since joined the *Tatmadaw*’s offensive against the KNU and its military arm, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), further weakening the ability of the KNU to present a united front against the current military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Since 1995, the KNLA has waged a largely defensive guerrilla war against the *Tatmadaw* with little hope of reasserting its authority over Karen areas captured by the Burmese Army. The KNLA now only has an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 fighters, in comparison to the 490,000-plus strong Burmese Army (Globalsecurity.org). Needless to say, the *Tatmadaw* exercises overwhelming and disproportionately heavy force against the few Karen fighters who remain. The conflict is a war of attrition. The *Tatmadaw*'s offensives against the Karen have resulted in mass casualties and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Karen.

Tatmadaw military operations ostensibly aimed at the KNLA have caused tens of thousands of deaths and injuries to civilians. Human Rights Watch reported that since 2002, approximately 100,000 people have been displaced from Karen areas with Karen State sheltering some of the largest numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Burma. The destruction of Karen villages forced Karen civilians to flee internally or to the Thai-Burmese border (Human Rights Watch, 2005, 8). The majority of Karen IDPs were forced out of their homes as a direct result of the *Tatmadaw*'s "Four Cuts" counter-insurgency strategy, which the army has been practicing since the mid-1960s. The objective of the Four Cuts policy is to eliminate all forms of support to resistance forces by cutting off their access to food, money, intelligence, and recruits. Civilians are regularly targeted since the *Tatmadaw* believes that, "there is no such thing as an innocent or neutral villager. Every community must fight, flee, or join the *Tatmadaw*" (Fink, 2009, p. 45).

The United Nations is mandated, under its own Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, to act to prevent and/or intervene in the case of genocide. The UN adopted the Convention in 1948, which states that genocide is a crime under international law. Article II talks about the definition of genocide:

"In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Article III states that genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit genocide, and complicity to genocide are all punishable acts (Jones, 2006, p. 13).

There is relative consensus in the international community that the actions of the *Tatmadaw* against the Karen and other ethnic minority groups are a violation of human rights. But why has the international community shied away from calling the ethnic conflict in Burma a genocide? Genocide Watch, which is directed by Dr. Gregory Stanton, is one of the only organizations that has labeled the conflict a genocide. When I questioned Dr. Stanton about Burma, he wrote that, “The Burmese Army's killings against the Karen, Shan, Shin, Rohingya, and other groups are genocidal. We consider Burma to have an ongoing genocide” (G. Stanton, personal communication, May 3, 2010). Dr. Stanton points out that genocide is a process, and not simply an “all-out attempt to exterminate a group as a whole.” Referring to the UN Genocide Convention, Dr. Stanton pointed out that even groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are ignoring the “in part” clause of the definition: “In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole *or in part*, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group” (emphasis mine). Dr. Stanton is vigilant in emphasizing that the destruction of “only” part of a group constitutes genocide. In its failure to recognize this, the international community is guilty of being “definitionalist deniers” (G. Stanton, personal communication, May 3, 2010).

According to the UN definition, the crime of genocide has two elements: intent and action. Intentional in this sense means purposeful. Dr. Stanton writes that intent is usually inferred from a systematic pattern of coordinated attacks (Stanton, 2002). The *Tatmadaw*'s offensives against the Karen are coordinated acts, which in the last decade have also included the use of systematic mass rape. Rape, when committed as part of a policy to destroy a group's existence, is considered a genocidal act. Dr. Stanton writes that genocide may also occur when a state deliberately inflicts, “conditions of life

calculated to destroy a group.” These conditions may include “the deliberate deprivation of resources needed for the group’s physical survival, such as clean water, food, clothing, shelter or medical services. Deprivation of the means to sustain life can be imposed through confiscation of harvests, blockade of foodstuffs, detention in camps, forcible relocation, or expulsion into deserts” (Stanton, 2002). The SPDC’s Four Cuts policy deliberately cuts off food and medicine to Karen fighters and civilians. SPDC blockades on trade and travel create food shortages and make accessing medicine and medical treatment extremely difficult. The Karen are forced to seek food in forests populated with landmines or flee to refugee camps. The Four Cuts policy also inevitably leads to forcible expulsion and relocation (Karen Human Rights Group, 2006).

Over the course of his work, Dr. Stanton has proposed a framework for understanding the process of genocide, which he calls The Eight Stages of Genocide (Stanton, 1998). He calls the first six stages early warning signs, which include: classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, and preparation. The seventh stage is extermination, and is the point at which genocide is taking place. Dr. Stanton did not feel that this phase was the end of the genocide process and therefore included the eighth stage of denial. He asserts that denial always accompanies genocide, both during and after the genocide has taken place. The eight stages do not necessarily occur in a linear fashion and more than one stage can occur at the same time. Dr. Stanton’s Eight Stages of Genocide presents an analytical framework for providing immutable evidence that a genocide will/is/or has taken place. I will apply Dr. Stanton’s framework to illustrate that the process of genocide is taking place in Burma, a process perpetrated by the SPDC against the Karen and other “rebel” ethnic minority groups.

The first stage of classification is tied closely to social identity theory. In this stage, borders are created between groups, creating an “us vs. them” division that may lead to power struggles between groups. People are categorized by ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality. In the case of Burma, people are predominantly defined by their ethnicity. Power struggles erupted between the Burman majority ethnic group and the Karen, along with other minority ethnic groups, as Burma gained independence. The Karen began fighting to preserve their cultural identity and to assert their right to self-determination. In

Burma, religion is also used as a salient classification system as people are identified as Buddhist, Christian, animist, or Muslim. Due to the large number of Christian fighters among some of the ethnic resistance armies, the regime tends to mistrust and discriminate against Christians. The SPDC also views Muslims, particularly the Muslim Rohingya community in Northern Arakan State, as a threat to national unity and plays on fears of an Islamic takeover. Christian and Muslim minorities are regularly targeted for persecution (Fink, 2009, p. 240).

The second stage of symbolization involves imposing names or other symbols to the classifications. Historic examples have included the Star of David in Nazi Germany and the imposition of Hutu or Tutsi identification cards in Rwanda. In Burma, symbols are not necessarily imposed on the Karen or other ethnic groups; rather, the problem lies in the regime's efforts to assimilate ethnic minority groups into the dominant Burman culture. For example, the military regime has forbidden the use of minority languages and ethnic dress except for special occasions (Hayami and Darlington, 2000, p. 143). It has seized and destroyed many Karen schools and institutions. The Karen are not allowed to study in their own language, certain Karen newspapers and books are banned, and they are not allowed to freely practice aspects of their culture that distinguish them too significantly from the Burman majority. As a result, the Karen are denied their cultural and, in the case of many Christians, their religious identity (Hayami and Darlington, 2000, p. 149). One example of symbolization that has occurred has been the regime's labeling of the Karen as "insurgents." This label serves to "other" the Karen, and immediately categorizes them as a dangerous enemy outgroup. The Karen resent the label because it carries an inherent implication that their cause is illegitimate, while they see the Burmese military junta as the entity lacking legitimacy (Karen National Union).

The third stage of genocide is dehumanization where one group denies the humanity of the Other. Dehumanization invokes the superiority of the ingroup while emphasizing the inferiority of the Other. Ethnic minority groups in Burma are devalued and in the case of the Karen, their land is taken over and they are forced to live in extremely difficult and often inhumane conditions. Dehumanization is an extreme case of cultural violence. Galtung (1990) writes that, "When Other is not only dehumanized but has been

successfully converted into an “it,” deprived of humanhood, the stage is set for any type of direct violence” (p. 298).

Organization is the fourth stage in the genocide continuum. Genocide is an extreme example of collective violence and must therefore be organized and closely coordinated. The state usually organizes, arms, and financially supports the groups that conduct the genocidal massacres (Stanton, 2007). Plans are put in place for implementing the genocidal killings. Each successive Burmese military regime has worked to increase the size of the Burmese Army, the *Tatmadaw*. In the years following the 1990 election, Burma’s leading generals sought to expand the size of the armed forces in order to be in a stronger position to suppress and control “insurgencies” by the Karen and other minority groups. As a result, the number of soldiers in the *Tatmadaw* increased from 180,000 in 1988 to 300,000 by the late 1990’s. The regime also built numerous new military compounds and bases throughout the country during this time period (Fink, 2009, p. 70). The increasing capacity and strength of the Burmese Army translates into deadly asymmetrical warfare.

During polarization, group divisions are demarcated even further and moderates from the “ingroup” are targeted, intimidated, and silenced. Moderates from the perpetrators’ own group become the first to be arrested and/or killed because they are the most able to prevent the genocide from occurring (Stanton, 1998). In Burma, political repression is the norm and Burman dissidents and activists are jailed and imprisoned for speaking out against the SPDC. Protests are violently shut down. Before the 2007 Saffron Revolution, there were over 1,100 political prisoners in Burma. Since then, hundreds more have been imprisoned and subjected to human rights violations such as rape and torture. There are 36 prisons in Burma of which 20 detain political prisoners. The two most notorious prisons are Myingyan and Insein Prison (US Campaign for Burma). The assassination of General Aung San in 1947 did not bode well for the direction of the country; his death was a harbinger of the ethnic conflicts to come.

General Aung San’s daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, won the 1990 election as the leader of the pro-democracy party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). The military junta refused to recognize the result of the election and numerous NLD members throughout

the country were arrested. By placing Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest, the regime hoped to break up the organizational structure of the pro-democracy movement (Fink, 2009, p. 70). The SPDC continues to persecute voices of dissent. To this day, Aung San Suu Kyii remains the legitimate elected leader of the Burmese people but the military regime has forced her to spend over 14 of the last 20 years under house arrest (US Campaign for Burma). Had General Aung San lived, or had Aung San Suu Kyii been allowed to lead, the suppression and violence against the Karen and other ethnic minority groups would not have escalated to its current excess.

The sixth stage of genocide, preparation, is the stage immediately preceding the actual act of genocide. During this stage, victims are identified and separated out based on their ethnic or religious identity. The Karen living in Karen State in eastern Burma have faced and continue to face the greatest threats to their cultural and physical survival. During preparation, weapons and resources are stockpiled and made ready. By taking advantage of China and India's competing interests, the SPDC has obtained economic, as well as military and political support from both countries (Fink, 2009, 250). This military and economic support has helped bolster the SPDC, allowing it to continue increasing the capacity of the *Tatmadaw*.

In the seventh stage, "extermination begins, and quickly becomes the mass killing legally called genocide" (Stanton, 1998). As part of the Four Cuts policy, Karen villagers are forced to relocate without compensation or new land to farm. Karen lands that have been seized are often sold to Burman buyers. In the most extreme cases, civilians are put into fenced relocation sites, which closely resemble concentration camps. At these camps, food is scarce, the water is often unclean, and medical access is virtually nonexistent (Fink, 2009, p. 145). These are indeed "conditions of life calculated to destroy a group."

In its attempts to root out Karen fighters, the *Tatmadaw* continues to engage in genocidal massacres of civilian populations. Peter Popham of the Independent wrote in 2005 of the military regime's genocidal intent: "In 1989, one year before the election won by Aung San Suu Kyi (but which the regime then ignored), the chairman of the junta acknowledged that the death toll in Burma's ethnic wars 'would reach as high as millions'.

Three years later, in 1992, the Health Minister, Ket Sein, reportedly boasted to a large meeting in Rangoon: 'In 10 years, all Karen will be dead. If you want to see a Karen, you will have to go to a museum in Rangoon' (Popham, 2005). The Karen National Union has stated its firm belief that the Burmese military regime is “waging a genocidal war against us” (Karen National Union).

The military has destroyed over 3,300 villages in Eastern Burma, and the area is now the most heavily mined region in the world (US Campaign for Burma). The *Tatmadaw* has destroyed crops, rice fields, and economic livelihoods. It has also subjected Karen villagers to grueling and often fatal forced labor conditions. According to the US Campaign for Burma, “In 2006 alone, 82,000 people died from or were forced from their homes to become IDPs in Eastern Burma, now living in camps guarded by ethnic resistance armies, barely surviving.” Over the years, *Tatmadaw* forces have even conducted repeated military assaults against Karen villages where there were no signs of armed opposition forces or any other apparent military target (Human Rights Watch, 2005, 29). H.T., a twenty-eight year-old Karen from Dooplaya District, described his experience with the *Tatmadaw* in January 2005:

I could hear machine gun fire and mortars when I was running to the borderline. I am afraid for my family, and very afraid that the SPDC will kill me. It's possible I will be tortured when I go back. Eleven SPDC soldiers were killed by the KNU. I don't want to go back to see the [SPDC] soldiers. I want to go back to my village when the fighting stops but I will be prepared to run once again (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 8).

Forced displacement is a military strategy that depopulates ethnic minority areas and denies Karen fighters the civilian support base it needs (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 41).

Karen women face a double burden: their ethnicity and gender make them targets for the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war. In a 2004 report called, “Shattering Silences,” the Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) documented the Burmese junta's use of rape as a weapon of war over an 18-month period. Hundreds of Karen women were raped in areas where Burmese troops were locked in a battle for territory with the KLNA. This

figure is most likely greatly under-reported due to the social and cultural stigma associated with rape. Most of these rapes were committed with impunity, meant to create a climate of fear for Karen women and their communities. Rape is widely and actively used by the *Tatmadaw* to intimidate, control, shame, and ethnically cleanse Karen groups in Burma (Karen Women's Organisation, 2004, p. 6). Mass rape can constitute an act of genocide when committed as part of a larger strategy of destruction.

The last stage of the process is denial and "it is among the surest indicators of further genocidal massacres" (Stanton, 1998). The SPDC has been able to continue its attacks against the Karen by justifying its actions as necessary in the midst of a civil war against enemy insurgents. The international community is also guilty of denial; as a whole, it has declined to recognize the conflict as genocide. Instead, the international community has framed the situation in Burma as one in which crimes against humanity and human rights violations are taking place. By defining genocidal acts as "mere" human rights violations, the international community greatly minimizes the severity and urgency of the situation. In the case of Burma, political repression is lumped together with collective violence against vulnerable civilians under the same umbrella of 'human rights violations.' This helps absolve the international community of the moral imperative to take immediate and decisive action to end the mass violence in Eastern Burma.

Another strategy that the international community has used to ignore the genocide in Burma is by focusing overwhelmingly on the pro-democracy movement of Aung San Suu Kyi, and on the human rights violations committed against political dissidents. Ignoring the "in part" clause of the Genocide Convention as stated earlier in this paper is another tactic (Stanton, 2007). In March, the Karen National Union issued a statement to the UN Secretary General stating that, "What is happening in Karen State is not a civil war with two sides fighting each other. The reality is that the Burmese Army is attacking and deliberately targeting civilians, and this has been verified by the United Nations' own reports" (KNU, March 4, 2010). The UN continues to ignore the irrefutable evidence found in its own reports.

Intervention Design

Even though international interest in Burma has increased since the 1990 Burmese elections, no government or international body has proposed military action to remove the military regime (Fink, 2009, p. 3). The international community must stop being a bystander to genocide and act to stop more genocidal massacres from taking place in Burma. The United Nations must first recognize that the ethnic conflict in Burma is genocide, and then act to implement “the responsibility to protect.” The Responsibility to Protect mandate states that:

The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian, and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. In this context, we are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity (UN Responsibility to Protect, 2009, p. 4).

The priority here should be to stop the direct violence that is being perpetrated against the Karen (and other minorities) by the Burmese military regime. In cases of genocide, I believe that the use of direct force is necessary. Dr. Stanton states that when genocide is occurring, “only rapid and overwhelming armed intervention can stop” it (Stanton, 1998). A multilateral force authorized by the UN should intervene by protecting the Karen from future *Tatmadaw* military assaults. This would send a strong message to the military regime that the international community is finally willing to act to end the genocide against the Karen and other ethnic minorities. If the UN cannot act, then regional alliances such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) must be encouraged to act to stop the genocide.

Once the genocide has been stopped, a ceasefire between the military junta and the KNU/KNLA must be signed and observed. The Karen National Union has stated that it would like to “urge all the ethnic and democratic forces and the international forces for

peace, freedom and democracy to join hands together and make a concerted push for final victory against the SPDC military regime, which is the most ruthless and criminal dictatorship in the world” (Karen National Union). The NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi and the leaders of the KNU and other ethnic nationalist organizations should meet to adopt a shared agenda for action to force the SPDC to compromise and hold tripartite talks. Every effort should also be made to ensure the integrity of the upcoming 2010 elections in Burma. This would involve allowing the NLD and political representatives from the ethnic minority groups to participate legitimately and fairly, and to honor the democratic outcome of the election results.

The identity and recognition needs of the Karen must be adequately addressed and met to their satisfaction. As long as ethnic minority concerns are not addressed, the conflicts in Burma are likely to remain even if democracy is finally restored. Azar has written that, “Groups which seek to satisfy their identity and security needs through conflict are in effect seeking change in the structure of their society. Conflict resolution can truly occur and last if satisfactory amelioration of underdevelopment occurs as well...peace is development in the broadest sense of the term” (as cited in Ramsbotham et al., 2005, p. 86). There is a real need for more effective international involvement in Burma, including the provision of more humanitarian and development assistance.

Peacebuilding activities both in the refugee camps and on the ground in Burma must also be encouraged, promoted, and adequately funded. These peacebuilding activities should include programs for dealing with trauma and for transforming the culture of violence that has permeated Burmese society for over sixty years. Women, including Aung San Suu Kyi must be involved in the peace process and a commitment to gender mainstreaming should be made. General Aung San’s promise of equality between ethnic groups - “For the Burmese one *kyat* and the Karen one *kyat*” - should be honored (Buadaeng, 2007, 81). Creating and implementing a federal Burmese constitution in which the Karen and other ethnic minority groups are guaranteed their right to self-determination within a unified Burma, would be an enduring tribute to the memory of General Aung San.

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