3. Meth & militias: the Myanmar–China border region

‘The militias only work for their personal benefit’, a lawyer in Myanmar’s northern Kachin State, close to the Chinese border, told me. In addition to non-state armed groups, which are commonly referred to as ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) in Myanmar, state-sponsored armed militias are active in the region. ‘They have no salary, but they are armed. So they do a lot of smuggling. The Tatmadaw [the Myanmar national armed forces] protect them and don’t intervene because they are useful for them.’

Some militias evolved out of EAOs or factions within them that switched sides in order to benefit from deals offered by the Tatmadaw, such as concessions to extract resources (see e.g. Callahan, 2007). Other militia groups were created by strongmen and later co-opted by the Tatmadaw; still others were established by the Tatmadaw as village-level forces. Militias have existed since Myanmar’s independence in 1948 and their number is unknown; but Buchanan estimates the number of militia groups in Myanmar in the hundreds or even thousands (2016, p.1).

Militias are also prevalent in Myanmar’s northern Kachin and Shan States (Figure 3.1). The region receives less attention in the world than the episodes of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine State that resulted in the displacement of the Rohingya, which is covered in Chapter 4. But a violent conflict that involves the Tatmadaw, EAOs and militias has been ongoing in Kachin and Shan States, in close proximity to the Chinese border, for decades.

Like the Thailand–Malaysia border, the Myanmar–China border is porous and large amounts of goods and people are smuggled across, primarily into China. This includes natural resources, such as timber and jade. In addition, Kachin and Shan States are a major source of opium, with Myanmar being the world’s second largest producer after Afghanistan (see Meehan, 2016). More recently, Shan State especially has also become a major exporter of methamphetamines (particularly ‘yaba’) in the region, including to Thailand and Bangladesh. Conversely, EAOs in the region often use weapons smuggled from China.
To gain a better understanding of how the smuggling business and armed conflict relate in Kachin and Shan states, I conducted interviews in the capital of Kachin State, Myitkyina, as well as in Lashio and Kengtung in Shan State in January 2018. To be able to go into more depth, the chapter focuses primarily on the findings from Kachin State, but also draws on examples from northern Shan State, where I observed similar dynamics.

BACKGROUND: A BRIEF HISTORY OF ARMED CONFLICT IN MYANMAR

Myanmar was founded as and continues to be known as Burma. What is often described as one of the longest civil wars in history has afflicted
the country since its independence from the British in 1948. Myanmar is ethnically diverse and various EAOs fight for independence, autonomy and/or greater political rights. Division began under colonial rule, when the British gave ‘Upper-Burma’ to the north far more autonomy than ‘Lower-Burma’ to the south. While the south was politically and economically dominated by the British, the north was left with a larger degree of autonomy. Local rulers were left to rule over their own territories with small concessions to the British.

General Aung San, who is commonly viewed as the founder of Burma and is the father of the Nobel Peace Prize winner and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, set out to create a federal state that would give equal rights to all ethnic groups. In 1947, the Burmese government and representatives of the Shan, Kachin and Chin ethnic communities signed the ‘Panglong Agreement’, in which they decided, rather ambiguously, that ‘full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas is accepted in principle’ for these ethnic groups ‘within a Unified Burma’. Shortly after, Aung San was assassinated, six months before Burma gained independence from Britain. The country’s new constitution categorised ethnic groups differently. The Kachin, the Karen, the Karenni, and the Shan were categorised as ‘states’ within a unified Burma. Among them the Karenni and the Shan were granted the right of secession after ten years if they fulfilled certain requirements (TNI, 2017, p.5). The Chin, the Wa and Muslims in Arakan as well as other ethnic groups did not receive special recognition (ibid.). In 1962, the civilian government was toppled in a military coup and a military government, dominated by the majority ethnic group, the Bamar, began its rule. In an attempt to unify territorial control, the military imprisoned and tortured many ethnic minority leaders.

After passing a new constitution in 2008, the military junta proclaimed its plan to begin a transition to democracy. In 2010, the government allowed elections for the first time in decades. Aung San Suu Kyi was released after 15 years of house arrest and her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), has been the dominant civilian political power in the country ever since. Nonetheless, the Myanmar military, the Tatmadaw, still holds substantial sway over power. Based on the constitution they passed, they are not subject to oversight by the civilian government and have a guaranteed 25% of the seats in parliament.

Armed combat between the Tatmadaw and EAOs has repeatedly occurred since the early 1960s. Many ethnic armed groups demand more autonomy within a federal system. However, with continued alienation as
a result of aggressive military interventions in the regions, some groups favour a solution of secession instead of federalism.

As in Thailand’s Deep South, the conflict has an economic dimension. The conflict is partly driven by a perceived neglect of communities and partly by aggressive exploitation of natural resources. Battles are not only fought over territory, but also over drug trade routes or natural resource extraction. Woods (2011; 2018) offers a detailed analysis of the ‘conflict resource economy’ in Myanmar’s borderlands. He points out that ceasefires have enabled the Tatmadaw, EAOs and militias to exploit natural resources on a large scale in what he calls ‘ceasefire capitalism’. He further describes how the Tatmadaw often try to incentivise EAOs, or breakaway groups, to end their fight against the government and become ‘self-sufficient counterinsurgent forces’ by allowing them to continuously control their territory and exploit its resources and trade routes (2018, p.6).


The most recent initiative to negotiate peace through the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015 failed. A number of key EAOs, such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA), refused to sign the agreement because the Tatmadaw had excluded other EAOs from participating in the talks, including the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA). Influential non-signatory groups formed the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC), which is backed by China and does not accept the NCA ‘because it is not all-inclusive and does not recognize the political rights of all ethnic nationalities’ (FPNCC, 2018; see also Lintner, 2018).

The Kachin Independence Army

One of the largest ethnic minority groups in Myanmar are the Kachin people. The Kachin trace their history back to migration from the Tibetan Plateau around AD 500. Today, a large population of Kachin lives in Myanmar’s Kachin State as well as in China’s neighbouring Yunnan
Province (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). Due to the influence of American missionaries who began travelling to Kachin in the nineteenth century, most Kachin are Christians of Baptist faith. The majority of Kachin speaks Jingpo, but some subgroups speak different languages.\(^8\)

The Kachin also have one of the most prominent EAOs in Myanmar: the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), with an estimated 10,000 troops, which functions as the armed wing of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). Brenner (2019, p.76) describes how their informal capital Laiza at the Chinese border has turned into a ‘Mecca of armed ethnic resistance’, a symbol of resistance within Myanmar.

The Kachin signed the Panglong Agreement in 1947, surrendering the right to secede in exchange for more territory under the constitution (TNI, 2017, p.5). But following a perceived neglect of the Kachin and a lack of implementation of Panglong after Burma’s independence in 1948, an ethnic armed movement gained ground. In 1960, university students...
established the KIO and in early 1961 established the KIA (Jaquet, 2015). The group demanded autonomy and self-determination for the Kachin, and frustration grew further when the constitution gave Buddhism a stronger role in the country that same year.

The group grew quickly and expanded its influence. In 1976, the KIO/A and the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) formed a coalition,
which ensured the KIA access to weapons smuggled from China (Burma Link, 2018). By the 1980s, the group controlled large parts of Kachin and northern Shan States (Brenner, 2019, p.75; Lintner, 2011). After the collapse of the CPB in 1989, which made access to weapons more difficult, the KIA negotiated a ceasefire with the Myanmar government in 1994 (Burma Link, 2018). The ceasefire allowed both sides to accumulate substantial profits from resource extraction and sale (Brenner, 2015, p.338), in line with what Woods (2011; 2018) describes as “ceasefire capitalism”. Kachin State has substantial natural resources – particularly jade – that have been extracted aggressively in recent decades (Global Witness, 2015).

Woods finds that controlling the mining town of Hpakant in eastern Kachin State had allowed the KIO/A to monopolise the jade trade until it relinquished this territorial control through the ceasefire agreement, after which it turned to timber in the areas it continued to control. He concludes that deforestation ‘skyrocketed’ at the Kachin State–Yunnan border after the peace agreement (2011, p.750). However, Brenner (2015; 2019) points out that while the mutually beneficial enterprise allowed for peaceful years in the region, the focus on revenue generation and neglect of local grievances has left underlying problems unresolved. Communities are now increasingly sceptical, not only of the national government, but also of the KIO/A leadership (2015, p.338).

In 2008, the Tatmadaw called on ethnic armed groups to transform themselves into Border Guard Forces (BGF), militias subordinate to the Tatmadaw. While some groups complied, this request resulted in a breakdown of the ceasefire with the KIA in 2011 (see South, 2018, p.4). Brenner explains that the young leadership of the KIA rejected the Tatmadaw’s proposal, feeling alienated as older generations of leadership had flourished as a result of natural resource exploitation, creating stark inequalities within the movement (2015, p.343). Meanwhile an interviewee in Kachin State, reflecting a common perspective on the streets, argued: “Both parties just want money. During the ceasefire the government and the KIA shared the revenues. The ceasefire broke down because the two parties couldn’t agree on who gets what share of the revenue.”

Fighting resumed between the Tatmadaw and the KIA in 2013 when the Tatmadaw launched an offensive on the KIA headquarters in Laiza, located at the Chinese border. Later attacks were launched in Kokang and Palaung. In June 2017, the Tatmadaw attacked gold and amber mines operated by the KIO/A in Tanai in Kachin State (Min Tun, 2018).
Fighting intensified in the following months and was ongoing at the time of this writing. The spokesperson of the KIO/A’s liaison office in Myitkyina, the Technical Advisory Team (TAT), claimed: ‘Originally we fought army against army. But then the government changed its strategy around 2014 and started to attack villages that are close to KIA posts. Hence, many villagers have been displaced. (…) Hundreds of villages have been burnt down.’10 Indeed, UN estimates say that 60,000 people in Kachin and Shan State were displaced between January 2017 and March 2018 (OCHA, 2018).11

Most of the internally displaced people (IDP) now live in camps along the Chinese border (KWAT, 2013, p.5). A resident of an IDP camp in Kachin State said that his village comprised 2,300 families before it became ‘a conflict zone’ where ‘[n]obody takes responsibility for our safety (…) neither the government nor the KIA’. He often goes back because he is the head of the village, though most people have moved to IDP camps. He also noted that he did not consider the IDP camps to be safe, citing an incident where the Tatmadaw shelled Mung Lai Hkyet IDP camp in January 2018. ‘The war is driven by the government. It feels as if the camps were shelled intentionally’, he says.12 Help for displaced people has largely come from local civil society and faith-based organisations, rather than the international community (South, 2018, p.25).

But the KIO/A does not limit its activities to fighting; it also governs parts of territory in Kachin State. The organisation built schools and universities and created its own quasi-governmental structure in the territories under its control, with departments for health, education, agriculture and women’s affairs (Brenner, 2015, p.347). Education plans integrating Kachin language and culture into the public education system are in place. Combined with the perceived cultural and political alienation by the national government, and the armed conflict that often also resulted in civilian deaths, this has contributed to a strengthening of Kachin identity.

Like most governments, the KIO/A generates revenue through taxes, which are levied on companies extracting natural resources, especially jade (see e.g. Brenner, 2019, p.80; Global Witness, 2015). A number of interviewees in Kachin State complained that the KIO/A was taxing people, shops, and sometimes also cars at checkpoints.13 One interviewee from Myitkyina, which is under government control but close to KIA territories, explained:

In downtown Myitkyina, small shops pay a tax of around MMK 1 million [c. US$720] to the KIA per year. But it’s not done very systematically.
Sometimes they come twice per year; sometimes once per year. Private car owners have to pay at checkpoints. If they give you a receipt, you can use it for a year. But if you have a receipt from the KIA and the government finds it, you may get arrested. And the government is collecting taxes too. So most people in the city pay to the KIA and the government.14

According to interviewees the group is involved in other business activities. For instance, the KIO/A owns hotels on the Chinese border and provides Chinese businessmen with licences for casinos in a town called Mai Ja Yang, which contribute significantly to their revenue.15

The New Democratic Army – Kachin

Another Kachin group, the New Democratic Army – Kachin (NDA-K) have a decidedly different relationship to the Tatmadaw. This particularly influential militia had its origins in the CPB, which members of the KIA under the command of Zahkung Ting Ying and Layawk Zalum had joined in 1968 in order to fight both the Tatmadaw and the KIA as the CPB’s Unit 101 (Lintner, 2011, p.435; Lintner, 2015, p.260). In 1989, Zahkung Ting Ying, Layawk Zalum and other commanders within the CPB mutinied, resulting in the collapse of the party, and they formed the NDA-K (2011, p.435; 2015, p.260). The same year, they agreed on a ceasefire, cooperating with the Burmese government. The state then formally recognised the territory controlled by the NDA-K in Chipwe and Tsawlaw Townships at the Chinese border as Kachin State Special Region 1. The export of heroin and natural resources from the area to China made the group’s leaders rich (Aung Myint, 2016).17 Layawk Zalum lost his influence after a failed mutiny in 2005 and Zahkung Ting Ying continued to run the NDA-K on his own (Martov, 2012). In 2009, Zahkung Ting Ying agreed to transform the NDA-K into a unit of the Burmese BGF and to turn the Kachin State Special Region 1 into a constituency. Zahkung Ting Ying got elected to parliament in 2010 to represent this constituency, which includes the townships Injangyang, Chiphwili and Tsawlaw.

A former NDA-K general explained that Zahkung Ting Ying sold all of the guns the NDA-K had held to the KIA at significant profit before it became part of the BGF.18 And even though the territory is now formally under the control of the Myanmar government, Zahkung Ting Ying remains, as another interviewee put it, the ‘regional king’,19 who controls a private militia of an estimated 1,000. The former general explained:
‘the NDA-K is now part of the official government forces, with uniforms and salaries. But the government gave Zahkung Ting Ying a licence for guns and he continues to have his personal militia. He still controls the townships and the government gave him the powers to operate there.’

An interviewee from the Kachin State Special Region 1 explained that people in the area ‘don’t really have any other option but to support him’. Another interviewee pointed out: ‘People who live in the area have to join his militia when they turn 18. If they don’t do it, they have no security. Anything can happen.’

Zahkung Ting Ying won his election to become a member of parliament in 2015, but lost his seat a year later after opponents in that election alleged in court that he had intimidated them into not running against him. A lawyer who helped with the court case against Zahkung Ting Ying remembered: ‘The trial took place in Myitkyina. But the problem is that nobody stops Zahkung Ting Ying from bringing his militias into the city. So he brought his militias into the courtroom to intimidate everyone. They came wearing uniforms and were fully armed. On the uniform it said ‘Pyithusit’ [militia] and on their arm patch they have two crossed arrows and a bow.’

Even though Zahkung Ting Ying lost his seat in parliament after this court case, the lawyer said, Zahkung Ting continues to treat his former constituency as his own property and has made plans to ensure his son succeeds him in dominating the region. He concluded: ‘his kingdom will be inherited by his two sons.’

THE SMUGGLING ECONOMY

The Smuggling of Goods

The neighbouring economies of Kachin State and Shan State are closely connected to China. Large quantities of goods, including most of the extracted natural resources, are exported there. Major border crossings in Kachin State are located at Phimaw, Pang War, Kampati (also spelled Kampaitee or Kan Paik Ti) and Laiza. However, it is difficult to get significant information distinguishing legal exports from smuggled goods. One interviewee claimed that he has seen significant goods pass the border and never seen anyone pay a custom fee. ‘Everything is smuggled’, he concluded.

The production of jade alone in Myanmar in 2014 is estimated to have brought profits of US$31 billion (Global Witness, 2015). Rubies and timber are also big business. In addition, less valuable goods are smug-
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Smuggled into China, often in large quantities. For instance, trucks full of cows are taken across the border every day. According to local media reports, 500 cattle are smuggled into China from Kachin daily (see Inkey, 2015). And just outside of Myitkyina, in Waingmaw Township, there are large banana plantations – an estimated 90,000 acres, according to an interviewee from the area. The companies running them are registered under the name of Burmese citizens, but are owned by Chinese people, and the entire product is shipped to China (see also Khaing, 2018; Myint, 2017). An interviewee noted: ‘Big trucks cross the border into China, but they are only checked from the outside, so we don’t know what they take.’

Some trucks may be carrying drugs. According to the UNODC (2018c, p.iii) Myanmar Opium Survey, 36,100 ha of opium poppy were cultivated in Shan and Kachin State in 2018. The border region of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar, in Shan State, is known as the ‘Golden Triangle’ due to its prodigious opium production. Heroin addiction is high in Kachin, with some interviewees even suggesting that half of the adult population of Myitkyina is addicted. But they also think that most of the heroin made in the state is smuggled to China. Nonetheless, according to the interviewees, heroin production is on the decline in Kachin State as opium from Afghanistan dominates the global market, while the production of methamphetamines, such as yaba, is increasing.

As yaba is a chemical drug, it can be produced almost anywhere and, in theory, does not need to be smuggled across borders (see e.g. UNODC, 2013, p.62). Nonetheless, Shan State is the largest producer of yaba in the world. A lack of prosecution offers particularly low prices. According to a recent International Crisis Group (ICG) report, the methamphetamine business is now considerably bigger than the entire formal sector in Shan State (2019, p.2). From here the drug is exported to China, Thailand, Bangladesh and elsewhere (Figure 3.4). Crystal meth is also produced in Shan State, almost exclusively for export (ibid., p.10). The drug smuggling, according to the ICG, is ‘increasingly professionalised’. For instance, crystal meth is ‘packed in branded tea packets, both to facilitate concealment and to give it a specific product identity’ (ibid., p.11). UNODC estimates that 80% of the methamphetamines produced in Myanmar are concealed in vehicles and smuggled at regular border crossings where the remainder cross at irregular crossings (2013, p.63).
Myanmar is one of the main countries of origin of migrant workers, trafficked people, and refugees in the region. For instance, as of August 2012, the Ministry of Labour in Thailand estimated that of the 743,538 migrant workers with active work permits, 623,555 (83.8%) came from Myanmar (Feingold, 2013, p.209). In 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees left Myanmar for Bangladesh.

Also in Kachin, in addition to the smuggling of goods, the smuggling of people is frequent. The border with China is fairly open and easy to cross. Due to the large-scale displacement in Kachin caused by the ongoing conflict, many decide to seek shelter with relatives on the Chinese side.
of the border. Many others cross the border into China for economic reasons. The economy in Kachin State is weak, and the unemployment rate is high, while in China the economy is booming and cheap labour is in high demand. Hence, countless people decide to cross the border to find work in China. As many people in remote regions or conflict zones in Myanmar lack proper identification documents (see US Department of State, 2017, p.107), and as it is often complicated to get the necessary documents to legally work in China, many – if not most – decide to cross the border without such documents and work in China illegally.

When working in China, migrant workers can make an income far greater than they would earn in Kachin State, where many people only earn around US$150 per month (see Dapice, 2016). An interviewee from Myitkyina described his life as a migrant worker in China:

I used to be a driver here in Myitkyina. But now the situation is very unstable. There are no more jobs. So I have been working in a paper factory in China for a year now. It’s an industrial zone, where products are made out of wood, such as furniture and paper. Thousands of people from Myanmar work there. They are mainly from Kachin, Shan, and Rakhine. The wages range between 1,500 and 4,000 Yuan [c. US$230–615] per month. I am paid 3,000 plus overtime, which adds up to 3,600 Yuan [c. US$555] per month. If you speak a little bit of Chinese, you are quickly favoured by the boss and are not looked down on by the Chinese. Officially, we get no holidays. But I get unpaid leave because I get along with the boss.

There are two options for people in Kachin State to cross into China legally. A red border pass allows them to stay for seven days. However, this limits people to the border area and does not allow them to travel further into China. Alternatively, people can apply for a work permit, which is a green booklet that allows them to stay and work in China for up to several years. However, the application process is considerably more challenging. A migrant worker told me: ‘The green booklet is very difficult to get. It is very expensive (...) and one has to go to Yangon to get it. So most of my friends don’t have one.’ Another interviewee said: ‘I have no documents at all. (...) Originally I had a green booklet, but when I washed my clothes it got wet and I can’t use it anymore. It’s really difficult to get a new one. You need a certificate [of good health] from the doctor.’

It is thus common to enter legally and overstay the seven days and return via an irregular route. One migrant worker said: ‘I usually cross legally into China at Kampati border with a border pass and then, on my
back to Myanmar, go through the village [an informal crossing]. A man who works in China and who was on holiday in Myitkyina explained:

On your way to the border at Kampati, you travel through NDA-K territory. They are now part of the government, but they sometimes have checkpoints. The official border crossing itself is controlled by actual government forces. Basically there are two options when you get to the border. Either you go through the government checkpoint, where they check the goods you have with you, and check your documents and stamp them. But you are only allowed to stay in China for six nights or seven days. (…) Alternatively, you can cross the border at Baokwan village. There, the local villagers have checkpoints. They don’t check your documents or goods, but they ask every person for 10 Yuan [c. US$1.50]. The Chinese government doesn’t bother them, and it enables them to make some money. In the past there was no formal border crossing. So that’s why the government lets them continue to make an income this way.

People who do not speak Chinese, do not know where to go in China or are less confident about travelling on their own rely on brokers. Two migrant workers from Kachin State in China whom I interviewed together explained on a video-call:

We had a broker who organised a car that took us to China. We didn’t have to worry about anything. The driver knew everything, and knew how to deal with the checkpoints, going around them, sometimes hiding the car in the bushes. (…) So there is no need for any documents. When we went for the first time, the broker kept all the money. So we ran away and found a new place to work. Now we work directly for a company, without a broker or middleman.

Another migrant worker had a more positive experience with a broker, however: ‘I went with a group of people and a broker took care of everything. It is safe to go with a broker. Ours was from Myanmar, but he also spoke Chinese. He had already worked in China for a long time, and then came back to find workers for three factories.’

The brokers appear to run their businesses independent of each other. One migrant worker explained: ‘Some brokers have more; others have fewer employees. The brokers have different areas. For instance, one may work in lower Myanmar, another one in Kachin. The brokers also pay different salaries.’

More challenging than the border crossing is daily life as a migrant worker in China, as the police frequently search factories for illegal migrant workers. The two migrant workers on the video call said that their ‘biggest problem’ was having to run if the police come, as they do
not have documents. However, arrests do not deter migrant workers, who usually return to China soon after being deported. An interviewee described being arrested in 2017 and held for about 24 hours, interrogated, then sent back to Kampati where the Myanmar police picked him up and brought him back to Myitkyina. ‘I went back to China the next day’, he concluded.

As the interviewees suggested, brokers sometimes exploit migrant workers. Especially vulnerable are those who are travelling to China for the first time. The brokers often act as middlemen and negotiate the migrant workers’ salaries and time off. One interviewee said that he received variable payments that were nonetheless always lower than what Chinese workers receive: ‘In the first month I got 3,500 Yuan [c. US$535] as promised. But then it got less over time. The salary is paid through a broker.’ At the same time, ‘it’s still four or five times higher than in Myanmar.’

Most interviewees agreed that despite exploitation they were earning a higher salary in China than in Myanmar. For instance, another migrant worker reported:

The broker receives the monthly salary for the workers from the boss but then only passes on a share to the workers. We don’t know how much he is paid by the boss and our salary fluctuates. After Chinese New Year we may get 1,000 Yuan [c. US$150]; in the middle of the year maybe only 500 [c. US$75]. But it’s still better than the salaries here [in Myanmar].

**Trafficking in Persons**

At times, people who believe that they would be smuggled as migrants end up being trafficked. Most people trafficked in Kachin state are women, who are forced into marriages with Chinese men. However, men can be victims of human trafficking as well, ending up in situations of debt bondage or other forms of forced labour (US Department of State, 2017, p.108). An interviewee explained that, for instance, ‘some are forced to work in the charcoal industry or with silk worms, but are not receiving any salary.’

A report of the Union of Myanmar (n.d.) indicates that, out of 641 reported cases of trafficking in the country between 2006 and 2010, 80% had China as the destination country. Feingold finds that 85% of the identified cases involved the trafficking of women (2013, p.112). China
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faces a substantial gender-imbalance, with men outnumbering women by 1.16:1, creating a large demand for women.

The victims are promised jobs with Chinese families by brokers, but end up being forced to marry Chinese men.\textsuperscript{48} I found no evidence of institutional connections between brokers who perpetuate this crime and political authorities.\textsuperscript{49} Interviewees further insisted that it is individual actors and not organised groups that are responsible,\textsuperscript{50} for example:

There are brokers who organise the trafficking. It’s usually local people who have lived in China for a long time, and know the Chinese people well. Many men in China can’t find a wife. So they ask somebody from Myanmar to look for a woman. Then this person comes here and tells a woman that they have a job for her in China. He takes her back to China, where she has to get married to the Chinese man. Only then she realises that she got trafficked. The brokers get at least 30,000 to 40,000 Yuan [c. US$4,600–6,150]. It’s individuals, who do everything themselves, not organised groups. The same brokers do not only traffic women but also pass on labourers to Chinese businessmen. Here, they have a different system. While they get a one-off payment for women, they take a monthly share of the salaries from the men they bring to factories in China.\textsuperscript{51}

According to a UNODC (2016) report, not only most of the victims, but also 65% of the traffickers are women. Not all of the ‘traffickers’ have bad intentions. Sometimes it is family members who convince women to get married to Chinese men, hoping that they will have a better future. There is some variation in the experience of women brought from Myanmar for marriage; some may be willing to go in the hopes of a better life even though they are marrying men they have not met. As one interviewee said, ‘some [women] go voluntarily to make money, to survive.’\textsuperscript{52} At the other end of the spectrum there is evidence of women used as sex slaves, and the same interviewee said that victims are ‘[o]ften’ ‘sold to another man after giving birth to a child’. The Kachin Women’s Association Thailand (KWAT) receives pleas for help from trafficked women on a monthly basis.\textsuperscript{53}

Particularly vulnerable are those who live in IDP camps and they comprise the bulk of female victims of trafficking (KWAT, 2013). One resident of such a camp reported: ‘In every camp the number of human trafficking cases is increasing. People think that they go to China to work, but then they are actually trafficked. They are told that they will get a job in China, but then are married to a Chinese man… Most of these cases happen in the IDP camps close to the border.’\textsuperscript{54}
Interviewees pointed out that few measures have been taken to deal with the problem. Some civil society organisations help families to find their relatives in China and bring them back. However, a central problem appears to be the cooperation of Chinese authorities. Civil society activists argue that the Chinese authorities sometimes agree to help victims of human trafficking, but that more often they ignore requests for help even when the exact location of a victim of human trafficking has been identified. Hence, many victims of human trafficking remain in China.

SMUGGLING AND ARMED CONFLICT: THE ROLE OF INSURGENTS

The Smuggling of Goods

Compared to armed conflict in Southern Thailand, armed conflict in Myanmar plays a considerably more direct role in the context of the smuggling of goods. Non-state armed groups, the Tatmadaw, and state-affiliated militias all benefit from smuggling revenue at the Myanmar–China border, often linked to the exploitation of natural resources. According to a Global Witness report, the extraction and smuggling of jade is the KIO/A’s main source of income (2015, p.14). However, the report also illustrates in great detail that Tatmadaw officers in the area ‘are making personal fortunes’ extorted from the jade business and that therefore ‘the battle for control of jade revenues [has become] a strategic priority for both sides in the conflict’ (ibid.). This competition over who controls the mines and the trade routes for jade is a driver of the ongoing conflict.

Different actors and authorities are in control of different border crossings in Kachin State. An interviewee from the Shan community in Kachin State complained: ‘We have three governments here. The Tatmadaw, the KIA, and the NDA-K. And each of them is in control of at least one border gate. Sometimes one even has to pass the checkpoints of [multiple] different authorities on the way from Myitkyina to the border.’

Both licit and illicit goods pass through all border gates. However, like their counterparts in Southern Thailand, smugglers usually prefer peaceful areas to conflict areas for the transportation of goods. An interviewee from an ethnic minority group in Kachin explained the impact of this:

In the past, all sorts of things were smuggled through the KIA gates, including jade, amber, logs, opium, and amphetamines. But since the end of the cease-
fire, most of the smuggling is happening through the areas controlled by the NDA-K rather than the KIA, because there is no fighting. At the moment, it’s mainly animals, cows, and buffalos that are smuggled through the KIA gates. But even that is happening on a larger scale in the NDA-K areas, where they use trucks to do so. In the KIA areas they walk them across.56

Controlling territory at the border is important for armed groups as business people prefer to operate in such a way that they can deal with a single authority from the sourcing to the point a commodity reaches the neighbouring country for a given product. Crossing dividing lines between competing actors creates risks, unpredictability and additional costs, which ultimately cuts into profits. Furthermore, controlling territory at the border may enable non-state armed groups to generate additional revenue, by charging fees for people who want to cross the border and for the export of goods – particularly of natural resources in the case of Kachin State. However, most money is made through concessions and taxes, not through bribes at the border crossing. For instance, when smuggling logs, smugglers make a one-time payment that covers the extraction and export of goods. One interviewee explained: ‘People pay tax to the KIA, so they don’t have to pay again at the border.’57 Again, this is an incentive for business, as the costs can be budgeted for easily.

In addition to natural resources, two other goods are commonly smuggled across the border in northern Myanmar: guns and drugs. The smuggling of weapons and ammunition is left almost exclusively to non-state actors. While state actors can legally buy and import such goods, EAOs often depend on smuggled weapons. The former NDA-K general explained:

Chinese arms are very easy to get. After signing the agreement, you transfer the money into a Chinese account. And you get the weapons right away. They are delivered to your doorstep. If you pay a bit more, you can keep the car they use to deliver the guns. (...) And the ammunition is very cheap. The price for a bullet ranges from 7 jiao [c. US$0.10] to 2 or 3 yuan [c. US$0.50] for more expensive ones. And all of these bullets work in the M21, M22, and M23 [types of guns that are prevalent in the area].58

While the smuggling of guns is acknowledged, KIA supporters deny that drugs pass through the areas that they control, arguing that only the government and militias are benefitting from the drug trade. They blame heroin addiction in Kachin State on the Tatmadaw. The Kachin Baptist Convention, which is closely connected to the KIO/A, has even set up
several ‘Drug Rehabilitation Centres’ (Figure 3.5), and their anti-drug militia, the Pat Jasan, pick up drug users on the streets and bring them to the centres. The methods used in these centres, however, are questionable. At a visit to one of them, some people were kept in cages (see also Cousins, 2016; Shaw, 2017). The director explained that they were running three-month programmes and that people were only locked up waiting for their programme to begin. He explained that the programme would consists of 14 hours of ‘prayers, teaching, work in the camp, and exercise’. He also said that when the centre was set up staff assumed that ‘only bad people were using drugs’ but that they soon realised that users’ backgrounds were quite varied. ‘Some people even come back repeatedly’, he said.59

It is widely accepted that the KIO/A is not involved in the drug trade and my research in Kachin State found no evidence that contradicts this view. How their role with regard to drugs is perceived by the public is particularly important for the KIO/A. In its ‘Myanmar Opium Survey 2018’, UNODC (2018c, p.3) says that the KIA controls or ‘influence[s]’ the
areas in Kachin State with ‘the highest density of poppy cultivation’. The KIO (2019a) strongly rejects this claim, and it responded to UNODC’s report with an open letter that states that the published maps erroneously identify an area that the government-controlled BGF controls as controlled by the KIO/A. It claims the KIO ‘is well aware of the danger of narcotic drugs to our people’ (ibid.) and has been ‘actively involved in carrying out opium eradication, punishing dealers, and conducting rehabilitation programs for users’ (ibid.). In support of their claim, the KIO (2019b) even released a ‘Drug Issue Report’ of its ‘Fact-Finding Mission in Kachin and Northern Shan States’ that closely resembles the format of UN reports. Clearly, the KIO considers it important to debate the claim. A study of the Transnational Institute (TNI, 2019) supports the KIO’s view, confirming ‘that there is presently no substantial opium cultivation in KIO-controlled areas’ and that it is ‘unclear how the UNODC arrives at its completely opposite claims about Kachin State, but it seems to be based on wrong assumptions about who “controls” which areas’.

However, EAOs that claim to be against the drug business can nonetheless in some cases benefit from it indirectly. For instance, the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in Shan State is a vocal opponent of opium production and one of its founding purposes was to combat drugs. But the ICG’s recent investigation finds that opium farmers pay the TNLA’s ‘revolutionary tax’, its primary source of revenue. The report concludes that ‘smuggling and drug trafficking provide some of the most lucrative opportunities for the TNLA’s taxation, with higher taxes reportedly being levied for these activities, and seized drugs reportedly often sold by the TNLA back into the supply chain’ (2019, p.14).

Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons

The armed conflict in northern Myanmar is a key push factor that contributes to migrant smuggling and human trafficking. Many communities in ethnic minority regions are displaced by ongoing violent conflicts between the Tatmadaw and non-state armed groups. Across Kachin and northern Shan State, an estimated 120,000 people have been displaced since 1961, either internally or into China; many now depend on aid (see BBC, 2018a). The US Department of State argues: ‘Ethnic minority groups in Burma – particularly internally displaced Rohingya, Rakhine, Shan, and Kachin communities – continued to be at elevated risk of forced labor, as a result of ongoing military incursions’ (2017, p.107). However, violent conflict also works through less direct mechanisms, by
decimating the local economy and contributing to the high rates of unemployment that lead people to seek employment in China. The particularly vulnerable IDPs are especially targeted by brokers who traffic people to China.

I found no indications that non-state armed groups smuggle people or are involved in human trafficking. Most interviewees stated that the ‘broker business’ was neither linked to the government nor to the NDA-K or the KIO/A. Local people can cross the border between Myanmar and China easily, and do not need the help of armed groups to do so. If they need help to find work in China, independent brokers offer support. These agents who help and convince people to work abroad appear to be business people linked to Chinese companies. Meanwhile, those who convince people to get married to Chinese men appear to be locals from the respective communities, who often got married to Chinese men previously themselves.

Meanwhile, Kachin civil society organisations (CSOs), and reportedly also the KIO/A itself, actively fight human trafficking, and help trafficked women to return to Kachin State. For instance, the chairman of the Kachin State Progressive Party stated that while KWAT was playing a key role, the KIA was also involved in combating human trafficking. In some cases, non-state armed groups even cooperate directly with the government to address trafficking. For example, an interviewee explained: ‘Like the police, the NDAA [the National Democratic Alliance Army, a non-state armed group based in Mong La in Northern Shan state] tries to arrest brokers. If they get them, they hand them over to the Myanmar police. And if the police try to arrest a broker in Mong La, they come to the NDAA’s liaison office and ask for help.’ Similarly, the United Wa State Army was described as collaborating with Myanmar’s police forces in cases of human trafficking.

However, non-state armed groups in Myanmar do participate in a particular type of people smuggling. Some groups are able to issue documents that are accepted in neighbouring countries and that allow people to cross the border in areas these non-state armed groups control. For instance, interviewees explained that the KIO/A issues border passes that enable Kachin to cross the border in Laiza. A KIO/A supporter explained: ‘The KIO/A and the Chinese government have an agreement. The KIO/A issues red border passes that can be used to cross the border into China at Laiza. It costs 30 Yuan [c. US$4.50]. They look almost like the ones issued and used by the Myanmar government at Kampati border. (...) But most people think that they do not need any documents.’
spokesperson of the KIO’s TAT denied this, and stated that they were only able to issue border passes before the fighting broke out.64

Similarly, an officer of the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army – South’s (RCSS/SSA-S) Peace Committee Liaison Office in Kengtung told me that the Thai authorities accept documents his group issues, which enable members of the group, but not civilians living in their territory, to enter Thailand for up to seven days: ‘We have RCSS documents, stamped by RCSS. They are accepted in Thailand; people can stay for five to seven days. It’s a normal A4 document which states the name of the person going and the purpose of the trip.’65

**Domestic Human Trafficking & Forced Recruitment**

A related issue that might be described as domestic human trafficking is the forced recruitment of soldiers and fighters. While this does not involve taking people across international borders, it does involve forcing people to cross the internal borders that separate different warring factions, often making it difficult for them to return home.

The work of international non-governmental organisations shows that the Tatmadaw as well as non-state armed groups like the KIA have used children to fight for them (see e.g. Child Soldiers International, 2015). However, in my interviews, the forceful recruitment of adults was also raised repeatedly. While a large number of Kachin support the KIA, many do not want to fight for the group. But there are reports of the KIA recruiting people against their will, including people from other ethnic groups in Kachin State, and people of other ethnic groups were most likely to mention the practice. For instance, a Rawang man explained:66 ‘The KIA forcefully recruits people from our community. We are an abandoned community.’67

According to the interviewees, such recruitment not only happens in the areas that are controlled by the KIA, but also in areas that they can access. One interviewee in Myitkyina pointed out: ‘It usually doesn’t happen downtown, but it does happen at the edges of the city. (…) This has always been going on, but it’s high season at the moment. Most people are recruited for fighting, but some of the women they take also become nurses.’68

A member of the Shan community reported on his personal experiences:

My youngest daughter (…) and her friend got taken by the KIA in 2007. She was around 20 years old at the time. They were taken into their territory and
Meth & militias: the Myanmar–China border region

65

A member of the Gurkha community in Kachin State also knew a young person who had been forced into service:

I was involved in one of these cases as a lawyer in Waingmaw Township [Figure 3.6] about a year ago. A boy had been picked up at night, captured by traffickers. His friend managed to run away. We went to the police and then travelled to the village where the kidnapping had happened. The anti-trafficking unit got involved, and ultimately a man got arrested. I questioned him myself, and he admitted that he had handed over the boy to the KIA. Then the police and the anti-trafficking unit dropped the case, because they can’t go there. The boy doesn’t even count as a victim of human trafficking, because he didn’t cross an international border. This happens all the time, but nobody talks about it. (...) The KIA has an entire Gurkha unit as part of its Battalion 8. Most of these people have been recruited by force. But the KIA is the strongest armed group around here. Nobody dares to criticise them. If you do so, you might get targeted. I would estimate that 20% of the KIA were forcibly recruited. Usually they take people below the age of 18. When they get to their base they try to convince them of their ideology. Some people try to run away. But the Unlawful Associations Act makes it difficult to do so.70

The Unlawful Associations Act (India Act XIV, 1908) has been used to jail people who were in contact with non-state armed groups in Myanmar, including the KIA (see Saw Myint, 2013).71

Dissatisfaction with the lack of international attention to forced recruitment to insurgencies was widespread among interviewees. ‘[N]obody cares about what the KIA does’, the lawyer from Waingmaw lamented.72 According to the interviewees, the international community only cares about forced recruitment conducted by the military, not about taking action against similar methods employed by non-state armed groups. The interviewees felt that the government was unable to do anything about it, and CSOs were not of much help either for ethnic minorities in Kachin State, because most of them were linked to the Kachin community. As a consequence, an interviewee pointed out, many people who are part of an ethnic minority are so scared that they decide to move away.73 De...
la Cour Venning (2019) shows that the KIO/A’s Central Committee, concerned about its international legitimacy, passed an order to halt the recruitment of children in 2015 and formalised policy on this issue was issued in March 2017. However, enforcement of this policy remains weak and international organisations have little leverage as they are limited in their ability to access areas controlled by non-state armed groups like the KIO/A (ibid.).

It is not just the KIO/A that is accused of such practices. For instance, in northern Shan State, interviewees reported that the TNLA was forcibly recruiting members of other ethnic groups. Similarly, the RCSS/SSA-S is accused of forcing Ta’ang to serve. Many armed groups have a ‘one household, one gun’ rule, and will therefore leave family members alone if anyone is serving with any group. However, due to the competition of non-state armed groups in certain areas, interviewees pointed out, it can happen that one household has to provide fighters for competing armed groups.
SMUGGLING AND ARMED CONFLICT: THE ROLE OF THE STATE

State actors play a key role in the context of cross-border trade and smuggling in the China–Myanmar border region. Corruption appears to be widespread and systemic, enabling state officials and state-sponsored militias to benefit from the exploitation of natural resources and the smuggling of licit and illicit goods in various ways.

The Tatmadaw benefit directly through concessions for the large-scale exploitation of national resources that are then exported to China. As in the case of EAOs, just on a larger scale, the concessions matter more than bribes at the border crossing. One interviewee summarised: ‘People who have the right documents [issued by the Tatmadaw] can take anything across the border, as much as they want to.’ To conceal the involvement of the state, it often operates through its own companies, the Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited and Myanmar Economic Corporation (Global Witness, 2015, p.11). The Global Witness report describes how systemic the corruption is: ‘Myanmar’s jade licensing system is wide open to corruption and cronyism. The main concessions are in government-controlled areas of Hpakant Township, Kachin State, and blocks are awarded through a centrally-controlled process which multiple industry sources say favours companies connected to powerful figures and high-ranking officials’ (ibid., p.10). Hence, the report concludes, ‘the army families and companies that own many of the jade mines would lose out in an equitable peace deal’ (ibid., p.14).

But petty corruption matters also. For instance, an employee of a travel agency in Myitkyina explained that he can arrange official Myanmar ID cards for MMK 2 million (c. US$1,450) and that Chinese businessmen often buy them to be able to operate businesses in Myanmar. Such documents allow people not only to reside in Myanmar, but also enable them to buy and own land there, facilitating the exploitation of border areas.

Beyond corruption and direct involvement of officials, state-affiliated militias like the former NDA-K and Zakhung Ting Ying’s private forces are involved in the business of smuggling goods across the border to China from areas under their control. The fact that Zakhung Ting Ying and his forces control territory at the Chinese border allows them to exploit the natural resources there and export them to China. For instance, in June 2018 it was reported that 2,000 logs weighing 1,300 tons were smuggled from Chipwi and Tsawlaw townships, areas which...
are under his control, to China (see Naing Zaw, 2018). An interviewee argued: ‘His militias don’t help to ensure security; they only ensure his personal profit.’ Another interviewee described his observation of Zahkung Ting Ying’s activities:

[H]e is selling all the natural resources from the area. He is doing logging, he is selling the animals and he is mining gold, minerals and marble. But his main business is poppy farming and he has around 30,000 acres. Before 2005, he used to do everything himself, being in direct control of the poppy cultivation and the factories producing heroin. Up to that point he also had his own factories for weapons, run with Chinese investments, technology, and staff. Now he works indirectly. He lets Chinese people use ‘his land’ for poppy cultivation and simply taxes them.

An ICG study (2019) shows the key role militias play in the drug trade, and the impunity with which they can operate in Shan State. The study describes the background of a drug seizure in 2018 that found ‘30 million yaba pills, 1,750kg of crystal meth, more than 500kg of heroin and 200kg of caffeine powder’ (p.6) in a location ‘relatively close to Lashio, not far from the main road to the Chinese border at Muse – Myanmar’s biggest overland trade route – in an area controlled by a militia allied with the Tatmadaw’, ‘not a remote, rebel-controlled part of Shan State beyond the authorities’ reach’ (ibid.).

There have also been reports of officials involved in migrant smuggling and human trafficking cases (see e.g. US Department of State, 2017, p.107). However, there is little evidence of an institutionalised direct involvement of the Tatmadaw. Even some non-state armed groups and CSOs appreciate the efforts of the police anti-trafficking task force, although they note its limitations with respect to bureaucratic constraints, inefficiencies, and a lack of capacity. In their 2013 report, KWAT found that the anti-trafficking border liaison office at Loije (also Lweje) does not seem to be operational, and that local communities are not aware of its existence (2013, p.16). Nonetheless, a number of interviewees, including civil society activists, acknowledged that members of the task force are well-meaning, and that the task force tries to address the issue of human trafficking, especially if they hear of a particular case. The chairman of the Kachin State Progressive Party supported this claim, arguing that ‘the government is cracking down on human trafficking.’ Hence, some armed groups cooperate with the Anti-Trafficking Task Force, even across lines of territorial control and despite the ongoing armed fight against the Myanmar military.
Just like the EAOs, the Tatmadaw are accused of forced recruitment, including of children (see e.g. Child Soldiers International, 2016). In 2018, UNICEF reported that the Tatmadaw had released more than 900 children following a Joint Action Plan with the UN. Particularly in Shan State interviewees were concerned about the Tatmadaw’s recruitment practices. However, interviewees were even more concerned about the corrupting influence of the incentives that militias provide. One interviewee from Shan State’s Lashio stated: ‘Many militias don’t pay a salary. They provide “opportunities” – such as land ownership, the permit to set up a check-point and to collect tax… If you join a militia you can hold a gun. You don’t need to register your vehicle. You can drink for free if you say “you know who I am”.’

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has illustrated striking differences as well as noticeable similarities between the KIO/A on the one hand and the Tatmadaw and state-affiliated militias on the other hand. All three actors are political authorities with territorial control in areas that border China. In these territories they generate revenues from the extraction of natural resources, which are then exported or smuggled to China. Hence, competition over the control of territory, in which extracting companies can be taxed, and over border crossings, which enable access to China, are among the driving forces of the violent conflict.

Local populations rarely have access to revenue from natural resources, which primarily benefit business elites and the armed actors on all sides. Even worse, the ongoing violence has resulted in a weak economy and high unemployment rates in places like Kachin State. Hence, many people try to find work across the border in China, sometimes with the help of brokers who function as middlemen. More directly, the armed conflict has also resulted in a large number of displaced people. Those living in these camps typically have even fewer opportunities to generate an income, and are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. Driven by a demand for women in China, many women from northern Myanmar have ended up being married to men in China against their will. Few people have returned to Myanmar, also because of a lack of systematic cooperation of Chinese authorities with authorities and civil society in Myanmar.

In contrast to the smuggling of goods, the smuggling of migrants and the trafficking of people appears to be a business that individual brokers
run. It seems that these brokers do not have any strong institutionalised links to the Tatmadaw or non-state armed groups. Instead, people smugglers tend to cooperate with companies in China, which are in need of cheap labour, and with men, who are looking for marriage. On the other hand, both the Tatmadaw and the KIA are accused of forcing people to fight for them, particularly ethnic minorities in Kachin State, where they take people across the borders that separate KIO/A-controlled areas from Tatmadaw-controlled areas, which could be viewed as domestic human trafficking.

There are also key differences between the KIO/A, the Tatmadaw, and militias. Most obviously, their political visions are different. However, they also differ with regard to their involvement in the smuggling economy. Non-state armed groups like the KIO/A have to construct or maintain local legitimacy. Considering the ongoing conflict with the Tatmadaw, local support is crucial for military success, particularly in the absence of international support and where financial resources are limited. Accordingly, they have to consider and respond to the expectations of the people in the areas they control. Hence, to some extent, they have to be legitimacy-seeking rulers. For instance, being involved in jade smuggling does not threaten the KIO/A’s local legitimacy, and it is a critical source of revenue.

In fact, if the KIO/A was a recognised de jure state, the extraction and trade of jade would be considered a legal economic activity, not a crime. But being a non-state armed group criminalises its cross-border activities. For instance, the KIO/A also cannot legally import weapons. Groups like the KIO/A therefore ‘smuggle’ weapons and ammunition into the country. This makes it important for non-state armed groups to control border regions, which allows them to import weapons without any interruption by the Tatmadaw. Despite its de jure non-state status, the de facto state-like status of the KIO/A is recognised by Chinese authorities in that they informally accept some documents the KIO/A issues that enable people to ‘legally’ cross the border.

By contrast to its near-open involvement in the jade trade, the KIO/A actively portrays itself as a group fighting the opium industry as a way to seek local and international legitimacy. Heroin addiction has turned into a major problem in Kachin areas, and it is widely seen as harmful to the local community. Without being able to draw on this source of revenue the KIO/A has to rely more on local taxes, which creates a greater imperative to respond to people’s expectations in order to be able to justify taxation. Conversely, the issue of forceful recruit-
ment of children poses a threat to the KIO/A’s local and international legitimacy. That the leadership has developed a policy against this practice reflects this concern. However, the continued practice of forcible recruitment shows that the perceived necessity to have more fighters on the local level may override such strategic concerns, particularly if the forceful recruitment targets other ethnic communities that are not a key audience for the group’s legitimacy.

Conversely, the Tatmadaw can act much more ruthlessly in the border areas that are populated by ethnic minorities, drawing on the support they have in central Myanmar. Even less concerned with local legitimacy are the state-affiliated militias that are almost exclusively driven by economic interests. In contrast to the non-state armed groups they do not need to listen and adjust to any great degree to the concerns of the people in the territories they control. They have external legitimacy, as they are protected by the Tatmadaw and ‘mandated’ to extract and exploit. In a way, they are legitimacy-indifferent rulers, who face no constraints in their involvement in the smuggling economy, ensuring market-access for the resources extracted in the areas they control. The large-scale production of yaba in militia-controlled areas in Shan State further illustrates that such areas are also more attractive to operate in for smugglers and criminals. It is a comparatively peaceful and stable environment, compared to the risk of being shelled by the military when working in a KIO/A-controlled area. Hence, while, for instance, jade is extracted and exported from areas under control of all three authorities, the Tatmadaw and especially pro-state militias can also generate revenues from the production and export of drugs.

NOTES

1. Interview, 6 January 2019.
2. Meehan (2016) argues that opium production goes up when the Tatmadaw engages in statebuilding exercises, including ceasefires. The Tatmadaw allows the armed groups to grow opium, using the groups to control the borderlands and incentivising them with the profit they can make from opium cultivation.
3. The KIA also manufactures its own Chinese-style AK47s and ammunition.
4. The military government changed the country’s name from the ‘Union of Burma’ to the ‘Union of Myanmar’ in 1989, arguing that the name would be more inclusive of non-Bamar ethnic groups. Aung San Suu Kyi stated she preferred the old name and many civil society organisations as well as some governments, including the UK, continue to refer to the country as Burma (see Selth and Gallagher, 2018, for a discussion of the name).
5. See Myanmar Peace Monitor (2016) for an overview of resistance groups.
6. The signatories were the Karen National Liberation Army–Peace Council (KNLA-PC), the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), the Chin National Front (CNF), the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army – South (RCSS/SSA-S), the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO).
7. The FPNCC comprises the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA), the Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA), the Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party/Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNTJP/MNDAA), the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta’ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA), the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army – North (SSPP/SSA-N), the Peace and Solidarity Committee/Shan State East National Democratic Alliance Association (PSC/NDAA) and the United Wa State Party/Army (UWSP/UWSA).
10. Interview, 9 January 2018.
12. Interview with resident of Mali Yang IDP camp, 7 January 2018.
13. e.g. interview with former insurgent, 5 January 2018 and interview with resident of Myitkyina, 5 January 2018.
15. e.g. interview with former insurgent, 5 January 2018 and interview with civil society activist, 9 January 2018.
16. See also KNG (2015).
17. e.g. interview with lawyer from Myitkyina, 6 January 2018.
18. Interview with former NDA-K general, 5 January 2018.
19. Interview, 6 January 2018.
20. Interview with former NDA-K general, 5 January 2018.
22. Interview, 6 January 2018.
23. Interview, 6 January 2018.
24. Interview, 6 January 2018.
25. Interview, 6 January 2018.
26. Interview with resident of Mali Yang IDP camp, 7 January 2018.
27. Interview with local politician, 7 January 2018.
28. Interview, 6 January 2018.
29. Opium is the term for the dried latex derived from the poppy plant.
31. Heroin is produced from opium by adding chemicals as well as, in some cases, other substances.
32. Yaba is produced by mixing low-purity methamphetamines with caffeine (ICG, 2019, p.2). Yaba is sold as pills and is consumed orally. According
to UNODC (2013, p.62), Thailand is the epicentre of yaba use in the region. However, the popularity is also growing in other countries, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines.

33. Crystal meth is a high-purity methamphetamine (ICG, 2019, p.2).
34. Interview with migrant worker, 7 January 2018.
35. Interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018.
36. Interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018.
37. Interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018.
38. Interview with migrant worker, 7 January 2018.
40. Interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018.
41. Interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018.
42. Video-interview with two migrant workers, 8 January 2018.
43. Interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018. The interviewee further explained how the Chinese police operate and deal with migrant workers: ‘Many people get arrested. Every time they check, they arrest 30 to 40 people. (…) People with expired documents are fined 50 Yuan. People who don’t have any documents are put into jail for a day and a night and then are sent back. But they don’t have to pay a fine. (…) They use the money from the people with expired documents to send the others back. And if the police check factories and workplaces and find people without documents, they have to pay a fine of 100 Yuan and are sent back.’
44. Interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018.
45. Interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018.
46. For a comprehensive study of this issue, see HRW (2019).
47. Interview with resident of Mali Yang IDP camp, 7 January 2018.
48. Interview with KWAT, 6 January 2018.
49. e.g. two interviews with lawyers, 6 January 2018.
50. Ibid.
51. Interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018.
52. Interview with resident of Mali Yang IDP camp, 7 January 2018.
53. Interview with KWAT, 6 January 2018.
54. Interview with resident of Mali Yang IDP camp, 7 January 2018.
55. Interview, 7 January 2018.
56. Interview, 7 January 2018.
57. Interview with resident of border area, 7 January 2018.
58. Interview, 5 January 2018.
59. Interview, 8 January 2018.
60. E.g. interview with migrant worker, 8 January 2018.
61. Interview, 5 January 2018.
62. Interview with civil society activist, Kengtung, 14 January 2018.
63. Interview, 7 January 2018.
64. Interview, 9 January 2018. The KIO/A certainly maintains a sophisticated administration. De la Cour Venning’s (2019) work describes the seal used on official documents that reads, ‘Wunpawng Mungdan Shanglawt Asuya’ – ‘Government of Kachin Republic’. This seal can also be found on the KIO’s open letter to UNODC.
66. The Rawang are one of the smallest recognised ethnic groups in Myanmar. They are known as Dulong in China (see Wang, 2016).
67. Interview, 5 January 2018.
68. Interview with lawyer, 6 January 2018.
69. Interview, 7 January 2018.
70. Interview, 6 January 2018.
71. It defines ‘unlawful association’ as ‘an association – (a) which encourages or aids persons to commit acts of violence or intimidation or of which the members habitually commit such acts, or (b) which has been declared to be unlawful by the President of the Union under the powers hereby conferred’. It further states that ‘17. (1) Whoever is a member of an unlawful association, or takes part in meetings of any such association, or contributes or receives or solicits any contribution for the purpose of any such association or in any way assists the operations of any such association, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term [which shall not be less than two years and more than three years and shall also be liable to fine]’ and ‘(2) Whoever manages or assists in the management of an unlawful association, or promotes or assists in promoting a meeting of any such association, or of any members thereof as such members, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term [which shall not be less than three years and more than five years and shall also be liable to fine]’ (see ICNL, n.d.).
72. Interview, 6 January 2018.
73. Interview, 6 January 2018.
74. Interview with resident of border area, 7 January 2018.
75. Focus group discussion, 6 January 2018.
76. Interview, 6 January 2018.
77. Interview, 6 January 2018.
78. Interview, 6 January 2018.
79. Interview, 5 January 2018.
80. Interview, 19 January 2018.