

**MUSEUMS, DIASPORA COMMUNITIES
AND DIASPORIC CULTURES**

A KACHIN CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This thesis adds to the growing body of literature on museums and source communities through addressing a hitherto under-examined area of activity: the interactions between museums and diaspora communities. It does so through a focus on the cultural practices and museum engagements of the Kachin community from northern Myanmar.

The shift in museum practice prompted by increased interaction with source communities from the 1980s onwards has led to fundamental changes in museum policy. Indeed, this shift has been described as “one of the most important developments in the history of museums” (Peers and Brown, 2003, p.1). However, it was a shift informed by the interests and perspectives of an ethnocentric museology, and, for these reasons, analysis of its symptoms has remained largely focussed on the museum institution rather than the communities which historically contributed to these institutions’ collections. Moreover, it was a shift which did not fully take account of the increasingly mobile and transnational nature of these communities.

This thesis, researched and written by a museum curator, was initiated by the longstanding and active engagement of Kachin people with historical materials in the collections of Brighton Museum & Art Gallery. In closely attending to the cultural interests and habits of overseas Kachin communities, rather than those of the Museum, the thesis responds to Christina Kreps’ call to researchers to “liberate our thinking from Eurocentric notions of what constitutes the museum and museological behaviour” (2003, p.x). Through interviews with individual members of three overseas Kachin communities and the examination of a range of Kachin-related cultural productions, it demonstrates the extent to which Kachin people, like museums, are highly engaged in heritage and cultural preservation, albeit in ways which are distinctive to normative museum practices of collecting, display and interpretation.

To illustrate the limited and contingent nature of collaborations led by British museums and involving diaspora communities, the thesis presents examples which reveal some of the issues raised by practice in this area over the last two decades. In reflecting on the opportunities for a deeper engagement with young and second-generation migrants specifically, it concludes by recommending the adoption, by museums, of an acculturalist practice, which would enable such institutions to better align themselves with their stakeholders and to articulate the changes in practice needed to serve an increasingly transnational public.

Key words: museums; source community; diaspora; Kachin; transnationalism

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Author's declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed: H. Mears

Dated: 3 June 2019

Part of this work has been presented in the following publications:

Mears, H., 2016. Counting the days: the Kachin ceasefire and the emergence of a new graphic medium. In M. Sadan, ed. *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994-2011*. Copenhagen: NIAS, pp.257-287.

Mears, H., 2017. "We owe a historical debt to no one": the re-appropriation of photographic images from a museum collection. *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* (5), pp.162-176.



Figure 1: Still from the music video for the track *Labau hte nga ai amy*, Bawmwang Jaraw and Brang San, Noah Productions, 2015. Use of still image courtesy of Bawmwang Jaraw / Noah Productions.

1.1 Introduction

In a 2015 music video by Kachin singer Bawmwang Jaraw and Kachin rapper Hpaujang Brang San,¹ the artists jointly appeal to the nationalist sentiment of their audience. The video to the track *Labau hte nga ai amy* (“A race with history”) includes footage of dancers in traditional forms of Kachin dress, at a *manau* festival showground (Figure 38). As Kachin viewers of the video would realise, the showground is located not in Kachin State, Myanmar, in what is considered the traditional homeland of the Kachin people. Instead, the video was filmed across the border in Mangshi, a city in Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, southern China. Some 150,000 Jingpo people live in this area and are considered ethnic kin to the larger Kachin community on the other side of the China-Myanmar border (Wang, 1997; Ts’ui-p’ing, 2016).

In staking a claim for the Jingpo/Kachin being “a race with history”, the music video relies on the incorporation of digital surrogates of photographic images of Kachin people, created in the 1920s by a British colonial officer and now in a British museum collection. These archival images, which appear in the video as a slideshow behind singer Bawmwang Jaraw, who is styled in hip-hop fashion (Figure 1), were taken by James Henry Green. Green was

¹ Bawmwang Ja Raw and Brang San, *Labau hte nga ai amy*. The track is from Bawmwang Ja Raw’s second album, *N Mai Byin Sai Chye Tim Tsawra*, produced in 2014 by Noah Productions.

recruiting officer for the Burma Rifles and an amateur anthropologist. Since 1992, his collection of 1,400 images and 230 textile items has been in the care of Brighton Museum & Art Gallery (Dell, 2000a).

In the song's lyrics, rap artist Brang San insists that "we owe a historical debt to no-one" ("*labau hka kadai hpe mung nkap*"), yet the construction of history presented in the video relies to a significant extent on the use of archival images cared for by a British museum. The use of these images in this transnational cultural product goes beyond the established interests of museums in engaging with "source communities" (Peers and Brown, 2003); an interest largely predicated on the engagement being with people who identify as 'indigenous', and the process being museum-driven or at least museum-supported. While it demonstrates a museum-like interest in the interpretative use of historical materials, this cultural product was, in contrast, generated out of sight of the museum, having been created by and directed to members of a politicised Kachin youth. Moreover—in contrast to the tendency of museums to presume that the communities they work with are homogenous and place-bound—the location for the music video falls outside traditional Kachin territory, and its target audience is both highly diverse and geographically dispersed.

Through a focus on the cultural interests and habits of the Kachin community, this thesis aims to test the limits of community engagement as this has been conventionally conceived of within the United Kingdom's museum sector (for a critique of normative practice see, for example, Crooke, 2010; Waterton and Smith, 2010; Lynch, 2011a, 2011b, Nightingale and Mahal, 2012 and Morse, 2014). It also seeks to extend the growing body of literature which provides critical analysis of museum work with source communities (for example Ames, 1992; Clifford, 1997; Simpson, 2001; Peers and Brown, 2003; Sleeper-Smith, 2009; Byrne, et al., 2011; Boast, 2011; Phillips, 2011; Harrison, Byrne and Clarke, 2013). In contrast to much of this literature, which has tended to focus on museum displays that draw on collaborative work with source communities, this research project focuses on the self-directed (and often politicised) engagement with cultural heritage demonstrated by members of Kachin communities. In attending to the words, actions and cultural productions of the Kachin—as opposed to those of the museum—it seeks to respond to the growing interest in critical heritage studies in 'outsider heritage'. Accordingly, it provides an example of "independent heritage-making actions and projects" driven by "those 'outside' the authorised realm of

heritage discourse,” including “ethnic, racial and other (sub)cultural groups and individuals” (Ashley and Frank, 2016, p.501).

Furthermore, the thesis seeks to challenge the pre-eminence given by museums to source communities—generally described as indigenous populations resident in settler-founded, modern anglophone nation states such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States—by museums over diaspora populations. It does so by considering the impact of experiences of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972 and 1980) on how cultural heritage is conceived and disseminated. It examines how the colonial logic which informed the development of so-called ‘non-western’, or ethnographic, museum collections is under pressure from postcolonial subjectivities emerging amongst the communities who once were more straightforwardly taken to constitute the collected subject.

Following an examination of the words, actions and cultural productions of the Kachin, this thesis considers recent and current museum collaborations with diaspora communities in the United Kingdom which focus on non-western collections. In highlighting some of the issues raised by this practice, as well as its limitations, I will close by reflecting on the possibilities raised by recent museum theory for the development of a decentralised, “distributed” museum practice (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, 2013; see also Morse, 2014). In pursuing this revised model of practice, I make an original contribution to the field of Museum Studies by advocating for an *acculturalist* approach as a method which might enable museums to make the fundamental adjustments and adaptations necessary in order to better meet the needs of postcolonial publics.² I argue particularly for a deeper and more sustained engagement between museums and second-generation migrants, emphasising the potential mutual benefits of this activity.

Alongside this contribution to Museum Studies, this thesis also contributes to as-yet underdeveloped work on identity formation and maintenance amongst overseas communities of Myanmar’s ethnic minorities. Despite the prevalent interest in ethnic identity within Myanmar, particularly its role in the endemic conflict and political turbulence that has plagued the country since its independence from British rule in 1948 (see, for example,

² In cross-cultural psychology ‘acculturation’ has been conventionally understood as the strategies employed by minority communities (including migrants, refugees and indigenous peoples) in response to contact with a dominant majority (Sam and Berry, 2010). Recent research has shifted from a focus on the individual to an assessment of acculturation as a broad, contextual and political phenomenon (Bhatia and Ram, 2009). This thesis argues that museums can do more to enable positive outcomes for those undergoing acculturation.

Smith, 1991; Callahan, 2007; Gravers, 2007 and South, 2008), the manifestation of this amongst Myanmar-born individuals living outside the country has been less often considered. This is especially surprising given widespread experiences of displacement and migration, partly as a result of civil conflicts which have plagued the country since 1962, and the political and cultural influence of exile groups. As such, this thesis responds to a call made by Renaud Egreteau for “studies exploring the diversity of the drivers and patterns of ... contemporary Burmese migrations, the multifaceted identities and sense of belonging cultivated by these heterogeneous communities in exile, and the transnational space, networks and influence they have carved out for themselves in their host countries” (2012, p.117).

Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into three parts. In Part One I establish the contexts for this doctoral research project beginning, in 1.3, with a review of relevant literature extant. In 1.4, ‘The Kachin and their recent political history’, I provide an introduction to both how the Kachin diaspora came into being as well as outlining the community’s experiences within Myanmar, which I argue have had a significant impact upon Kachin lives lived outside the country. In 1.5, ‘The creation of a space and a resource for Kachin culture by Brighton Museum’, I describe how a collection of early twentieth-century photographs and textiles associated with the Kachin and cared for by Brighton Museum & Art Gallery came to figure to a significant extent in nationalist articulations of Kachin culture and identity made in a post-ceasefire context. I also examine how the treatment and use of the James Henry Green collection by Brighton Museum reveal bigger shifts in museum practice, especially those concerning source communities, over the past two decades.

In Part Two, furthering my aim of attending to the words, actions and cultural productions of the Kachin, I review the material amassed through this research project to consider how members of Kachin communities engage with culture heritage and how these engagements are informed by contexts and conditions that might be described as “glocal” (Robertson, 1995). I will advance this case in 2.2, ‘Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora’, through reflecting on interviews undertaken with individual members of three overseas Kachin communities, based in West London (United Kingdom), the San Francisco Bay Area (United States of America) and in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). I also draw on observations made of

attending church services and community events in these places. I use these to consider how Kachin cultural practices have evolved in the post-ceasefire period, and, particularly how they have been transformed by experiences of migration and displacement. I then turn to Kachin cultural productions to demonstrate how these have responded to the changing needs and conditions of Kachin society. In 2.3, ‘The printed calendar and the development of a Kachin visual identity’, I consider the role of graphic design in the articulation of Kachin identities through an examination of a form of print media which became popular amongst Kachin communities at home and abroad in the period following the 1994 ceasefire agreement between the Burmese government and the Kachin Independence Organisation. I also consider the practice of an individual graphic designer and artist who—in taking advantage of newly technologies—came to provide a visual identity around which a newly globalised Kachin community might cohere.

In 2.4, ‘Kachin culture and new media’, I present some examples which reveal the different ways in which information communication technologies are enabling new identity formations amongst dispersed Kachin communities. I consider the potential of these as models for alternative heritage practices. Firstly, I describe the practice of ‘Jinghpaw Tingsan’, the pseudonym of a Kachin activist based in the Netherlands, whose website www.jinghpawtingsan.net, which promotes Kachin popular music, attracts a large following. Secondly, I analyse a music video created by one of the artists promoted by Jinghpaw Tingsan, Bawmwang Jaraw. Thirdly I describe a project led by a Singaporean academic which has sought to use a social media hashtag (*#KachinLifeStories*) to construct an “auto-ethnography” of the contemporary, transnational Kachin community (Tan, n.d).

In Part Three, the final part of the thesis, ‘Transforming the museum’, I return to the museum to consider ‘How are museums currently serving diaspora communities?’ (3.2). I look to recent work being undertaken by museums in the United Kingdom with diaspora communities to consider the challenges and opportunities generated by this increasingly normative but under-theorized part of curatorial practice. In my conclusion to Part Three, ‘What might a diasporic museum practice look like?’, I call on museums to do more to align their practice with the cultural activities of diaspora communities, arguing that this will become a central element of future museum work.

1.2 Methodology

This doctoral research project was motivated by a professional interest in how Brighton Museum, as the repository for a rare collection of historic images and textiles relating to the Kachin community (a collection for which I have curatorial responsibility), might better serve this community, and use its relationships with Kachin people to develop its practice. Having been involved in the Museum's activities as a volunteer in the World Art section (1997-1998), as Curator of World Art (2002-2008) and then as Keeper of World Art (2008 to present) I was witness to some aspects of the work being undertaken by Museum staff and researchers in the late 1990s, and then have played an increasingly directive role in pursuing the legacy of this work through my own museum practice as well as through my doctoral research (2013-2018). Through my museum role I was able to make visits to Myitkyina, capital of Kachin State, Myanmar in January 2005 and January 2011 (both deliberately coincided with the large-scale *manau* dance festival held on Kachin State Day, 10 January) but it was meeting members of the small West London-based Kachin community which provided the catalyst for this research project.

With an independent filmmaker, in May 2011 I attended a fundraising event organised by the London Kachin community to interview young members about the iconic Kachin dance festival, the *manau*, for a new gallery display (described in 2.2.1). Both the event itself and the interviews we recorded revealed the extent to which community members were highly engaged in issues of heritage and cultural preservation.³ However, it was also clear that, despite the obvious intersection between Kachin-related resources held by the Museum, and the community's great interest in material of this nature, a gulf existed between how these agencies approached Kachin heritage. As I was already familiar with normative museum practices of collection, interpretation and display, I took the opportunity presented by this doctoral research project to put to one side my "museum-mindedness" (to paraphrase Kreps, 2003), and to familiarise myself with how Kachin people engage with ideas of culture and heritage.

In tracking a relationship between people (individuals who self-identify as Kachin) and things (Kachin-related objects and images in the collections of Brighton Museum) my case study offered certain advantages. One was that Brighton Museum-related research activities

³ The video, which plays on a continuous loop as part of a display ("Celebrating the Manau") in Brighton Museum's *World Stories Young Voices* gallery, is also available on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kalj_qDIImUE&sns=em).

undertaken in the late 1990s had inadvertently provided the means for digital surrogates of James Henry Green's photographic images to circulate amongst Kachin cultural researchers, activists and elites (see 1.5 for more details of these activities). As such, I had access to rich evidence of the use-potential of museum collections for source communities and an indication of the kinds of ends to which these collections might find themselves repurposed. Moreover, as outwards migration amongst Kachin communities intensified in the years after 1994, when the Kachin Independence Organisation and Burmese government formed a ceasefire agreement, the opportunities and threats generated by experiences of migration and diaspora, including in terms of cultural maintenance and preservation, were still being worked through. Lastly, as a community originally from a part of Southeast Asia, the Kachin represented a population from a region largely overlooked in the established literature on museums and source communities, which has tended to privilege indigenous communities in the Pacific region and in North America.⁴

My methodology then reflects the intentions outlined above. Much of my context-setting in Part One is based on secondary sources, largely published texts in the case of 1.3 and museum reports for 1.4, although I also undertook recorded interviews with individuals involved in the Museum's Kachin activities (see Appendix 1 for details of these). Missing interviewees were Anthony Shelton, the former Keeper of Ethnography, who did not respond to my interview requests (but whose perspectives are well-represented in his extensive list of published works) and, regrettably, the Kachin historian Pungga Ja Li, who remained in poor health in Laiza on the Myanmar/China border, until his death in 2017. The chapter thus lacks a fuller Kachin perspective on the Museum's activities.

In Part Two, 2.2 'Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora', my observations about Kachin cultural practices are drawn from attending church services and community events, as well as from undertaking interviews with adult community members. Interviews were semi-structured, informed by a list of topic areas which is provided in Appendix 2. Brief details of interviewees, who were chosen to reflect different genders, ages and experiences, are provided in Appendix 1. Formal, informed consent was sought from all interviewees. Most interviewees were happy to be named but where an individual requested anonymity I have

⁴ Notable exceptions which address the intersections between museums and communities in South East Asia include Kreps, 2003; Tan, 2010 and UNESCO, 2010. That museological developments in this region are likely to develop an increased international profile is evident in the 2014 international conference 'Museum of Our Own: In Search of Local Museology for Asia', organised jointly by the Universitas Gadjah Mada (Indonesia) and National Museum of World Cultures (Netherlands) (reviewed by Cai, 2015).

used the interview code number. These are prefixed with the location of the interview (for example, interview SF-1 took place in the San Francisco Bay Area).

The interviews undertaken in London were longer and more in-depth, and arose from a greater familiarity with the community which developed over the course of this research project (2013-2018). Those undertaken in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Kuala Lumpur were made in the context of intensive two-week research visits (in March-April 2015 and July-August 2016 respectively).⁵ I also had occasional opportunities to speak with members of other overseas Kachin communities (for example, from the Netherlands). These are noted in Appendix 1. In London and the San Francisco Bay Area interviewees' English language skills meant that almost all agreed to be interviewed in English. In Kuala Lumpur, most interviews were undertaken in Jinghpaw, with in-interview translation provided by a volunteer church worker from the Malaysia Kachin Baptist Church, for whom it was his first language. If it was not possible to make a recording of the interview then extensive notes were taken, which were later checked back with the interviewee.

As is described in 1.4, over the last two decades a number of overseas Kachin communities have developed. The three that I examine in this thesis are by no means the biggest nor the longest-established. While all are facing similar issues—including managing the responsibility to 'home' in the context of ongoing conflict and displacement; negotiating interactions between established migrant community members and recent incomers; navigating the spiritual and political influence of the Kachin Baptist Convention, and raising the first generation of overseas-born Kachin children—the way that they approach each of these concerns is informed by their specific circumstances. As such, the value of focusing on these three communities is in identifying how common themes and issues are dealt with in different ways in different places. This was especially apparent in Malaysia, where life as an undocumented migrant presents particular challenges for the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage.

My access to these communities was facilitated to a significant extent, at least initially, by my friend and former colleague Gumring Hkangda. Hkangda is a member of the London-based Kachin community. Having played a key 'narrator' role in the piece of filming undertaken in May 2011, Hkangda's decision to pursue postgraduate study at the University of Sussex enabled him to develop a closer relationship with the Museum, leading to paid work (some of

⁵ I made a further, brief visit to the Kuala Lumpur-based Kachin community 23-29 July 2018.

this activity is described in 1.5, ‘Making representations: Museum interactions with Kachin communities’, particularly the final section ‘Museum work with the Kachin community since 2012’). The relationship between Hkangda and myself was mutually beneficial: Hkangda was supported in developing his knowledge of the Green collection (in which he had a research interest) and he provided invaluable assistance to this research project by facilitating access to potential interviewees in London and elsewhere in Europe, also by introducing me to two of his siblings who were key figures in the San Francisco Bay Area Kachin community and by providing occasional translation services (of consent forms, for example). Through such serendipity, and personal generosity, are research projects made possible.

My professional status as a museum curator undoubtedly influenced my interactions with members of the Kachin community. On the one hand, it legitimated my interest in Kachin cultural heritage (although only a few of the Kachin people I met knew of Brighton Museum and of the Green collection) and awarded a certain level of status and credibility. Moreover, in connecting to an area of current concern for Kachin communities—the potential ‘loss’ of cultural heritage in diaspora (see the concluding discussion of 2.2, ‘Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora’)—I was understood to be pursuing a research agenda of considerable importance and was on several occasions thanked for my interest. However, the drawbacks were that this apparently ‘official’ interest almost certainly influenced the terms on which accounts of Kachin life and cultural life in diaspora were presented to me. This was especially apparent in responses to my knowledge of the recent schism in the Kachin American church (discussed in 2.2, in a section devoted to the San Francisco Bay Area community) and has to be an acknowledged limitation of my findings.

In Part Two, 2.3, ‘The printed calendar and the development of a Kachin visual identity’, I explore how graphic design forms have been used to mediate the tension between local experiences, and the desire to promote a politically-useful pan-Kachin identity. My focus is on a selection of popular printed calendars produced between 2002 and 2015 which are revealing of the ways in which Kachin communities have navigated these tensions, and on examples of graphic design and installation art created by Kachin artist Zakhung Hkawng Gyung (‘Ko Z’). The calendars were given to or acquired by me over the course of the research period, and my analysis of Ko Z’s work is informed by conversations which took place at his Yangon home in January 2005 and August 2016. In using the calendars as research resources, I draw upon the tools provided by visual analysis well as my knowledge

of recent historical contexts. I use these to describe the visual elements of these examples of graphic design as well as to make arguments about their potential symbolic associations for Kachin viewers. No image of the Mali Zup (the confluence where the Mali Hka and Nmai Hka meet to form the Irrawaddy), for example, can be separated from the critical discourse that has seen this popular beauty spot and proposed location for a hydro-electric dam become a focus for heated debates about Burmese government-driven natural resource extraction initiatives in resource-rich ethnic states (Kiik, 2016b; Kim, 2016). As I also consider how the calendars (and Green's photographs) were produced and disseminated, and who the intended consumer(s) might have been, I lean towards an approach to the reading of images which Gillian Rose has characterised as "anthropological" (2007, pp.216-236). While my interpretations of these visual documents are inevitably partial in respect to my position as a non-Kachin researcher, I have sought to follow Stuart Hall's advice to "try to justify one's 'reading' in detail in relation to the actual practices and forms of signification used, and [to the] meanings they seem to you to be producing" (Hall, 1997, p.9).

In addition to forms of print media, information communication technologies have become important to the whole Kachin community in recent years and in 2.4, 'Kachin culture and new media', I reflect on their impact on Kachin culture and heritage via three examples; the efforts of 'Jinghpaw Tingsan' to promote Kachin music to a diasporic consumer base, a pop music video by Bawmwang Jaraw and Brang San, and a research initiative led by a Singaporean academic, Stan BH Tan-Tangbau, to capture 'Kachin Life Stories'. My analysis of these initiatives is based on interviews with their creators, conducted in person (Jinghpaw Tingsan), by telephone interview (Bawmwang Jaraw), and by email correspondence (Stan BH Tan-Tangbau) as well as through analysis of their cultural productions.

In Part Three, 'Transforming the museum', 3.2. I ask, 'How are museums currently serving diaspora communities?'. I offer a description and critique of recent and current work undertaken by British museums with non-western collections with diaspora communities. My findings are based on interviews undertaken with curatorial staff associated with each venue, largely undertaken in person but occasionally by telephone (see Appendix 1). Where available, I also consulted evaluation reports and other written materials. The scope of the project did not allow for interviewing participants. This would be an important feature of future research in this field.

A note on terminology

Burma / Myanmar: In 1989 Burma's official English name (the Union of Burma) was changed by the country's military government to the Union of Myanmar. The change was disputed by many, including ethnic nationalists who interpreted the decision as further evidence of junta attempts to 'Burmanize' the country.⁶ It was also opposed by many of those aligned with the country's pro-democracy movement. For these reasons and others, it has not been universally adopted (see Watkins, 2007, for a fuller discussion of the significance of this name change). For the sake of simplicity, 'Myanmar' is used in this thesis as the country's post-1989 name. No political position is intended by this. Note also that the lack of a commonly-used adjectival form means that 'Burmese' continues to be used, as it is here, to describe the national citizens of Myanmar. 'Burman' is the term used to describe those who identify with the country's ethnic majority.

Kachin: As Sadan has demonstrated, while Kachin nationalist rhetoric determines that the category of Kachin is comprised of six principal lineages, "all of which are deemed to be descended from a common ancestor" (2007b, p.34), the relationship between these subgroups is historically contingent and often contested. In particular, the cultural and political dominance of one of these subgroups, the Jinghpaw, has often been viewed critically by members of other, more marginalised factions. One solution has been the introduction of the vernacular term *wunpawng* or *wunpawng amyu ai* ("centre" and "clans", Hanson, 1954, p.711) but, for various reasons this has not been widely adopted (see Sadan, 2007b, and Robinne, 2010, for further discussion). While the term 'Kachin' is used throughout this thesis for simplicity, these inherent tensions are recognised.

Kachinland: Kachin people, especially those who identify with the aims of Kachin nationalism, often refer to 'Kachinland' (*wunpawng mungdan*) as a geographical entity although it is not a term which can be found on any map. In its usage the term generally includes Kachins living in northern Shan State as well as in Kachin State. In terms of the latter it includes Kachins living in areas under Kachin Independence Organisation control as well as those under the control of the Myanmar government. The use of the term often implies an emotional connection to the land or territory. For further discussion of the term see La Seng, 2013.

Tatmadaw: The official name of the armed forces of Myanmar.

⁶ This term first appeared in Houtman, 1999. Houtman used "Burmanization" as an alternative to his preferred term "Myanmarification" but it is the alternative term which has been more widely adopted.

Acronyms used in this thesis

KBC – Kachin Baptist Convention

KIA – Kachin Independence Army

KIO – Kachin Independence Organisation

KNO – Kachin National Organisation

KTC – Kachin Theological College

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

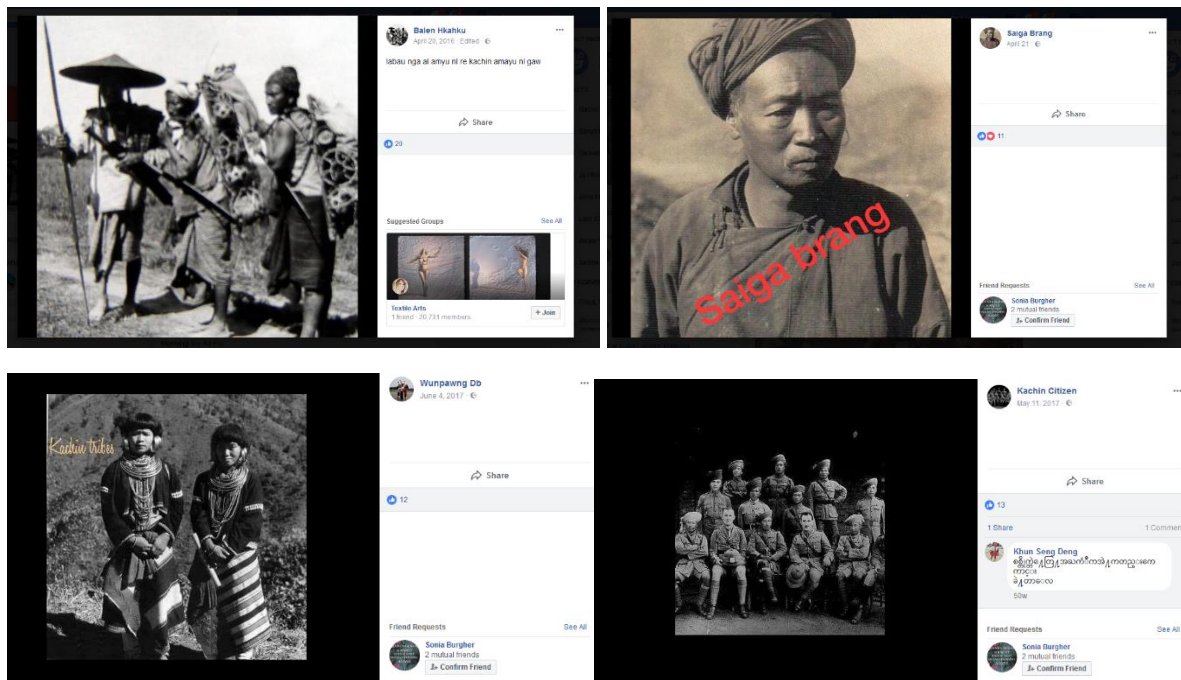


Figure 2: Examples of James Henry Green’s photographs being used as Facebook profile images (by “Balén Hkakhú” (top left), “Saiga Brang” (top right), “Wunpawng Db” (bottom left) and “Kachin Citizen” (bottom right)).

1.3 Literature review

The present global moment is one in which the changing nature of social relations and communication have produced circumstances to which museums and heritage organizations must adjust, exploring new possibilities and facing new challenges. (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.4)

Introduction

When, in the 1920s, James Henry Green, a British colonial officer and amateur anthropologist, set about recording through photography the social and cultural practices of Kachin people in northern Burma, he could not have imagined the purposes to which his visual archive would later be employed (see, for example, Figure 2). This thesis takes Green’s collection, and its appropriation by Kachin people over the last two decades, as the starting point for a meditation on the museum implications of experiences of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972 and 1980). It is especially concerned with the museum implications of the increasing number of people who identify as belonging to a diaspora community.⁷ Diaspora communities are here understood to mean groups of people living away from the territorial base with which they are associated.

⁷ Data collected by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in the United Kingdom, for example, suggests that 12.3% of the population was born overseas. The Office for National Statistics has identified a statistically significant increase in the population of non-UK born and non-British nationals since 2004 (2016). Successive United Kingdom-born generations mean that the number of people identifying in some way with a diaspora community is likely to be much higher.

Alongside sharing the fact of their physical displacement, some researchers have identified that diaspora communities also share a form of social consciousness that generates and maintains connections across space (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blanc, 1994). Such communities exist in many places but, despite often being deeply engaged with issues of identity-making and cultural preservation, their relationship with the collections and activities of museums has not been adequately discussed or theorised.

While a substantial body of literature has evolved dedicated to museum interactions with source communities—typically understood to be indigenous communities based in settler-founded, modern Anglophone nation states such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—the same is not true of diaspora communities. While the presumption has been made that the ‘source community’ model can be neatly transposed on to diaspora communities,⁸ I argue here that diaspora communities demand a different kind of museum praxis. Indigenous communities, in being tied to a geographical place and part of the national imaginary, often benefit from official structures and agencies to ensure representation of their cultural and political interests. In contrast, diaspora communities are more likely to have to make use of their own limited resources in pursuing these. Moreover, as minority migrant communities, they are often marginalised and their political agendas, which typically concern developments in the home country, are sidelined. Furthermore, often being based in densely-populated urban areas where “super diversity” is the norm (Vertovec, 2007), the visibility and legibility of specific representational practices is far from guaranteed. This thesis, then, provides a focus for thinking more deeply about the potential intersections between museums and diaspora communities.

In developing its case study—Kachin culture and heritage preservation practices in the context of diaspora—this thesis also contributes to an established body of literature on ethnic politics in Myanmar. However, in contrast to much of the existing literature, which has tended to privilege the histories of ethnic armed organisations, this thesis addresses ethnic politics and ethno-nationalism through the cultural practices of overseas communities and through the analysis of forms of popular culture not previously considered. In developing a parallel argument about the potential use-value of museums and their collections to diaspora communities, and vice-versa, it similarly widens the frame, moving beyond the traditional

⁸ Ruth Phillips, for example, notes that “although collaborative practices were first developed in response to the demands and needs of Aboriginal peoples, museums soon began to apply the partnership model with equal success to their work with diasporic communities” (2011, p.10).

focus on museum-based and -led practices of research, display and interpretation to emphasise the agency of Kachin people as cultural producers and consumers.

While it is not specifically addressed within the following sections, which attend to academic work concerning museum intersections with contexts of migration and diaspora and to writings on and by the Kachin, this research project carries an indebtedness to the broader field of postcolonial theory. It is theorists such as Stuart Hall (1994) and Paul Gilroy (1993) who revealed the instability of identity and the productive possibilities, for cultural theory, of exploring diasporic identity projects. While not directly attending to museums, the connections drawn by postcolonial theorists between histories of empire and contemporary culture gave rise, within Museum Studies, to a critical reflexivity which provided the context for much of the work described below. Similarly, Hall's work on cultural identity, 'race' and ethnicity (for example, Hall, 1997) served to highlight the complicity of museums in promoting racist ideologies and has been developed in influential ways by museum theorists such as Annie E. Coombes (1994) and Henrietta Lidchi (1997). This work underpins much of that discussed in the following sections.

1.3.1. New contexts for old institutions: Museums under conditions of migration and diaspora

However global their collections, European museums have always been about the nation. As scholars have observed, the founding of museums in Europe from the late eighteenth century coincided with the rise of the nation state, and these institutions played an active role in the promotion of national ideologies. Theorists such as Peter Vergo (1989), Tony Bennett (1988), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992, 2000), Sharon Macdonald (2003) and Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius (2015) have revealed the extent to which museums have served as government-serving apparatuses embedded within a network of power relations which privilege elite interests. In this respect, their activities can be understood as an attempt to shepherd objects and interpretations into ideological positions which reaffirm the national order, including its membership and its territorial claims. As Macdonald has observed, "Public museums ... were from their beginnings embroiled in the attempt to culture a public and encourage people to imagine and experience themselves as members of an ordered but nevertheless sentimentalized nation-state" (2003, p.5).

In this context, collections of non-western material culture were important in demonstrating “claims of the capacity to know and to govern; signs too for the visitor that theirs was a nation, or a locality, that also played on the global stage” (Macdonald, 2003, p.3). Museums also made evident who could claim membership of the nation and who could not: “Because the nation was defined in opposition to other nations and ethnic groups, people who were out of place—such as immigrants and people of minority faiths—were not likely to see themselves represented, or, if they were, not without serious biases” (Levitt, 2015, p.6).

In developing collections of non-western material culture, European museums evolved as centripetal forces: centres of knowledge and authority to which other knowledges and forms of material culture flowed. Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh (2013) have defined this institutional model as the “contributive” museum and have demonstrated how its operations intersected with those of colonialism and imperialism:

Working on a model of centre and periphery, with tribute flowing from the (colonial) margin to the (imperial) metropolis, the contributive museum presupposes uni-directional flow. Tribute goes to the centre, while an established set of values is disseminated to the margins. (2013, p.157).

Over the last thirty years the “uni-directional flow” on which museums and collections of non-western material culture were founded has been tested by the increased mobility of people and goods, and the expansion of communication technologies. Politically, the rise of ethno-nationalisms and founding of new transnationalisms have also challenged the certainties on which museums were grounded. Old notions of the nation-state and the kinds of public with which it was associated are increasingly under interrogation as new publics nurture hybrid identities which criss-cross national borders.

Museum theorists have questioned how, in this new context, museums might reconcile their historical positionings with the “emerging identity dilemmas of the ‘second modern age’ or ‘late modernity’” (Macdonald, 2013, p.1). This has proven especially challenging in the case of non-western material culture, which was collected in the context of the nation’s imperial activities, embodying historic inequities which continue to haunt the present. One response has been to shift museum practice, as Fabienne Boursquiot has described, “from a ‘collection’ model to an interlocution or a ‘translation model’, and from a naturalist paradigm, whose aim was the objective depiction of different ways of life, to a translation paradigm” (2014, p.64). Through such interventions the museum ensures its continuing

centrality to the nation by playing a crucial intermediary role between the national citizenry and migrant groups.

The interrelationship between centre and margin has increasingly become a focus of interest in museum theory and practice. Boursquiot observes that in a postcolonial context, “ethnographic museums become museums of the *relationship* between ‘Us’ and the ‘Others’ more than museums of the ‘Others’” (2014, p.67, original emphasis). Alongside this is a growing research interest in heritage activities which operate beyond these margins, in the informal actions of communities (Smith, 2006; Ashley and Frank, 2016 and Naidoo, 2016), the museological implications of which have not been fully considered.

In what follows I offer a brief survey of writings on museums which have sought to address these “emerging identity dilemmas” (Macdonald, 2013, p.1). I start by considering texts which specifically discuss the challenge of addressing the phenomena of migration and diaspora. I then consider some of the different strategies through which museums are negotiating new “glocal” (Robertson, 1995) contexts. I end this first section with a reflection on some of the dilemmas posed by the increasing use of digital technologies to engage with these contexts.

Migration Museums

A notable feature of museum practice since the late 1980s has been the extent to which museums have increasingly sought to engage with the concept of migration. This has taken place both through the activities of existing institutions (for example via exhibitions, displays, outreach projects, new collecting strands and research initiatives)⁹ and through the founding of new institutions dedicated to the subject.¹⁰ The reasons for this engagement can be traced back to the scholarship of New Museology (Vergo, 1989) which, in revealing how museum institutions had historically served the interests of a select elite, demanded new

⁹ For discussion of some of these initiatives see Gößwald, 2007, on the ‘Born in Europe’ (2000-2005) initiative; Ohliger, 2009, on the ‘Migration in Museums: Narratives of Diversity in Europe’ (2007) research programme, and Basso Peressut and Pozzi, 2012, on the ‘MeLa – European Museums in an Age of Migrations’ (2011–2015) project.

¹⁰ Many of these are located in settler countries. The earliest is The Migration Museum (Adelaide) which opened in 1986. Other examples of migration museums include the Immigration Museum (Melbourne, established 1998), The Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration (New York City, established 1990), Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration (Paris, established 2007), the Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany (DOMiD, Cologne, begun 1990), Museu da Imigração do Estado de São Paulo (São Paulo, opened 2014), Interkulturelt Museum (Oslo, founded 1990) and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum (near Cape Town, opened 2000).

configurations of the relationship between museums and their publics, and called on museums to develop a more expansive role, which actively engaged with issues of social justice. Such a role is advocated by Richard Sandell in *Museums, Society, Inequality*, in which he argues that museums “have both the potential to contribute towards the combating of social inequality and a responsibility to do so” (2002, p.3). Sandell has increasingly framed this responsibility within a human rights discourse, calling on museums to provide “support for the human rights of different communities whose lived experiences of disadvantage and marginalisation have often been reflected in their exclusion from, or misrepresentation within, existing museum narratives” (Sandell, 2011, p.131). In this respect, the growing numbers of people undertaking high-risk migration journeys and heightened levels of anti-immigrant sentiment provide contexts in which the museum might perform a useful social function. According to the findings of an expert meeting on migration museums, this function can include contributing to “peaceful social cohesion – by showing the migrants’ contributions to their host societies, and by enabling them to feel an integral part of the host country”, explaining “the reasons for refugees or forced migrants to leave their country and as such developing empathy among the host population”, and helping in “deconstructing stereotypes on immigration” (International Organization for Migration, 2006, p.1).

One critique of this emerging field of practice is that museums’ historic relationship with the nation is hard to disentangle. This can lead to simplistic attempts to accommodate narratives of migration in a predetermined, ethnocentric national story. In this respect, securing migrants’ integration into the host country is achieved in representational terms only, often in ways in which their marginality is reaffirmed. Ien Ang has highlighted how the tendency to “isolate the story of immigration from the main national story—and to marginalize it—is a common representational strategy in the museum landscapes of many countries” (2017, p.3). This emphasis on simply widening museums’ representational field through the integration of migration histories into existing museum spaces and narratives is evident in the introduction to *Museums, Migration and Identity in Europe: Peoples, Places and Identities*, in which the editors note that their intention is to make “a significant contribution to studies of the *representation* of migration in European museums” (Whitehead, Eckersley and Mason, 2015, p.1, emphasis added).

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill is optimistic about the political effects of museum representational strategies: “By making marginal cultures visible, and by legitimating difference, museum

pedagogy can become a critical pedagogy” (2000, p.148). However, an alternative critique might suggest that by simply picturing inclusion and integration such museum efforts actually serve to deflect attention from the real causes and consequences of migration and risk overlooking “a more complex reality exploring the precise reasons why migrants and refugees leave; the more troubling and difficult problems they encounter as they travel and upon arriving; as well as the feelings and actions of those in the host nation who are uncomfortable or hostile toward immigrants” (Jenkins, 2016).

Similarly, Peggy Levitt (2015) has observed how narratives of migration tend to be told in separate institutions, located away from the city centre, and often in immigrant-majority neighbourhoods. Joachim Baur (2009) has interpreted museum efforts to address migration as simply a new iteration of the mission of museums to promote national identity, proposing that immigration is used by museums to portray host nations as multicultural and tolerant. Tiffany Jenkins (2016) has characterised museum initiatives that focus on migration as political projects, which run the risk of what Sharon Macdonald has described as a process of “‘museumising’ the identities and cultures on display” (2003, p.9). Andrea Torres has also warned of the “museumization of migration” in her account of the efforts of museums in Paris and Berlin to address this theme (2011). Through the process of museumization, subject positions—migrant or non-migrant / citizen or non-citizen—become fixed. In Torres’s case, the implications of this are made apparent in the complaints of a group of black French citizens who found themselves featured in a photographic exhibition at the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration: “instead of taking immigrants out of mainstream discourses and making them look better in the French nation, [the museum] had turned ‘French’ people into immigrants” she observes (2011, p.10). Torres also highlights the tendency of museums to marginalise narratives of migration and to present them from the perspective of the nation: “Although individuals and immigrant associations perform, they do not enter the big stage of decision-making, as the concepts are made and knowledge produced by representatives of the national societies” (2011, p.19). She moreover observes how representational strategies adopted by museums to address migration quickly becomes redundant as the lives of migrants undergo rapid change in their new location: “Changes in identity and in the relations between transnational spaces mean also changes in representation” (2011, p.13).

The disjuncture between the transnational phenomenon of migration and museums, the histories of which are embedded in those of the nation-state, and the tendency of the latter to

fossilise and marginalise the former is also evident in the treatment of diaspora communities by museums.

Museums and diaspora

Diaspora communities have always been implicit in the relationship between museums and so-called ‘source communities,’ which Peers and Brown’s preeminent volume on the subject define as “the communities from which museum collections originate,” encompassing “every cultural group from whom museums have collected: local people, *diaspora and immigrant communities*, religious groups, settlers and indigenous peoples” (2003, p.2, emphasis added). However, the different forms of curatorial praxis demanded by museum activities with one kind of “cultural group” as opposed to another has not been sufficiently considered. Nor has the extent to which these different groups might be seen, by museums, to constitute a valid source of cultural authority or not. These issues are discussed in this thesis, particularly in 3.2, ‘How are museums currently serving diaspora communities?’, which considers them in regards to examples of museum practice in the United Kingdom.

In *Museums and Source Communities* Peers and Brown observe that museum work with source communities represents “one of the most important developments in the history of museums” (2003, p.1). They note that this area of museum practice, one which emphasises processes of dialogue and collaboration, grounds itself in the principles that:

artefacts play an important role in the identities of source community members, that source communities have legitimate moral and cultural stakes or forms of ownership in museum collections, and that they may have special claims, needs or rights of access to material heritage held by museums. (2003, p.2)

Examples of these principles in action typically focus on museum work with indigenous communities in the context of anglophone former settler societies, for example, projects between Maori and New Zealand museums, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and Australian museums, and First Nations/Native Americans and museums in Canada and the United States, which have been considered to “set the standard for new relationships and forms of research” (2003, p.3). These examples have thus tended to dominate the literature on museum engagements with source communities (for example, Ames, 1992; Phillips, 2011; Clifford, 1997, 2005; McCarthy, 2011).

Peers and Brown acknowledge the less extensive work undertaken in this field by museums in the United Kingdom, including with diaspora communities, situating this within a long tradition of social history curating, rather than in curatorial work with ethnographic collections. They include two examples of this work in their volume: a chapter by Anthony Shelton on the curation of the African Worlds gallery, which opened in 1999 at the Horniman Museum in London's Forest Hill (Shelton, 2003, see the discussion of this gallery in 3.2, 'How are museums currently serving diaspora communities?') and another by Eithne Nightingale and Deborah Swallow on the consultation undertaken with United Kingdom-based Sikh communities in support of the V&A exhibition *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdom* (Nightingale and Swallow, 2003). However, despite the editors' initial insistence that diaspora communities represent a *bonafide* source community for museum collections, Peers and Brown's assessment of work in this field presents it as a necessary compromise to the worthier effort of engagement with *in-situ* source communities. They describe the case studies given as examples of "projects in British museums which have used overseas curators and diaspora community members in Britain *as links to* source communities" (2003, p.4, emphasis added) and critique the efforts of British museums in this field, reporting that in the United Kingdom "curatorial authority and institutional procedures have not shifted much at all as far as *overseas* communities are concerned" (2003, p.4, emphasis added). In contradicting their initial position on diaspora communities as source communities, Peers and Brown inadvertently reveal the tendency in museum practice to view diaspora communities and diasporic intermediaries *as links to* the source community, rather than a locus of cultural authority in their own right. The implications of this are further discussed in 3.2, 'How are museums currently serving source communities?'

Despite being an established feature of the museum landscape, especially in North America,¹¹ diaspora museums, and the work of existing museums with diaspora communities in their locale, has attracted scant academic interest (exceptions include Ashley, 2005; Kochman, 2008; Wilson, 2008; Porat, 2009 and Naguib, 2013, most of whom describe museum projects which address the experiences of the Jewish or African diaspora). The possible reasons for this have been discussed in the work of Brandi Wilkins Catanese and Ien Ang. In "When Did You Discover You Are African?' MoAD and the universal, diasporic subject," Wilkins

¹¹ United States museums devoted to telling the stories of diaspora communities include The Japanese American Museum (Los Angeles), the Museum of the African Diaspora (San Francisco), the Polish Museum of America (Chicago), and the Ukrainian Museum (New York).

Catanese uses the example of the San Francisco-based institution, the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD), to discuss:

the ironic competition of logics required to contain a diaspora within a museum. In other words, how does the museum – with its traditional emphasis on acquiring and imposing order upon objects – accommodate the logic of diaspora, with its emphasis on dynamic forces of belonging and mobility? (2007, p.91)

Similarly, in “Unsettling the National: Heritage and Diaspora,” Ien Ang identifies a fundamental disjuncture between the work of heritage—with its ties to territory and nation—and diaspora. She identifies this distinction in the following terms:

the ultimate impossibility of ‘heritagising’ the experience of (physical and cultural) displacement as such: the ambivalent condition of (non)belonging, of the fragility of diasporic identity as it is fractured by the push and pull of competing nationalising pressures, is difficult to objectify as distinctive heritage (2011, p.86).

Moreover, she reveals a fundamental disconnect between heritage and its close relationship with nation and territory, and diaspora in terms of their spatialised logics: “In spatial terms, diaspora is always fundamentally in tension with the quintessential territorialism of the nation-state” (2011, p.86).

If critics have found that museums tell over-simplistic stories of migration, freezing subject positions of ‘citizen’ and ‘non-citizen’, Ien Ang argues that they similarly tend to “simplify the complex instabilities of the diasporic experience by reducing the diasporic subject to the frozen, one-dimensional identity of the ‘immigrant’” (2011, pp.89-90). Much of the way museums treat diaspora communities “constructs the diasporic experience as a linear history between two stable sites of origin and destination, with the diasporic subject suspended in-between, always able to be pulled back into the symbolic fold of the original homeland, the unquestioned source of his or her identity” (Ien Ang, 2011, p.91). Ien Ang thus emphasises the limited ability of museum interpretative technologies to describe the transnational and fluid nature of diasporic identities.

As Wilkins Catanese suggests, the logic of museums, and in particular the logic of ethnographic or non-western museum collections, is disrupted at a fundamental level by the fact of diaspora. Historically grounded in ideas of cultural homogeneity, boundedness and geographical fixity, such collections risk coming undone by local manifestations of the ‘source’ or ‘originating’ community. Pursuing this analysis further, Anthony Shelton questions the implications of museums being subject to radical interrogation “by members of

the disjunctive populations they once tried to represent,” as their users, and even their neighbours, are “increasingly made up of peoples they once considered as part of their object” (Shelton quoted by Bennett, 2006, p.58).

Ien Ang, whose focus is on heritage rather than museums *per se*, nevertheless establishes a potential point of connection between heritage institutions and diaspora communities in the engagement of both with history. However, in her framing, a diasporic “looking back to some point of origin” is gloomily marked by experiences of “dislocation, exile, separation from a place, loss of (and nostalgia for) home” (2011, p.87). This negative perspective on diasporic engagements with history fails to account for the resourceful, inventive and politically-astute nature of many diasporic cultural practices (see Part Two of this thesis). Furthermore, despite the potential intersections generated by a shared interest—amongst both museums and heritage institutions and diaspora communities—in “looking back”, Ien Ang struggles to identify a means by which conventional heritage institutions can accommodate “a more transgressive, transnational, multi-local diasporic imagination where the experience of displacement as such—the movement across different places—becomes more central” (2011, p.92).

While Ien Ang proposes that museums and heritage institutions resist the marginalisation of experiences of diaspora and migration, making them more central, how the “more fluid and hybrid notions of identity” she advocates for might be accommodated by these is unclear (2011, p.92). Perhaps for this reason Ien Ang observes that the heritage practices of diaspora groups tend to remain hidden from public view: “Much memory-work of migrants occurs not in the public sphere (from which they are often excluded or marginalised), but in the private sphere” (2011, p.87).

What arises from the literature is a sense of the impossibility of reconciling certain aspects of globalisation—particularly migration and diaspora—with conventional museum practices, at least those of display and interpretation.¹² But where theory falters, practice continues. Today, motivated by social justice and diversity agendas, museum work with diaspora communities continues. This is especially the case in the United Kingdom where, as described in 3.2, it has become a normative part of the practice of curators and museum

¹² Wilkins Catanese does, however, find promise in the MoAD’s public programmes, particularly its ‘Salon’ function, which “fuses a West African focus on orality as a community-generating strategy with the European emphasis on the museum as a public institution vital to the proper functioning of the city that houses it” (2007, p.100).

learning or engagement staff working with ethnographic or non-western museum collections. What can the existing literature offer in terms of potential strategies to be pursued that might be able to reconcile historic collections and curatorial practices with the new social, political and economic realities created by globalisation?

Other museum strategies for dealing with global issues

While Museum Studies offers surprisingly little critical analysis of museum strategies which involve working with diaspora communities, recent years have produced a groundswell of writing addressing museum intersections with global issues. Much of this scholarship discusses the various ways in which heritage institutions are seeking to reconcile their practices with new globalised conditions. Some of this literature considers the relationship between museums and diaspora communities, and their heritage practices.

One example is an edited volume by Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto—*Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*—which seeks to provide a holistic view of globalisation and its museum effects. This volume starts from the position that “international connections and global orientations [have] become increasingly central to the circumstances and practice of museums since 1990” (Karp et al., 2006, p.xvi). In response, contributors set out to track the effects of globalizing processes on public cultures and the ‘frictions’ generated. Moving beyond issues of representation, the volume reveals how new social, political and cultural conditions are demanding a fundamental review and revision of the traditional museum model; both in terms of the communities museums presume to serve and the cultural forms they seek to collect and display.

In proposing strategies for addressing these new conditions, the volume reveals the extent to which—while acknowledging that museums remain “essential forms through which to make statements about history, identity, value, and place and to claim recognition” (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.4)—these institutions are moving away from their traditional role as a bricks-and-mortar storehouse of knowledge, towards becoming a “portable social technology, a set of museological processes through which ... statements and claims are represented, embodied, and debated” (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.4). In Karp, et al.’s book these “tactical museologies” (Buntinx and Karp, 2006) take different forms, including:

an alternative museum of the contemporary arts that fantasizes itself exhibiting on a traveling minibus in Lima, Peru, an exhibition space and publishing house in Phnom Penh, a South African museum for a community dispersed more than thirty years previously by forced removals, and a union of community museums dispersed through Oaxaca, Mexico (Buntinx and Karp, 2006, p.207).

All of these were “developed to take advantage of the symbolic capital associated with the idea of the museum, but also present an alternative to the claims made by better-established museums to define citizenship for a broad public” (ibid.). All are in some way a product of new globalised conditions, and have relatively short histories, but are also closely tied to the cultural politics of a particular community, including diaspora communities. Less attention is given to the global transformations undertaken by larger, established museums with their links to difficult histories of imperialism and colonialism. A key question thus remains as to how effectively these tactical or guerrilla strategies promoted by successful, but poorly-resourced, community museums can and should be appropriated by mainstream institutions.

In celebrating initiatives which undertake ‘the *critical* appropriation of the very name and notion of the museum *for radical purposes*’ (Buntinx and Karp, 2006, p.213, original emphasis), Karp, et al. advocate for a transformed museum practice which is able to address the kinds of “transgressive, transnational, multi-local diasporic imagination” Ien Ang describes (2011, p.92). Nevertheless, how these “tactical museologies” might be used by mainstream organisations, without blunting their ideological potential, or dislodging their deep-seated connections to specific communities, remains unclear. Whilst admiring of these tactics, the authors are less attentive to their reception, a common weakness of much museum studies literature. Aware of this, they call for “more analytical emphasis [on] the kinds of interpretative movements that take place as people connect their own experience and concerns with exhibitions, collections, memorials, and so forth” (2006, p.19). This is a call to which the research project of this thesis directly responds. Moreover, the book’s 2006 publication date means that the potential of digital technologies, as another means of exploiting the symbolic capital of museums, while simultaneously de-centering them as institutions, is little considered.

In contrast to the interest in an activist, grassroots engagement with museums offered by *Museum Frictions*, a recent volume by Peggy Levitt, *Artifacts and Allegiances: How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display* (2015), looks to national museums to provide an account of the “travails and dilemmas of nationalism in today’s interconnected, globalized world” (Ien Ang, 2017). Through an analysis of institutions in seven cities—in the

United States, Doha, Singapore, Denmark and Sweden—and extensive interviews with curators, policy makers, academics, museum directors, and educators, Levitt explores “how nationalism and cosmopolitanism come together under museum roofs in different cities and nations” (2015, p.2). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Levitt’s approach has been critiqued as promoting an elite perspective, favouring “the production of meanings and representations from above, as opposed to the telling of stories from below” (Yeoh, 2017, p.48). Moreover, like Karp, et al., Levitt neglects to consider how visitors and users make sense of the resources and ideological positions on display in her chosen institutions.

Nevertheless, what Levitt does reveal are some of the strategies adopted by museums which see themselves as having some kind of national remit or responsibility to address the globalised conditions they find themselves operating under. At the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, established in 2004, for example, permanent displays are eschewed in preference of explicitly ideological temporary exhibitions. These displays address themes as diverse as human trafficking, women’s boxing in India and LGBTQ identities in China. Even when ‘local’ issues are addressed, it is through the prism of the global. As curator of contemporary global issues Klas Grinell explains to Levitt, “When we are dealing with local subjects, we always want to show how they are connected to the global frame, how globalization takes different forms, trajectories, and directions” (2015, p.18). In this respect, Sweden’s increased diversity and “inherent cosmopolitanism” (2015, p.10) are presented as tools through which the nation can be strengthened. In another example, Levitt describes how the Art of the Americas wing of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston uses historic non-western works of art to provide evidence of the cosmopolitanism of American history: “The museum ... wants people to see that American art never took shape in a vacuum. From the outset, cultural connections to other parts of the world influenced what the nation created” (Levitt, 2015, p.59).

As was apparent in those institutions seeking to address the themes of migration and diaspora, Levitt finds that museums that seek to ‘put the world on display’ do so through ways inflected by ideas about the nation. In this context, “Global stories are refracted through national lenses. The national story and its regional variations, whether they are told in Brooklyn or Doha, are the building blocks with which the global story is narrated” (Levitt, 2015, p.136). This, one reviewer suggested, demonstrates the tendency of museums to:

reflect, rather than challenge, prevailing approaches to issues of immigration and diversity, on the one hand, as well as national identity and citizenship ideals, on the other. In other words, museums are microcosms signalling how ‘others’ who gain a somewhat slippery foothold in the national geobody are viewed, as well as how the ‘national self’ is projected onto a global stage and exhibited to others, including those coming from beyond its borders (Yeoh, 2017, p.49).

Levitt concludes by arguing for the need for museums to instil a cosmopolitan ethos in a world of increasing transnational mobility. “We need new kinds of institutions that respond more effectively to this reality,” she says, concluding that “Museums are just one of a range of cultural institutions that can help” (2015, p.142).

Despite its relatively recent publication date (2015), Levitt’s book privileges the museum site, and does not consider the other channels adopted by museums to explore and articulate their global position. In particular, like the earlier Karp, et al., publication, it does not discuss the use of digital technologies, except where these are used as part of onsite exhibitions and displays. These, I argue, provide a key forum where museum and diasporic interests might converge. This is addressed in the last museum-orientated part of this literature review, alongside a consideration of the ‘dilemmas’ these technologies might pose.

Digital technologies and museum dilemmas

The implications of digital technologies as a means by which cultural forms can be exploited in a newly globalised world order has been attended to within in the field of media, cultural, migration, and diaspora studies (for example Georgiou, 2006; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010 and Madianou and Miller, 2011), as well as in museum practice and in the literature on museum studies,¹³ but with remarkably little cross-comparison of findings. In terms of the latter it is clearly a key means by which the idea of museums as a form of “portable social technology” (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.4) might be realised, as well as a vehicle through which museums can seek to promote wider access, especially by those institutions holding ethnographic or ‘non-western’ collections and to those communities unable to visit the museum’s physical site. As such, many digital initiatives by museums have been viewed as part of wider decolonising agendas seeking to:

¹³ Significant examples of digital initiatives involving ethnographic museum collections include the Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts and Cultures (GRASAC) programme (see Bohaker, Corbiere and Phillips, 2014), work on collections of Maori taonga (see Ngata, Ngata-Gibson, and Salmond, 2012) and Moriori taonga (see Solomon and Thorpe, 2012) and the *Reanimating Cultural Heritage: Digital Repatriation, Knowledge Networks and Civil Society Strengthening in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone* initiative (see Basu, 2015).

reclassify collections, overturn antiquated taxonomies, [and] enhance databases with culture-specific content, all within the overarching aim of dismantling the colonial constructions of ethnographic knowledge that are perceived to have remained unaltered in museums for decades. A desired corollary of these exercises is the ... diminution of curatorial authority and a levelling of the unequal power balances of the past (Harris, 2013).

For Clare Harris, curator for Asian collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, the museum use of digital technologies to share collections data provides an opportunity to “break down the fixity of ideas of community and place that previously structured much of the work of the ethnographic museum” (2013). In her museum practice directed at the Tibetan community—a community which has significant similarities with the Kachin experience, in being ‘nation-less’ and dispersed across territories within the People’s Republic of China, refugee camps in India and across international diaspora communities—Harris finds particular value in digital technologies which are better able to “address the interconnected cartographies of diaspora as well as the homelands, both real and imagined, to which these relate” (2013). Yet this work, she notes, is not without its ‘dilemmas’.

Harris’s monograph, *The Museum on the Roof of the World: Art, Politics and the Representation of Tibet*, reveals the political dimensions of the use of the museum model as a “portable social technology” (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.4). For example, she describes how archival images of Tibet taken by British photographers have been used locally to “substantiate contemporary claims or to testify to a particular reading of history” (2012, p.149). She gives the example of the Chinese government-built Tibet Museum in Lhasa, in China’s Tibet Autonomous Region, which uses these images in order “to illustrate the history of Tibet’s incorporation into the motherland and to exhibit the benefits of the ‘peaceful liberation’ of that country in material form” (2012, p.191). In contrast, amongst the exiled Tibetan population in McLeod Ganj, northern India, the same images are used to establish a “platform to assert cultural distinctiveness in the global contest for recognition” (2012, p.11; see further discussion about the museological interests of this community in section 3.2.1, in an analysis of the work of World Museum Liverpool curator Emma Martin). In a conference presentation, Harris examined the extent to which her own institution, the Pitt Rivers Museum, was implicated in these tactical museologies, having made 6,000 historical images of Tibet available through a digitisation project, *The Tibet Album* (2013). Harris described her discomfort at seeing the way in which some of these had been re-appropriated and repurposed

at a Chinese government-run ideological theme park, Snow City, located in the outbuildings of Lhasa's Potala Palace:

somewhat disconcertingly for me in particular, photographs of Tibetan aristocrats from the Pitt Rivers Museum collection, that had been shown in the exhibition I curated called *Seeing Lhasa ...* and reproduced in a book of the same name had been copied ... and reproduced in a large scale, displayed in an exhibition denouncing, and I quote, 'The Three Pillars of Feudalism: The Aristocracy, The Monastic Hierarchy and the Tibetan Government'. These pictures taken of aristocrats by British colonial officers in Tibet in the 1930s were evidently the 'ones that are wanted' by the curators in Lhasa in order to induce repugnance amongst contemporary Tibetans towards their elite predecessors (Harris, 2013).¹⁴

While this experience is described as one of the ways in which open access to museum collections via digital technologies presents new 'dilemmas',¹⁵ the fact that the source of the images was actually a printed museum book, not a website, suggests some of the complexities involved in releasing museum collections into globalization's flows. These complexities, in particular the implications for curatorial authority and for the museum institution itself when collections materials are re-purposed by other agencies pursuing other agendas, are explored in this thesis.

Harris's text also questions the relationship between museums and nation. She notes that "it is hard to imagine a nation without a museum," but, in ways relevant for this thesis with its attention to the Kachin community, Harris then asks, "what of those for whom a nation is a distant memory or an unfulfilled dream?" (2012, p.154). Alongside highlighting the ways in which digital technologies can enable the creation of virtual museums which are "transnational and transcultural in their remit and reach," able to "address citizens of all nations while transcending the borders and national constructions of culture," Harris also suggests that digital technologies can provide a medium through which a nation such as Tibet can be recreated "where no such place exists in contemporary geo-politics" (2013).

¹⁴ Harris's mention of 'the ones that are wanted' is a reference to a publication by Corinne Kratz, *The Ones That Are Wanted: Communication and the Politics of Representation* (Kratz, 2002).

¹⁵ In setting out the issues raised by such appropriations, Harris asks, "If our aim amongst many ethnographic museums is to reduce our authority, to share resources and to facilitate access democratically and without always explicitly specifying who the users, which communities, which places should be, what dilemmas may arise from this?" (2013). This issue is returned to in 3.3, 'What might a diaspora-appropriate museum practice look like?'

Conclusion

Through a focus on a dispersed transnational community, this thesis illustrates the ways in which, as Sharon Macdonald has observed, “the identities of the past are becoming increasingly irrelevant and ... new identities, and new identity formations, are being created” (2003, p.1). It also explores how these new identity formations are resulting in new “forms of cultural production and exchange [which] exist increasingly outside the spheres and frames of reference to which many museums are dedicated” (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.6). It goes beyond the usual preoccupations of museums with *representing* the experiences of migration and diaspora, to consider how the complex and multidirectional forces integral to these might serve to problematize, or even destabilise, conventional museum practice and seeks to move beyond theory to identify some practical ways through which these tensions might be mediated, if not resolved. In doing so, it moves away from a traditional museum-centred approach, with an emphasis on the analysis of museum displays, exhibitions and other museum products, to foreground testimony and cultural products associated with a diasporic community. Lastly, in its focus on overseas Kachin communities, this thesis extends writings on the ‘Kachin’—famously the subjects of anthropology and more recently of ethnic conflict studies—to consider how these new communities are mobilising and rehabilitating their cultural heritage in ways as yet undocumented.

1.3.2. Introduction: Writings on and by the Kachin

Texts by non-Kachin authors

Missionized from the late nineteenth century, the Kachin were subject to ethnographic and linguistic interest from European missionaries and thus formed the focus of several ethnographic works (for example Hanson, 1913; Gilhodes, 1922 and Carrapiet, 1929). The Swedish-American Baptist missionary Ola Hanson is especially important to Kachins as he developed an orthography and produced a first grammar of Jinghpaw in 1896, followed by a dictionary in 1906 and a Jinghpaw translation of the Bible in 1927.

As the twentieth century progressed the ethnic diversity represented in northern Burma (as the country was officially known until 1989) attracted the interest of anthropologists. Initially these interests were motivated by the pursuit of military work, such as James Henry Green’s photography and writings, including his masters dissertation for Cambridge, “The Tribes of

Upper Burma North of 24° Latitude and their Classification” (1934) (Dell, 2000b; Odo, 2000). A series of *Kachin Recruiting Lectures* written by C. M. Enriquez (1920) were also a contribution to this field. Later, in 1954, Edmund Leach produced his seminal *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*. Strongly critiqued since (for example, Sadan and Robinne, 2007), Leach’s choice of the Kachin community to hang his theory around the instrumentalist use of ethnicity nevertheless led several other pioneers in anthropology, including Jonathan Friedman (1979) and James Scott (2009), to make the Kachin a case study for their own more general propositions in social theory. While these scholars offered new insights into social and political formations, in their attempt to produce abstracted models of social interaction, the static and insular view that they presented of Kachin social systems inevitably obscured the complex and shifting realities on the ground (Sadan, 2013, pp.14-20).

Civil conflict and the difficulties foreigners encountered in gaining access to the region restricted the amount of academic research and publishing activities associated with the Kachin that could be undertaken in the period 1960 to 1990. However, from the late 1980s, the worsening political situation and the increased global awareness of what was happening in Myanmar (as the country was officially renamed in 1989) led to a number of publications addressing the political turmoil in the country. Several addressed the specific experiences of the Kachin as part of a broader attempt to understand the impact of ethnic politics on national politics. Important amongst these was writer and journalist Martin Smith’s *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (1991), which remains a key resource for understanding the historical developments behind the conflicts that have beset the country since it secured Independence in 1948. Other authors who have addressed the Kachin issue as part of a wider debate on Myanmar and the role of ethnic politics include independent researcher and policy analyst Ashley South. South’s writings on this issue include *Ethnic Politics in Burma, States of Conflict* (2008), in which he specifically discusses the series of post-1989 ceasefire agreements between the military government and armed ethnic groups, including the Kachin Independence Army. Both Smith and South focus on the role of political organisations, ethnic armed groups and, in South’s case, civil society and foreign networks, in driving social and political change. Arguably they also contribute to the heightened interest in Myanmar’s ethnic politics, with recent commentators suggesting that the conventional characterisation of ongoing conflict in the country as the outcome of “centre-periphery ethno-nationalist politics” (Laoutides and Ware, 2016, p.47), has obscured

more complex motivations for resisting state rule. In their account of the “Kachin conflict” Laoutides and Ware argue instead for attention to be given to the ideological processes through which ethnic identity is “naturalized as the self-evident, legitimate point of reference to make sense of the world” (2016, p.52). My research offers a more nuanced account of the role of ethnicity in identity-making projects, particularly outside the contested territories which have traditionally formed the focus of much literature in this field.

Since 2000 research undertaken by historian Mandy Sadan, as well as increased access to the field, has established Kachin studies as a viable new research area (Farrelly, 2014). Initiated by research on a selection of James Henry Green’s photographs and interactions with Kachin cultural historians in Myanmar, most notably Pungga Ja Li (discussed further in 1.5), Sadan has produced a wealth of research findings based both on archival research in the United Kingdom, including within India and Colonial Office records held by the British Library (2008a), and research undertaken in the field including via interviews and an interrogation of ritual language used in the Kachin area. While much of her research has addressed the cultural dimensions of Kachin life (for example, 2002, 2003, 2008b), Sadan has carefully situated these in detailed social, historical and political contexts. The breadth of her research interests is reflected in her monograph, *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma* (2013). *Being and Becoming* exploits current academic interest in ‘borderworlds’ as “a complex, uneven social and political construct” (2013, p.6) using this notion to interrogate how, in the intersection between Myanmar, China, Thailand and India, local, regional, national and global logics of affiliation have become part of everyday lived experiences. In taking a wide temporal (from the late eighteenth century to the present) and geographical (crossing national boundaries from Assam to Kachinland to Yunnan) frame, Sadan’s work reveals how the shifting and heterogeneous nature of being Kachin has been subject to different articulations over time and place. Despite the wide geographic frame adopted by the book, it does not seek to account for Kachin communities living beyond this particular region of Southeast Asia. Despite this, Sadan acknowledges the value of doing so; noting how new Kachin transnationalisms offer contexts of “increasing significance in the contemporary ideological development of modern Kachin ethno-nationalism, creating new strengths and weaknesses, new points of possible fracture or segmentation, of debate, growth and introspection” (2013, p.12). This omission can be only partially addressed by this thesis, which primarily seeks to develop debates within Museum Studies. However the descriptions of cultural practices amongst Kachin communities in

diasporic settings provided in Part Two will provide new entry points for investigations into the development and extension of Kachin ethno-nationalism into new locales. Moreover, in considering how identity-making practices manifest themselves online, this thesis discusses a medium not explored in Sadan's work, thus responding to one reviewer's comment that "Determining the influence of new technologies for ethnic reproduction is clearly one area ripe for future academic enquiry" (Farrelly, 2014, p.470).

As access to northern Myanmar has become more feasible in the 2000s (bar those areas directly affected by post-2011 conflict), a new body of scholarship is emerging. Much of this has focussed on the exploitation of natural resources in the ceasefire context (a phenomenon evocatively described by Kevin Woods (2011) as "ceasefire capitalism"), including the politics of hydro-electric dam projects (Kiik, 2016b; Kim, 2016). The return to conflict in 2011 and consequent human displacement has also prompted studies of affinity ties in the context of humanitarian efforts (Ho, 2017), and of gender-based violence and discrimination (Hedstrom, 2018).

Texts by Kachin authors and Kachin-led agencies

The above suggests that Kachin authors have been less well represented in academic debates and writings on the Kachin. The parlous state of education in Myanmar since independence, the pattern of university closures, the strict enforcement of government censorship (especially on publications in minority languages - see 2.3), the lack of publishing infrastructure and of opportunities to participate in international academic debate, as well as the recurrent outbreaks of conflict, have restricted the quality and distribution of research by Kachin writers, although any visit to a Myitkyina bookseller reveals a wealth of cheaply-printed books by local authors, largely in Jinghpaw, but occasionally in English. However, the relaxing of government censorship controls,¹⁶ has brought new freedoms to writers and publishers and is set to contribute to a boom in the field of Kachin literature, as well as across Myanmar more generally. A new research journal, *The Kachinland Research Journal*, which is being produced by the Kachinland Research Centre at the Humanities Institute in Myitkyina, is evidence of this.

¹⁶ The 1962 Printers and Publishers Law was revised in 2014 and the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division disbanded in 2012. See 2.3 'The Printed Calendar and the Development of a Kachin Visual Identity'.

Much of the literature produced by Kachin-led agencies has sought to highlight ongoing human rights abuses and acts of environmental degradation perpetrated by the Burmese government and its military. While some reports have been issued by international organisations like the Transnational Institute/Burma Centrum Nederland and Global Witness, the growth in Kachin-led non-governmental organisations (for example the Metta Development Foundation (Metta); Nyein (Shalom) Foundation and Wunpawng Ninghtoi (WPN)), some of which operate from diasporic settings (for example the Pan Kachin Development Society (PKDS), the All Kachin Students & Youth Union (AKSYU) and Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT)), have ensured the visibility of a Kachin perspective on these issues (South, 2008). Some Kachin NGO leaders have contributed to the discourse on ethnic politics in Myanmar, for example Assistant Director of the Shalom Foundation, Ja Nan Lahtaw (2007), and Lahpai Seng Raw, founder of the Metta Development Foundation who, amongst other things, contributes to the online publication *Kachinland News*.

Outside Myanmar, Kachin intellectuals able to access education and research training include Dr Maran La Raw (published works include 1967, 1971, 2007). More recently the educational opportunities available to some diaspora communities, and the increasing interest in Kachin 'issues' amongst diasporic youth have generated new research, some of which directly address the experiences of the diaspora. Ja Htoi Pan Maran, former director of the Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences in Mai Ja Yang, has, for example, explored the "first generation experience" as part of her postgraduate studies in the United States (2012a, 2012b).

Texts that address histories of migration, displacement and diaspora in terms of Myanmar

As described in 1.4 and 2.2, political and economic developments in Myanmar since the late 1980s have generated significant demographic change, as large numbers of people have moved from rural to urban areas or left the country in pursuit of safety or greater opportunities overseas. Some aspects of this demographic shift have been discussed in detail, for example, the experiences and impact on home politics of communities and activists from Myanmar living in exile (Zaw Oo, 2006; Arnold, 2012 and Williams, 2012) and the conditions of Karen refugees living on the Thai-Myanmar border (Lang, 2002; Dudley, 2010;

Rhoden, 2011 and Chantavanich and Kamonpetch, 2017). Other Burmese communities living outside the country have been less often considered.¹⁷ This situation is noted in a summary of the extant literature on Burmese diasporas in Asia provided by Renaud Egreteau (2012). As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Egreteau highlights the relative absence of “comparative studies exploring the diversity of the drivers and patterns of these contemporary Burmese migrations, the multifaceted identities and sense of belonging cultivated by these heterogeneous communities in exile, and the transnational space, networks and influence they have carved out for themselves in their host countries” (2012, p.117). This thesis aims to provide some material with which to address this lacuna, focusing on the Kachin experience.

Attention to Kachin experiences of migration, displacement and diaspora has been limited, although Karin Dean has made useful observations on Kachin “mobilities” (2016). In attending to the importance of spatiality and of “socio-spatial connectivities” in Kachin social resistance to the Burmese state, Dean shows how mobilities and networks have always been part of the Kachin experience (2016, p.216). She points to the long histories of interaction between, and movement across, northern Myanmar and southwest China motivated by “petty trade, opportunism and seasonal work, besides the more conventional social imperatives for mobilities such as kinship” (2016, p.222), arguing that these mobilities continue to provide a vital “capability” to be drawn upon “for moral, medical and material support” (p.224). She also demonstrates how these mobilities have been amplified by communication technologies and Kachin exile-based media which have “assembled and mobilized the Kachin in unprecedented ways” (p.230). Dean’s focus remains on the exchange of news information but this thesis demonstrates how these “socio-spatial connectivities” can be forged and maintained in other ways, through, for example, the sharing of visual material or music.

The phenomenon of Kachin migration is addressed in more specific ways in two contributions to a recent edited volume, *War and peace in the borderlands of Myanmar: the Kachin ceasefire, 1994-2011*. In describing “Kachin Student Life in Yangon in the Mid-1990s,” Hkanhpa Tu Sadan outlines the political and economic circumstances that led to the “quiet but relatively large-scale exodus of newly-educated young Kachin people ... to a slowly widening range of countries” (2016, p.251). In “The Founding of the KNO [Kachin National Organisation] and Development of a Diaspora Activist Network,” Duwa Mahkaw

¹⁷ Exceptions include Susan Banki’s work on Burmese refugees in Tokyo (Banki, 2006a, 2006b), Violet Cho’s on Karen refugees in New Zealand (Cho, 2011) and five chapters dedicated to different Burmese refugee communities in urban settings in a recent edited volume on urban refugees (Hoffstaedter and Koizumi, 2015).

Hkun Sa reveals how political disagreements during the first decade of the ceasefire resulted in the mobilisation of an alternative political voice led largely by diaspora elites. While he does not discuss in detail the formation or character of Kachin overseas communities, he highlights their importance to a Kachin activist network. He argues that since its foundation in 1999, the KNO has relied “upon networks of people who have migrated from Kachinland to other parts of the globe, near and far”, particularly on “the incorporation and involvement of the increasingly large group of diaspora Kachin who left the country from the late 1990s onwards” (2016, p.256). That more research might follow, led by the interest of Kachin diaspora scholars, is suggested by the postgraduate work of Ja Htoi Pan Maran (2012a, 2012b), as well as by those concerned with humanitarian and social welfare issues (for example Palmgren, 2016).

Conclusion

As discussed above, Kachin communities have been privileged in certain kinds of academic debates, particularly in terms of ethnic identity formation and in ethnically-motivated political movements. However, despite the significant demographic changes which have taken place over the last three decades—as Kachin people have been forced or have chosen to move away from northern Myanmar—the impact of these changes has been little considered. This thesis thus attends to areas of interest flagged up by earlier scholars, including the role of ethnicity in identity-making projects and political and cultural activism, but does so in new geographic contexts, thus contributing to much-needed work on new Burmese transnationalisms.

Before discussing in detail the interactions between Brighton Museum and Kachin communities from the late 1990s, and the development and activities of overseas Kachin communities, I use the next section to provide an introduction to recent histories of the Kachin, outlining the political, economic and social forces that brought these communities into being.



Figure 3: Schematic map of Kachin State, Myanmar.

1.4 The Kachin and their Recent Political History

Any discussion of the history of ethnic minority groups in Myanmar entails grappling with issues of great sensitivity and complexity. As contributors to the literature in this field remind us, there are great difficulties in trying to construct a coherent narrative against a constantly shifting, politically-charged and often turbulent terrain.¹⁸ In this section, I offer some background information to the construction of a Kachin diaspora, specifically to contextualise and support the case studies I offer in Part Two of this thesis. Much of the detail of Kachin political history, not least its place within the larger sphere of ethnic politics in Myanmar in recent decades, must be left to other researchers.¹⁹ This, then, is not intended to provide a comprehensive description or analysis, but is instead an attempt to highlight those aspects of recent history which have been regularly pointed to in my discussions with Kachin individuals, and frequently alluded to in Kachin popular media.

Introduction

The Kachin are an ethnic minority community most commonly associated with Kachin State in northern Myanmar,²⁰ although large numbers also reside in Northern Shan State. There are estimated to be some 1.2 million Kachins, although this remains an unsubstantiated figure. Attempts in recent years by the Burmese government to conduct a national census have been hotly contested, with the Kachin Independence Organisation refusing to allow the census to be undertaken in areas under its control (International Crisis Group, 2014). A transnational community, Kachin people also live in southwest China (Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture), where they are known as Jingpo, and in northeast India (Arunachal Pradesh and Assam), where they take the name Singpho. A sustained period of political conflict and associated social and economic challenges created the conditions for the development of a widely dispersed set of Kachin diaspora communities including in the United Kingdom and northern Europe, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Japan.

¹⁸ As the authors of a background report to ethnic minorities in Myanmar note, “The history of these struggles is extremely complex as literally scores of groups have formed, split, reunited and dissolved at various times” (International Crisis Group, 2003, p.4).

¹⁹ See, for example, Sadan, 2013 for a detailed examination of the evolution of Kachin ethno-politics across Myanmar, China and India. Others who have written more generally on ethnic politics in Burma include Smith, 1991 (1999); Gravers, 2007 and South, 2008.

²⁰ As is characteristic of most of the ethnic ‘states’ created through the 1974 Constitution, ‘Kachin’ State is not ethnically homogenous, having significant populations of Burman, Shan and Chinese people as well as Kachins (Kiik, 2016a, p.211).

Myanmar is considered to present ‘one of the most complex ethnic mixes in the world’ (Smith, 1991(1999), p.30), and the Kachin are one of 135 ‘national races’ officially recognized by the Burmese government. The term ‘Kachin’ is actually an umbrella term for six ethnic groups: Jinghpaw, Lawngwaw (Maru, Lhaovo, Lhaovar), Zaiwa (Atsi, Atzi), Nung-Rawang, Lisu and Lachik (La:cid, Lashi).²¹ Burmans, the country’s ethnic majority, constitute an estimated 68% of the population of Myanmar, and have held long periods of political control over the country. Historically, Burman sovereignty was dislodged by British rule of Burma between 1824 and 1948, from the Anglo-Burmese wars through the creation of Burma as a province of British India to the establishment of an independently administered colony, and finally independence in 1948. British interest in Burma, as it was then, was initially limited to the opportunities it provided for the effective policing of India’s north-eastern borders, and as a buffer against the encroaching interests of other Europeans in the region. However, as British influence developed, interest grew in the economic opportunities offered by this new territory, and the objective became territorial consolidation for economic purposes. The country was divided into two sections, ‘Burma Proper’ and the frontier, later ‘Scheduled’ or ‘Excluded’, areas. It was a division created along perceived putative ethnic difference. Burma Proper, or Ministerial Burma, along the central river valleys and deltas, as well as portions of upper Burma where Burmans were the majority, was governed directly by the British. In contrast, in the mountainous border areas where many minority communities were based, a policy of indirect rule was introduced. Social structures and local elites were more or less left intact with administrations separate from that of the Burmese heartland (Callahan, 2007, p.12; Smith, 1991(1999), p.42). This division effectively hindered Burman-minority interaction and ensured that areas remained on different roads to political and economic development (Smith, 1991(1999), p.34). To make matters worse, under colonial rule the British deployed Indians, Karens, Anglo-Burmans, and small numbers of Britons and Burmans to administer and police Burma Proper, while allowing traditional local leaders to run the day-to-day affairs of the Excluded Areas (Callahan, 2007, p.12).

The British approach to governing a country of such great ethnic and cultural diversity has been famously described as establishing “order without meaning” (Aung-Thwin, 1985). The

²¹ The relationship between these sub-groups and the umbrella term ‘Kachin’ is historically contingent and deeply contested. As Mandy Sadan has observed, “In Burma today Kachin nationalist rhetoric determines that the category Kachin is comprised of six principle lineages, all of which are deemed to be descended from a common ancestor ... Inevitably, all of these categories are themselves complex entities and their affiliations to the category Kachin have historically been contested, reconfigured and renegotiated at both local and national levels” (2007b, p.34).

legacy of colonial rule has been blamed for creating an environment of political toxicity in terms of ethnic relations, which then became the inheritance of the newly independent Union of Burma in 1948. Post-independence promises of greater political autonomy for minority groups such as the Kachin failed to materialize, and the country quickly became beset by widespread ethnically-oriented conflict. Following a coup led by Burman military leader General Ne Win in 1961, the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) was formed and went on to fight a long gruelling conflict against the Burmese junta, until the two sides signed a ceasefire agreement in 1994. The agreement broke down in June 2011, precipitating another episode of devastating conflict. In the following sections, organised in a broadly chronological manner, I track some of these developments in more depth.

1947-1961: Independence and the founding of the Kachin Independence Organisation

In reporting on recent ethnically-oriented conflicts the ‘Panglong spirit’ is often evoked by ethnic nationalists, as well as by international press and development agencies. This phrase is intended to illustrate how far the country has apparently retreated from the aspirations for ethnic equality expressed just before Burma (as it was then) achieved independence.²² On 12 February 1947 an agreement was signed between the Burmese government under General Aung San (as head of the interim Burmese government) and representatives of some of Burma’s ethnic minority groups at a ‘Conference of the Nationalities’ in Panglong, central-southern Shan State. Later known as the ‘Panglong Agreement’, it would become an enduring focal point for political activity (the anniversary of its signing is marked each year, on 12 February, as ‘Union Day’²³). As Smith has noted, “it was largely on the basis of the [Panglong] meeting that the principle of the formation of a Union of Burma was agreed,” the Burman majority’s relationship with its frontier peoples having been a key concern of the British in the lead up to discussions around Independence (1991(1999), p.78).

²² For example, an article by Benedict Rogers carried by the *Huffington Post* was titled “Burma Should Honour Freedom’s Martyrs and Revive the Spirit of Panglong” (Rogers, 2012). Mael Raynaud has noted how, just a few years after the 1988 pro-democracy movement, the notion of a ‘Panglong Spirit’ evolved to become a “rallying concept under which members of both Burmese and ethnic NGOs and rebel groups could unite” (Raynaud, 2016). Significantly, peace talks held by the Burmese government with ethnic leaders in 2016 and 2017 were called the 21st century Panglong Peace Conference.

²³ Sadan notes how, contrary to popular assumption, Union Day has only been marked in its current form since 1953, when the anniversary was “used to transform the explicit public narrative of the Panglong Agreement into a new ideological representation based upon the notion of a Panglong Spirit” (Sadan, 2013, p.303).

In exchange for their acceptance of a new Union of Burma, Aung San issued guarantees of autonomy to the Chin, Kachin and Shan leaders present at the gathering. The Panglong Agreement stated that “full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas is accepted in principle”.²⁴ The spirit of the agreement was echoed in Aung San’s much-quoted assurance to ethnic leaders: “If Burma receives one kyat [the Burmese currency unit], you will also get one kyat” (Smith, 1991(1999), p.78). However, while the ethnic leaders present at Panglong (significant minorities such as the Karen were not represented) were able to articulate their demands in a united fashion, the conference actually resulted in a number of individual agreements, the general terms of which were to resurface in the Constituent Assembly and ultimately in the Constitution adopted on 24 September 1947. As Smith has described, “The result was a Constitution as lopsided and riddled with inconsistencies as any treaty drawn up in the era of British rule. In short, it was a recipe for disaster” (Smith, 1991(1999), p.79. See also Smith, 2007). Despite talk of federalism the actual constitution “delineated the federal state, but in reality provided for a centralised governmental system” (Taylor, 1987, p.227). Although the claims of some ethnic nationality groups were partially accommodated through the creation of separate, ethnic Union States, “these were administrative arms of the central government, and enjoyed little real power” (South, 2008, p.25).

Soon after independence, it became apparent that the ‘Panglong spirit’ offered little more to ethnic nationalists than empty words. Not only was government increasingly centralised, but first Prime Minister of the Union of Burma U Nu’s insistent pushing of Buddhism as Burma’s official state religion was seen by the mainly Christian ethnic minorities, including the Kachin, as “running counter to the voluntary spirit of the Union” (Smith 1991(1999), p.192). Within the first year of independence, Arakanese, Karen, Karenni and Mon ethnic nationalists had taken up arms against the state, as had the powerful Community Party of Burma. Over the following decade and a half, several more groups were to join the insurrections, “many articulat[ing] some kind of ethnic nationalist agenda” (South, 2008, pp.26-27). For the Kachin, added causes of grievance were the lack of governmental

²⁴ Panglong Agreement, 1947. [online] Available at: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/MM_470212_Panglong%20Agreement.pdf [accessed 24 May 2018].

investment in infrastructure in Kachin State,²⁵ and the insulting proposed loss of three Kachin villages to China in 1961.²⁶

Bubbling levels of discontent amongst the Kachin community came to a dramatic head in March 1961, when a group of young Kachin nationalists led by a former Rangoon University student (Zau Tu) raided the treasury in Lashio, Shan State. The Kachin movement had begun as a small cell on the Rangoon University campus in the 1950s; “this daring assault, just a few years later, signalled the outbreak of the insurrection by the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), founded on 5 February 1961 ... which within a decade developed into one of the most successful and best organised of all the armed opposition movements in Burma” (Smith 1991(1999), p.191). In ways which highlight the complex relationship between culture and politics in Myanmar, Sadan points to the KIO’s origins in a cultural organisation. An earlier initiative of the KIO founders, known as the ‘Seven Stars’, had been to establish a Kachin Literature and Culture Committee (*Jinghpaw Wunpawng Laili Laika hte Htunghking Hpung*) at Rangoon University. As Sadan notes: “it was from this group that the armed Kachin ethno-nationalist movement was to grow” (2013, p.250).

Just over a year after the founding of the KIO, increasing discussions about federalism amongst ethnic minority leaders and an apparent willingness on the part of U Nu to participate in these were to lead to a dramatic coup. Led by Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Ne Win, the coup was supported by his *Tatmadaw* leaders who had come to see themselves as the lone protectors of the Union’s national integrity and the federal movement as a guise for the country’s insurgents’ separatist demands (Smith, 1991(1999), p.196). On 2 March 1962 troops surrounded all the key points in the city and Ne Win seized power claiming “Federalism is impossible; it will destroy the Union” (quoted in Smith, 1991(1999), p.31).

1962-1988: The Ne Win era

Ne Win became head of state as Chairman of the Union Revolutionary Council and also Prime Minister. Declaring parliamentary democracy unsuitable for the country, the new regime suspended the constitution, dissolved the legislature, and introduced military rule. Ne

²⁵ Smith notes, for example, the “appalling condition of the state’s few roads, which had steadily deteriorated since the departure of the British” (1991(1999), p.192).

²⁶ See, on this issue, Smith 1991(1999), p.192; Pangmu Shayi, 2015, and Lintner, 1997, pp.123-124. In contrast to Smith (1991(1999)) Lintner (1997) dates this event to early 1960.

Win instituted a number of national reforms, drawing on a philosophy which combined elements of extreme nationalism, Marxism, and Buddhism, which he called the *Burmese Way to Socialism*. He founded the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), which in 1964 was formally declared to be the only legal party.

Ne Win's government nationalized the economy and pursued a policy of autarky, which meant the economic isolation of his country from the world. A ubiquitous black market and rampant smuggling supplied the needs of the people, while central government slid slowly into bankruptcy. Autarky also involved expelling foreigners and restricting visits to the country by foreigners to three days, and after 1972, one week. Even foreign aid organizations were banned; the only humanitarian aid permitted was on an intergovernmental basis. Almost overnight Myanmar "became one of the most isolated and hermetically sealed countries in the world" (Smith, 1991(1999), p.200).

For Myanmar's ethnic minorities the 1965 nationalisation of all schools was especially troubling, as this policy gave full weight to Ne Win's highly 'Burmanised' view of the country's diverse cultures and history (Smith, 1991(1999), p.201). Similarly, the closure and/or nationalisation of newspapers and the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Law, which governed not only the text, language and subject of new books and journals but even the number of copies printed (Smith, 1991(1999), p.205; Thaw Kaung, 2014), made the publication of texts in ethnic minority languages virtually impossible (see further discussion of this in 2.2 'The printed calendar and the development of a Kachin visual identity').

For nearly quarter of a century Ne Win pursued what Smith has described as a simple, twofold strategy: "he concentrated on building up a highly centralised system of administration from the centre in Rangoon while, in areas of rural insurgency, carrying out relentless counter-insurgency programmes in a bid to crush armed opposition once and for all" (1991(1999), p.199). Perhaps unsurprisingly these efforts only increased the levels of support for, and enlistment into, the KIO which grew "from a small guerrilla band of less than 100 to a highly organised army with new mobile battalions growing at a rate of more than one a year ... By 1966 these had penetrated as far as Myitkyina, in the Hukawng valley, the Naga hills and the strategic Kamaing jade region" (1991(1999), p.220).

In the mid-1960s Ne Win developed a counter-insurgency programme which, known as the *Pya Ley Pya* (Four Cuts) policy, was designed to cut the four main links (food, funds,

intelligence and recruits) between insurgents, their families and local villagers. Under this policy, the map of Burma was divided into a vast chessboard under the *Tatmadaw*'s six (later nine) regional military commands and shaded in three colours: black for entirely insurgent-controlled areas; brown for areas both sides still disputed; and white was 'free': "The idea was that each insurgent area would be cleared, one by one, until the whole map of Burma was white" (Smith, 1991(1999), p.259).

The development of Kachin nationalism

The Four Cuts policy, however, did little to dampen support for the KIO amongst the Kachin community. What then, given the devastating consequences for its supporters, attracted a broad community of people to identify with Kachin nationalism, and with the aims of the KIO?

As Sadan has discussed (2007b), the enduring existence of a community of people called 'Kachin' is not substantiated by historical evidence. Indeed, understandings of who might have constituted the membership of this community have changed significantly over time (Sadan, 2003). What can be determined is that the majority group within the Kachin today, the Jinghpaw, do have an identifiable historical trajectory. Jinghpaw Christian elites (as opposed to members of Kachin constituencies representing other ethnic or religious factions) have tended to dominate Kachin society and politics, especially through leadership of the Baptist church, and of the Kachin nationalist movement (South, 2008, p.19). Jinghpaw dominance in matters political, social, religious and cultural, has caused ongoing concern to other members of the 'Kachin' family leading, at times, to political divisions and intra-ethnic conflict. However, the use of the Jinghpaw language as a *lingua franca* for the whole Kachin community is perhaps one of the elements which has enabled the KIO "to forge a united nationalist movement amongst the several ethnic subgroups of the north-east (despite government attempts to depict it simply as an ethnic Jinghpaw movement)" (Smith, 1991(1999), p.35).²⁷ As this study will show, the maintenance of Jinghpaw language skills, especially amongst diasporic Kachin children and youth, remains a concern for the wider Kachin community (see 2.2, 'Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora').

²⁷ This thesis seeks to demonstrate some of the other ways and means through which Kachin nationalism has been sustained and extended, including into diaspora.

The Jinghpaw language is not the only common factor amongst the diverse ethnic groups who have identified with the aims of the KIO. Christianity has also played an important role in the development of Kachin nationalism, indeed it provided the means by which the spoken Jinghpaw language could be transcribed and disseminated across a broad public. Historically animist, the presence of European missionaries in Myanmar's mountainous borderlands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,²⁸ led many of the country's ethnic minorities to adopt the Christian faith. Amongst the Kachin, the influence of the Baptist church has been most dominant, but the Anglican, Catholic and Evangelical churches all have Kachin congregations. In 1896 the Swedish-American Baptist missionary Reverend Ola Hanson—a figure of huge spiritual significance to the Kachins—developed an orthography and produced a first grammar of Jinghpaw, followed by a dictionary in 1906 and, most importantly, by a Jinghpaw translation of the Bible in 1927 (a copy of which can today be found in the possession of most Kachins in and outside Myanmar) (Sadan 2013, p.376). The transcription of Jinghpaw set in motion the wheels for the development of Kachin print cultures including the newspapers *Jinghpaw Shi Laika* (published from 1914, sponsored by the American Baptist Mission (South, 2008, p.18)) and, later, *Jinghpaw Prat*. As this study will show, despite the restrictions on print and publishing within Myanmar, which have only recently been relaxed (Thaw Kaung, 2014), Jinghpaw print cultures have persisted in the form of magazines, calendars (see the discussion in 2.3, 'The printed calendar and the development of a Kachin visual identity'), and now through online content (as described in 2.4, 'Kachin culture and new media').

The church has played an important role in Kachin society and in diaspora it serves similar spiritual, educational, cultural and social purposes as it does within Myanmar (see the discussion of the diasporic Kachin church in 2.2 'Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora'). Sadan has noted how the sermon has played an important role in guiding political sympathies as well as religious ones. Particularly important amongst Kachin Christian organisations is the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), members of which played a significant role as mediators of the 1994 ceasefire agreement (see below for further details of this agreement). Ashley South, writing in 2008, observed how the KBC was seeking to meet gaps in state infrastructure, noting how "The KBC has a network of over 300 local churches in Kachin State. It runs several schools in remote areas, which the KIO and government education departments are unable to reach" (2008, p.193).

²⁸ Foreign missionaries were banned from Myanmar after 1966 (Sadan, 2013, p.379).

Perhaps even more important than the influence of Christianity, or the experience of a shared language, has been shared clan identities and a complex kinship system (Leach, 1954), which draws all members of the Kachin community—whether in Arunachal Pradesh, Yunnan, Kachin State, San Francisco or Tokyo—into an extended family network.²⁹ The tight relationships created through this system, which come with real social responsibilities, have provided the community with an enduring form of ‘social security’ which has helped sustain the ambitions of Kachin nationalism, even when living conditions for its adherents have been otherwise intolerable.

The late 1980s / early 1990s: From Crisis to Ceasefire

From the late 1970s onwards, Myanmar was on an inexorable slow march towards socio-economic collapse. In 1985 and again in 1987 (the year in which the United Nations recognised Myanmar as a Least Developed Country), a series of demonetisation measures were implemented. These devastated the economy, wiped out the savings of families across the country and triggered the collapse of Ne Win’s Socialist Party state. Popular demonstrations presented a new set of challenges to the struggling state. They erupted in Rangoon in late 1987 and continued there and in other urban areas sporadically into the following year despite occasional violent crackdowns. Given impetus by the appearance of General Aung San’s daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, at Shwedagon Pagoda on 26 August 1988, who called for democracy and restoration of the rule of law, the demonstrations grew in number and energy (South, 2008, p.44). However, on the afternoon of 18 September 1988, army leaders seized power, establishing the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) under the chairmanship of the army commander and Ne Win follower, General Saw Maung. Noting that the army’s first priority was the restoration of “law and order and peace and tranquillity” (Rangoon Home Service, Summary of World Broadcasts, BBC 19 Sept. 1988, quoted by Smith, 1991(1999), p.15), the armed forces set about crushing the protests resulting in the deaths of an estimated 10,000 people (Smith, 1991(1999), p.16). A similar number of people, largely students and political activists, fled to borderland areas under the control of ethnic nationalist armed opposition forces, where they were given

²⁹ The five main clans within the Kachin community are Marip, Maran, N’Hkum, and Lahpai, and Lahtaw. These clans are related by marriage and some cultural practices. Kachin anthropologist Maran La Raw has explained the organising framework in this way: “The structure-organizing principles shared by all Kachin social systems are: 1. patrilineal descent grouping; 2. exogamy; 3. *mayu-dama* marriage alliance system. That is, clan identity is traced through the male line, one does not marry into one’s own clan, and that exchange of women for marriage is one-way directed for each instance of exchange” (Maran, 2007, p.56).

shelter, training and medicine. Some were also given weapons (Callahan, 2007, p.15). Bertil Lintner has suggested that more than 1,000 Burmese students took refuge in Kachin Independence Army-held areas (1997, p.152).

Under re-assumed *Tatmadaw* control, the period 1988-92 witnessed fierce fighting in several border regions creating hundreds of thousands of refugees and exiles, including those gathered in diaspora communities in Thailand, Bangladesh and countries further abroad. 1989, in particular, saw a series of ethnically-motivated conflicts which brought about the collapse of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), a feature of Burma's national political life for some quarter of a century. These conflicts led to a new ethnic ceasefires policy initiated by Military Intelligence chief, General Khin Nyunt. The ceasefire agreements spread from a slow beginning to involve 17 main groups by the mid-1990s (the regime refused to negotiate with any joint fronts). Awarding ethnic opposition groups local autonomy over economic, social and local political affairs and the right to maintain arms, the agreements meant that the junta could pull back troops from former war zones and concentrate its units against remaining opponents (Callahan, 2007, p.13). For the leaders of these groups, the ceasefire agreements provided an opportunity to re-enter national politics after years in the "insurgency wilderness" (Smith, 1991(1999), p.40). Following the 1990 general election (which was won, by a landslide, by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party, which was then prevented from taking up rule) it was clear that such groups "had to be on the inside process of reform discussions which, many assumed, the NLD would sooner or later join" (Smith, 1991(1999), p.41).

In December 1989 the New Democratic Army-Kachin, which was formed largely of non-Jinghpaw Kachins who had originally defected to the CPB, agreed a ceasefire with the SLORC and was granted control over Kachin State Special Region-1, with its headquarters at Pang Wa in Chipwe Township (see Figure 3; Chipwe is indicated by the spelling "Chyi Hpwi"). A few years later KIA's Fourth Brigade which had succumbed to *Tatmadaw* pressure and split from the KIO, also agreed a separate truce in 1992. This group, the Kachin Defence Army, was allowed to maintain control over a large Kachin-populated area, north of Lashio, centred around Kutkai in northern Shan State (South, 2008, p.153).

The KIO's own ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government was formalised in Myitkyina, capital of Kachin State, on 24 February 1994, with the KIO ceasefire area officially designated Kachin State Special Region-2. Under the terms of the agreement:

the KIO retained control of some 15,000 square miles (39,000 sq. km) of territory, consisting of 20 demarcated zones, including a headquarters area along the China-Burma border; another area further to the south (Third Brigade); a zone to the north of the Kachin State capital of Myitkyina; and a large triangle of territory between the Mali Hka and the Nmai Hka rivers ('the triangle' – traditional homeland of the Jinghpaw). The KIO also continued to hold sway over a number of villages in northern Shan State, and along the Indian border. The population of these KIO-controlled areas was perhaps 300,000 people (South, 2008, p.155).

All major towns in the area, including Myitkyina, remained under government control as did about three-fifths of Kachin State, an arrangement which gave significant power and influence to the *Tatmadaw's* northern regional commander, "who oversaw and regulated most economic activity in the state and to whom the ceasefire groups were required to report" (Callahan, 2007, p.43).

1994 to 2011: A 'not-quite-peace' drives outwards migration

The ceasefire agreement, like others signed by the Burmese government with ethnic opposition groups, was a military truce not a political agreement and thus focussed on military matters: the territory under control of the group, the location of checkpoints, the number and location of soldiers and the location of military headquarters and liaison posts. As Tom Kramer has explained, "The regime insisted it was a temporary military government, and therefore not in a position to talk about politics. It told the groups to put their political demands forward at a National Convention, which was to produce a new constitution" (2009, p.13). One of the main criticisms of the ceasefire policy was that none of the agreements which came out of it "addressed the fundamental political and economic grievances that fuelled the insurgencies nor the enormous challenges faced by war victims trying to rebuild their lives" (Callahan, 2007, p.14). However, the ceasefire in Kachin State did produce a "not-quite-peace" (Callahan, 2007, p.4), during which infrastructural needs could start to be addressed and civil society organisations could emerge.

In northern Myanmar, while some groups like the former New Democratic Army-Kachin operated like an "armed syndicate" (Callahan, 2007, p.42), maintaining ties to the Burmese and Chinese governments and implicated in questionable business deals including logging (South, 2008, p.153), the KIO operated more like a "state-within-a-state" (Global Witness, 2005; Kramer, 2009, p.18). It received international donor support for its health and education programmes. South has noted that it operated 28 hospitals or health centres in 1997

and, by 2007, 10 hospitals, 65 clinics, as well as mobile health centres (South, 2008, p.191). The KIO Education Department administered 150 schools in 2005-06, including four high schools and 16 middle schools, teaching over 15,000 students. It also provided training to teachers through its teacher training college in Mai Ja Yang, on the Chinese border, 75 kilometres south of the KIO headquarters at Pajau. In the delivery of its quasi-governmental functions the KIO was supported by a number of civil society organisations. Many of these were focussed on the border towns of Mai Ja Yang and Laiza, Laiza being the largest KIO-controlled town and only official non-government-controlled border crossing in Kachin State. These locations became the epicentre for development activities led by the KIO and a range of local NGOs (South, 2008, p.194).

Important amongst Kachin NGOs emerging at this time was the Pan-Kachin Development Society (PKDS) established by the Kachin businessman Bawmwang La Raw. Bawmwang La Raw had made his fortune trading jade during the 1980s. PKDS ran projects in Thailand and in some KIO-controlled areas, including agricultural schemes, computer and English language courses, an HIV/AIDS programme and environmental, political and human rights training. In October 1999 the organisation opened a Pan-Kachin College at Mai Ja Yang, with donations from the KIO and prominent Kachin businessmen. The college sought to encourage “critical thinking and political discussion among the students, the best of whom [were] sometimes found scholarship places at further education institutes in India and Thailand” (South, 2008, p.193). In 2004 a dispute between Bawmwang La Raw and the KIO relating to an alleged coup attempt (Naw, 2004) caused the closure of the PKDS, including the college (*Burma Today News*, 2004).

Other important Kachin civil society organisations, which have been described in detail elsewhere (South, 2008, pp.191-194; Kramer, 2009, p.22), include the Metta Development Foundation, the Kachin Relief and Development Committee, the Kachin Women’s Association and the Shalom Foundation. The latter organisation was set up by the Reverend Saboi Jum who, in his previous position of General Secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention, had played a significant role in mediating ceasefire negotiations between the KIO and the Burmese government.

Kachin-run civil society organisations operating in the ceasefire period worked under difficult conditions to provide humanitarian, medical and educational assistance in the absence of central government support. Negotiators to the 1994 ceasefire agreement between

the Burmese government and the KIO, as with other ethnic ceasefires, had been under the illusion that development schemes such as the government's Border Areas Development Program would help support peace and reconciliation efforts until political talks could begin. It quickly became clear, however, that neither the government nor ceasefire groups had sufficient resources for the enormous tasks of community rehabilitation that were needed. This lack of resources was compounded by the absence of international aid for, as Martin Smith has noted, "All Western development aid had been cut off to Burma in 1988 in protest at the SLORC's assumption of power, and into the 21st century the regime continued to be treated as an international pariah by many governments and aid organisations in the West" (Smith, 1991(1999), p.42). This dire economic situation meant the KIO and civil society organisations entered business relationships which left them vulnerable to accusations of corruption and betrayal (South, 2008, p.156; Naw, 2004). In the case of the KIO and the KIA, accusations of autocratic decision-making as well as corruption led to the founding of a political exile group, the Kachin National Organisation (KNO), in 1999 (Mahkaw, 2016). The KNO became a critical source of opposition to the KIO, as well as offering support to vulnerable Kachin migrant workers and refugees living overseas (Mahkaw, 2016). More discussion of its activities is offered in 2.2.2, 'Three diaspora communities'.

Especially devastating to the region was the loss of KIO control over the region's important jade trade. This process had started with the *Tatmadaw's* targeted offensives in the area in the late 1980s and the introduction of free-market reforms resulting in jade concessions being sold to private investors, even in areas under KIO control (Linter, 1997, p.161). The trade centred on the mines at Hpakant, "the world's only jadeite deposits of any consequence" (ibid.). Once a key means of raising KIO income through taxation and the allocation of "digging tickets" (Lintner, 1997, p.165), after the ceasefire the KIO and its business partners struggled to compete for concessions with well-connected Chinese and other outside business people with access to greater financial and technical resources (South, 2008, pp.164; Skidmore and Wilson, 2007, p.279). In contrast to the hundreds of small independent companies that once operated in Hpakant, in 2009 the Kachin News Group reported that "now only about 30 companies are licensed to carry out joint mining ventures with the regime" (Kachin Development Networking Group, 2009). Where previously the mines had provided an important focus for a range of Kachin-led economic activities—as jade-diggers, jade-traders and those associated with catering and retail—these economic restrictions meant that employment in the mines became increasingly restricted to the physical work of manual

jade digging, usually as self-employed *yemase*, or stone foragers, often under dangerous and difficult conditions. Low levels of pay and desperate working and living conditions fuelled a surge in heroin use with associated rapidly-escalating levels of HIV infection (Kachin News Group, 2009).

At Hpakant and elsewhere in the region, the rapidly multiplying number of agencies operating in the new ceasefire context, the criss-crossing of the various authorities and “complicated governance situation amongst the different armed groups” (Thaung, 2007, p.275) created an economic vacuum in which the lines between legality and illegality were often unclear (Smith, 2007, p.42). The focus of much of the shadow economies was on the extraction of the area’s rich natural resources with dire consequences for the environment. While western business interests were largely forced to keep a wide berth,³⁰ Myanmar’s immediate neighbours were more willing to pursue a new strategy of “constructive engagement” with the regime, beginning with China and Thailand during 1988-89 and including Bangladesh and India by the 21st century (Smith, 2007, p.43). The outcome of these new relationships was a rash of natural resource extraction initiatives, the largest of which were in the energy field, including new gas pipelines and hydro-electric projects (Smith, 2007, p.44). For the Kachin community the most contentious of these was the proposed construction of a hydroelectric dam at Myitsone, near the symbolically-important confluence of the Mali Hka and Nmai Hka rivers (see 2.3, ‘The printed calendar and the development of a Kachin visual identity’). The social and environmental devastation caused by these natural resource extraction projects has been well-documented in a series of reports by environmental campaign groups Global Witness and Earthrights International, and by Kachin-led media and civil society organisations like the Pan Kachin Development Society, Kachin Development Networking Group and Kachin Women’s Association Thailand, amongst others.

The frustration felt by the Kachin community about the difficult economic situation and exploitation of local natural resources by non-local agencies was compounded by the increased presence and visibility of army battalions in the region. Between 1992 and 2006 the number of Burma Army battalions stationed in Kachin State increased from 26 to 41 and the number of artillery units increased from three to seven (Kachin Development Networking Group, 2007). Often underpaid (or not paid at all), soldiers were expected to levy local taxes to support themselves resulting in widespread cases of land confiscation and land-clearing as

³⁰ But not all: Ivanhoe Mines Ltd., a Canadian-owned company were the largest single foreign investor in Burma’s mining sector (Pan Kachin Development Society, 2004, p.60).

well as human rights abuses including rape (Callahan, 2007, p.44; Thaug, 2007, p.280). Moreover, there was a fear that the Burmese government was engaging in social engineering by encouraging the migration of ethnic Burman families into ethnic nationality-populated areas including through the establishment of several new villages north of Myitkyina (South, 2008, p.166).

While post-ceasefire conditions engendered a sense of cohesion amongst Kachin people living in northern Myanmar, with increased social and cultural freedoms facilitating an “undeniable revival in social mobility and energy” (Smith, 2016, p.71), the opportunities for Kachin people to engage in economic or political activities remained extremely limited. Alongside the growing sense of mistrust that the KIO leadership was using the ceasefire to establish business deals which brought personal profit rather than community development (Naw, 2004), families worried about their children’s future. Beyond high school, young people’s options were limited to joining the KIA or attending theological college so as to enter the church, in which very few opportunities for paid work existed. Myitkyina University was closed from 1996 until June 2000, leaving students in the Kachin area with the only option of undertaking poor-quality ‘distance learning’ courses with the University of Mandalay (Project Maje, 2001). The lack of opportunities also contributed to rapidly increasing rates of drug use amongst Kachin youth in urban areas, and a related rise in AIDS/HIV infection rates. For many families, outwards migration seemed like the only route which offered any hope.

In the short-term, many families sent their children and young people to metropolitan areas such as Yangon or Mandalay to attend school or university. Longer-term, those families that could raise the necessary resources pursued a route established by Burmese families from the late 1980s to send a family member to Japan, where a high demand for labour meant undocumented migrant workers were tolerated and could make remittances to their families back home. In mid-2004, there were an estimated ten thousand Burmese people living in Japan (Banki, 2006a). Transport to Japan and access to employment (albeit illegal) were provided by a Yangon-based agent (or human trafficker), who invariably charged a large fee. Individuals who undertook the journey was considered to have made a great personal sacrifice, as they then became the family’s “breadwinner” (Hkanhpa Tu Sadan, 15 December 2013), working long hours and living in crowded quarters with other migrant workers. One Bay Area interviewee noted that, while his own migration journey took him first to Saudi

Arabia, and then the United States, “initially I was trying to go to Japan ... because [I had] friends and relatives over there and they said ‘If you work in Japan you can make good money’” (Shadan Zau Aung, 24 March 2015).

Many of those pursuing the Japan route were in principle, refugees, although the country’s restrictive refugee policies prevented them being legally recognised as such (Banki, 2006b, pp.39-40). While members of other ethnic minorities in Myanmar were likely to seek refuge on the Thai-Myanmar border (for example the Karen and Karenni) or in Bangladesh (for example, the Rakhine and Rohingya), the Kachin tended to follow paths established by the Chin community, a largely Christian minority based in western Myanmar. From the late 1990s, with the aid of agents who organised transportation, young Kachin people began to make the overland journey from Myanmar across Thailand to Malaysia. A ‘pull’ factor for this journey was the presence of a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Kuala Lumpur, which had begun registering refugees and offering some refugees resettlement in a third country (see 2.2, ‘Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora’). In 2000, another group took the opportunity created by a ‘Guam-only’ visa waiver programme,³¹ to travel to this United States territory in the Pacific Ocean, where they applied for asylum and were subsequently resettled, mainly in Jacksonville, Florida, now home to one of the largest Kachin diaspora communities in the United States (Keefer, 2003).

Whether motivated by the desire for immediate refuge or for longer-term educational and economic opportunities, outwards migration undertaken by the Kachin community since the 1994 ceasefire agreement has generated a network of Kachin diaspora communities. The operations of the UNHCR in terms of third-country resettlement have been especially important in this process, establishing Kachin communities in Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and in Norway and Denmark. Further Kachin diaspora communities have formed in other places, for example, in the United Kingdom, Thailand and Singapore. These communities have become increasingly vocal and active regarding developments in their homeland, especially since the breakdown of the ceasefire agreement in 2011.

³¹ The Guam-Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Visa Waiver Program allows nationals of eligible countries (for example, Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea) to enter its territories without a special visa. Myanmar was removed from the list of eligible countries in 2001 (*Pacific Islands Report*, 2000).

Post-2011: The return of conflict

In the run-up to a planned general election, in 2009 the Burmese government announced a new Border Guard Force (BGF) scheme for all ceasefire groups. The scheme constituted a rushed attempt to absorb ethnic armed groups into the *Tatmadaw*, obligating them to give up their autonomy. Incorporation into the BGF was a necessary qualification of the 2008 Constitution and deemed essential to allow ethnic groups to participate in the 2010 elections. Following several extensions of the deadline for incorporation, it finally expired in September 2010, after which the government announced all ceasefires null and void. Government pressure on the KIO, which resisted incorporation of the KIA into the BGF,³² was brought to bear in a number of ways: through economic measures such as blocking Chinese border trade through the KIO's Laiza headquarters, political measures such as closing all but two of the KIO liaison offices in government-controlled areas and barring a Kachin political group (the Kachin State Progressive Party) from registering in and contesting the elections, as well as through referring to ceasefire groups as 'insurgents' in the state media. Most critically, in June 2011, it meant the resumption of conflict in Kachin State. Efforts by both sides to reduce military tension through a preliminary ceasefire agreement in 2013 came to nothing and, from 2014, renewed fighting broke out again. A 2013 report by the Kachin Women's Association Thailand stated that the fighting had created over 100,000 refugees and that 364 villages had been wholly or partially abandoned since 2011 (Kachin Women's Association Thailand, 2013). Having been prevented from crossing into China (Kachin Women's Association Thailand, 2013), many of those displaced by conflict remain in Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps along the Myanmar/China border. In many cases the Burmese government has hampered, or prevented, international agencies delivering aid to those in the IDP camps. These conditions have put pressure on locally-based populations and civil society organisations to meet refugee needs (Fortify Rights, 2018).

The escalation of military attacks on targets in the Kachin area in early 2018 was viewed by the international community as an opportunistic attempt to eradicate the KIA and its supporters while global attention was focussed on the genocide of Burmese Muslims and members of the Rohingya minority in the west of the country. The military's use of a group of villagers from Awng Lawt village in Tanai township as human shields prompted young Kachins to form an anti-war protest movement. In ways which self-consciously reproduced

³² Two other armed ethnic Kachin organisations, the New Democratic Army - Kachin (NDAK) and the Kachin Defence Army accepted the transition's terms and were incorporated into the BGF. As BGF are expected to operate in their locality, this brought ethnic Kachin into conflict with ethnic Kachin.

those of the global ‘Occupy’ movement, young protestors organised a large public march before staging a ‘sleep-in’ on the streets of Myitkyina (Tickner, Aung and Slow, 2018). Youth networks in Yangon and Mandalay undertook similar activities in solidarity (Naw, 2018). Several protestors were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly and criminal defamation (*The Irrawaddy*, 2018).

The experience of conflict and the suffering of IDPs, as well as the activities of in-country activists, have provided a catalyst for the mobilisation of diaspora communities. Whereas, I was told, diaspora communities had previously largely operated in isolation, by contrast diasporic Kachins talk of becoming “more connected with each other” after 2011 (Dean, 2016, p.230). The absence of state funding and government attempts to block international aid destined for IDP camps have been partly mitigated by the energetic fundraising efforts of diaspora communities, who have been raising funds to send to Kachin agencies supporting the camps. Members of Kachin diaspora communities have also assumed an activist role, organising demonstrations, protests and other political events to draw international attention to the conflict in northern Myanmar (see 2.2, ‘Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora’), as well as jointly signing letters addressed to key political leaders (Dean, 2016, p.226). As is explored in this study (in 2.4, ‘Kachin culture and new media’), Facebook and other digital media channels, including online news content issued from outside Myanmar, have provided critical mediums for sharing information and for forming a cohesive political position and international response.

In this respect it is clear that Kachin people, at home and overseas, have become increasingly proficient at making representations of themselves and their political interests and concerns. In the following section I consider how the entry of the James Henry Green collection into Brighton Museum—and then into the highly politicised environment of northern Myanmar in the late 1990s—set in motion the means for making different kinds of representations, made for different ends. I also begin to explore how museum engagements with members of the Kachin diaspora in London generated a new set of possibilities for cultural work.

1.5 Making representations: Museum interactions with Kachin communities

Introduction

In tracking the journeys taken by a collection of photographic images and textiles assembled by James Henry Green, this section seeks to highlight the different ends to which collections materials are deployed by museums and communities. I will also explore the “frictions” potentially generated by their intersection (Karp, et al., 2006). Originally created to supplement his military career, after Green’s death his collection would come to serve as part memorial (to Green and to British military intervention in what was then Burma) and part ethnographic survey. When, in 1992, the collection was transferred from Green’s home to Brighton Museum, thus moving from private ownership into public space, it would provide a vehicle for a museum curator to achieve his curatorial ambitions; ambitions which reflected broader sectoral concerns. Later, as photocopied and digital surrogates of Green’s photographic images were taken into the highly politicised arena of cultural activity in Kachin State, they became a focal point for the many tensions which surrounded cultural work in the years following ceasefire, including those around authority and access.

This section takes a chronological approach, tracking not the creation of the Green collection which has been documented elsewhere (Dell, 2000b), but what happens to it after its founder’s death in 1975. In examining the different uses made of this material it shows how, while museum practice in Europe and North America has been under pressure to become more accessible, user-oriented and reflexive, by contrast, in Myanmar, the political context which has framed local uses of Green’s collection has required that these remain under the control of a select group of gatekeepers. The interactions between these two spheres demonstrate the high stakes of the contact zone, and the “power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull” (Clifford, 1997, p.192) that are brought into play, as well as the “frictions” Karp et al. describe, generated through the “conjunctions of disparate constituencies, interests, goals, and perspectives” (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.2).

More recently, museum contact with the London-based Kachin community has generated a new set of opportunities for engaging with Green’s collection and with cultural institutions in the Kachin area, but the politicisation of culture remains very much in evidence. This is

especially the case given the return of conflict to the Kachin region from 2011. Coming at the same time as debates about the “moral agency” of museums (Marstine, 2011, p.10), these interactions have caused museum staff to consider the institution's responsibilities to a community represented within its collections. How these might be met is discussed further in 3.3, ‘What might a diaspora-appropriate museum practice look like?’.

Ethnography at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery 1973 – 1991

A published critique of Brighton Museum’s ethnography gallery as it appeared in 1991 offers an insight into what has been described as the “intellectual crisis” faced by museums at the time (Harrison, 1993, p.160). The critique constitutes the response of the Museum’s new Keeper of Ethnography to the Museum’s displays of ethnographic material, which had little changed since the mid-1970s. Having come to Brighton straight from the heady intellectual environment of London’s Museum of Mankind (MoM), Anthony Shelton was dismayed by the outmoded displays and the negative connotations they seemed to convey:

Brighton Museum's ethnography gallery... combines a blackened, dimly-lit exhibition space with wall cases decorated by an assortment of dark cloths, animal print wallpaper and mirrored plinths. The gallery, due to be refurbished this year, suggests a subtle ranking of cultures by the use of backdrops. Connotations of savagery produced by the animal print paper used to display the African collections, reinforce the narrative classification of peoples. African and North American collections are divided by tribal affiliation, while Asian material is identified by nation. The exhibition therefore provokes a contrast between tribal and national cultures. Within this division, each African society is represented by specific and different manufactures - the Yoruba by sculpture, the Hausa by domestic clothing, South and East Africa by weapons and shields. Such an approach encourages the notion that material specialization corresponds to specific psychological dispositions: the notion that some societies are made up of religiously devoted artists, while others have a settled, practical and decorative flair. Visual display criteria and narrative mutually reinforce four messages:

1. Non-Western societies are insular, ahistorical and caught in the web of tradition that buffers them from change.
2. Societies can be divided between African and American tribal cultures and Asian national cultures with the implication that one is superior to the other.
3. Cultures are identifiable by not only the styles but the types of manufactures they produce.

4. Certain cultures are more adept at certain activities than others.

(Shelton, 1992, p.14)

Shelton's criticisms reveal the influence of an intensifying debate about the 'poetics and politics' of museum practice. A body of scholarship which had emerged since the late 1980s had drawn attention to the implications of museum's representational practices, especially where these concerned the material culture of the non-western or indigenous 'other' (Bennett, 1988; Clifford, 1988; Karp and Lavine, 1991; Karp, Kreamer and Lavine, 1992). Where previously the museum had been understood in purely functional terms—as a repository for material culture which could be acquired, preserved, displayed and interpreted in ways which were value-free and could straightforwardly advance 'knowledge'—increasingly it was being exposed as an important site for the promotion of certain elite interests and ideologies.

At the MoM, which he had joined in 1983 as a research assistant in the America's section, Shelton had found himself at the heart of these intellectual debates. Shelton's MoM collaborators included Michael O'Hanlon, Malcolm McLeod, John Mack and Brian Durrans whose preference for a critically-inflected museum practice was apparent in exhibitions such as McLeod's *Lost Magic Kingdoms* (with Eduardo Paolozzi, 1986), Mack's *Madagascar: Island of the Ancestors* (1987) and *Emil Torday and the Art of the Congo* (1990-91), and a 1986 conference Durrans organized on the politics of representation (Houtman, 2009, p.7). Shelton later described his time at MoM as "extraordinarily rich and full of experimentation in exhibition design and interpretation" (Houtman, 2009, p.7). Nevertheless, the tension caused by this intellectual crisis could be felt even here, with Shelton complaining that "in the majority of cases curators were suspicious of theoretical or critique-based interpretation, which they dismissed in favour of uncritical empirical scholarship" (Houtman, 2009, p.7).

Shelton's Brighton Museum appointment was made as his predecessor George Bankes, the Museum's first ever Keeper of Ethnography, left to take up a post at Manchester Museum. Bankes, who had joined the Brighton team in 1971, had a background in South American archaeology. On starting at Brighton and finding the Museum's "Native Art Gallery ... full of half completed showcases and rubbish," he had initiated its redevelopment.³³ The redevelopment focused on the uses of a diverse range of everyday, as well as ceremonial,

³³ George Bankes, personal communication with the author, 21 February 2013.

objects (Shelton, 1993, p.2). The new display opened in 1975. and followed a structuralist functionalist approach; a popular interpretative strategy amongst museums at the time, especially in the presentation of ethnographic collections. Informed by the writings of Marcel Mauss, Bronisław Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, structural functionalism sought to understand how social structures persist through time. Social structure was understood as the “articulation of a set of clearly definable and directly observable social institutions which were considered to constitute the basic framework of the society concerned. The function of such an institution was formally defined as the part that it played in the maintenance of the system as a whole” (Leach, 1982, p.32). Likewise, material culture was seen to have a function in the society which produced it and this formed the basis on which it was displayed in museums. In viewing society as bounded social systems, structural functionalism enabled the packaging of material culture on an ethnic basis, thus lending itself neatly to interpreting collections amassed in a colonial context. While Shelton argued that, at Brighton, such an approach made the societies featured appear “insular, ahistorical and caught in the web of tradition” (1992, p.14), Bankes justified his curatorial approach by insisting that it was “important to show that there were distinct cultural differences between peoples” (1992, p.23).

Wanting to make his mark on a gallery which had little changed in nearly two decades, Shelton secured some initial funds from the Museums and Galleries Commission for this purpose and began an active programme of new collecting. In advance of the redevelopment project Shelton undertook a survey of the state of ethnography in local and regional museums across the United Kingdom. He was shocked by what he found. Not only did the chronic underfunding of museums appear to especially impact upon ethnographic collections, the position of which he described as “dismal and sadly neglected” (1991a), Shelton was also frustrated to find “outdated and sometimes racist ethnographic exhibitions in the UK’s provincial museums that had outlived perspectives already discredited within the university system” (2013, p.14). He wrote at the time that:

There are few other areas where the effects of lethargy and neglect have been more acutely felt than in ethnography displays, where under-capitalisation, lack of specialised expertise and problems of contextualisation have threatened the preservation of materials and compromised the commitment of serious curators to provide appropriate settings for their collections (1992, p.11).

Negotiations over the James Henry Green collection 1991 - 1995

At this point, eager to make visible changes to museum ethnography at Brighton Museum, Shelton began a dialogue with the executors of the estate of James Henry Green. The Green collection would become a vehicle for achieving his curatorial ambitions.

James Henry Green had served as a recruiting officer for the Burma Rifles in what was then Burma in the period 1918-1935. For much of this time he was based in the north of the country. An amateur anthropologist, Green was fascinated by the ethnic diversity he saw around him and motivated to record traditional ways of life that he considered to be under threat from outside forces (Dell, 2000b). He took some 1,400 photographs, many of the appearance and social, cultural and spiritual practices of minority groups in the region, and acquired examples of textiles. Much of his work was undertaken in the Kachin area meaning that this group is especially well-represented in the collection (Sadan, 2000). Green's anthropological research, which dovetailed with his professional work of assessing indigenous communities for their military potential, resulted in a dissertation submitted to the Anthropology Department of Cambridge University in 1934: "The Tribes of Upper Burma North of 24° Latitude and their Classification". The dissertation was illustrated with his photographs, which also featured in public lectures he gave and in the popular press, bolstering both his professional and personal profile (Dell, 2000b).

Following Green's death in 1975, in August 1977 a charity was established—the Burma Rifles Charitable Trust,³⁴ —and Green's collection of photographs, textiles, books and papers became the focus of a proposed memorial to the Burma Rifles, intended to:

keep alive the memory of the officers and men who served from the annexation of Pegu in 1852 (when the Arakan Light Infantry, the first Burma unit to serve the Empire, was formed) until the grant of independence in 1947 and to maintain the mutual regard which existed between Britain and Burma during those years (Anon, 1977).

The memorial was intended to form part ethnographic survey—"a museum for the storing and exhibition of objects illustrating the customs and habits of the various races of Burma from which the men of the Burma Rifles and other locally-raised forces were drawn"—and

³⁴ The Trust's name was changed to the James Henry Green Charitable Trust by deed of amendment dated 5 July 1993.

part commemoration of military activity as the trustees expressed their intention to seek out “articles of uniform and equipment, weapons, medals, photographs, diaries, etc., relating to Burma units” (Anon, 1977). The museum was situated at Green’s former home in Shepherd’s Hill, Merstham, Surrey, which was still occupied by his wife, Dorothy Green. A 1977 paper notes that: “the existing exhibits are now being catalogued and certain work is being put in hand in order to make the premises suitable for use as a museum”.

It is unclear what happened in terms of the development of this activity in the period between the establishing of the Burma Rifles Charitable Trust in 1977 and a meeting between John Govett (chair of the trustees), Richard Marks (Director of Royal Pavilion & Museums) and Anthony Shelton that took place on 27 June 1991 but it is likely that with Mrs Green in failing health and living in a rest home, the other trustees were concerned about the longer-term security of the collection. They started to make some initial enquiries for its potential accommodation within an established museum service. In a letter to Marks dated 9 September 1991, Govett explained:

Although John Emmett and I have been explaining to Mrs Green the impracticality of keeping the Burma Rifles Charitable Trust’s collection in its present location in her unoccupied house in Merstham, she is still reluctant to accept this fact, though she does accept that at the very least the Burma Rifles Museum should be administered by a larger museum. John Emmett and I hope to make further progress on this in due course (1991).

Shelton was quick to pursue the opportunity presented. With the future of Green’s collection undecided, he advised that a full formal record of it would be an essential precondition of its acceptance by any museum. Shelton recommended Louise Tythacott, a student of South East Asian studies recently returned from undertaking research in Hong Kong, to perform the services of registrar. Over the period July to November 1991 Tythacott worked for the Trust, in the house, creating a register of the textiles and associated artefacts in the Green collection (Green’s photographs were already in good order). The intention was primarily to turn the textiles—an undifferentiated mass of garments from unknown sources which were scattered throughout the house—along with other objects, into a museum collection.³⁵ In interview, Tythacott recalled how she had been given an example of a British Museum accessions

³⁵ Green himself made no reference to his textile collection and it is likely that the formation and preservation of this body of material was motivated by Dorothy Green. Later alterations made to some textile pieces suggest they were adapted to be serve as western-style garments or as home furnishings (Dell and Dudley, 2003, pp. 17, 20, 26).

register entry form by Shelton, and had created an equivalent entry for the 230 items, including a detailed line drawing (Tythacott, 20 November 2014).

In August 1991, while Tythacott was undertaking the registration of the collection, Shelton wrote to John Govett noting that he had visited Green's home and:

was quite surprised to find how large the collection really is and the extent of the photographs and written records. Taken together, the collection and archives are certainly an important resource; and now that the registration is approaching completion, you will have to decide what to do with the photographs and other documents (1991b).

Shelton then set out his own pitch for the collection,

The Burmese collection has some absolutely superb material that is comparable to the most outstanding objects that would be in any future exhibition here at Brighton or, I am certain, elsewhere. It would be a great public loss if this material were to disappear into storage and I would advise that we prioritise exhibiting the items along with our own sculptures and textiles from Burma if the collections were to come to us (1991b).

In support of his pitch, Shelton noted that he had prepared “a report on how the Brighton collections, and associated archives and library, could be absorbed by the proposed Green Centre for Ethnography”, which was with the director Richard Marks for his consideration. Shelton's enthusiasm for the Green collection (and the investment which might accompany it) appears to have been shared by Marks, who wrote to Govett noting that, as a result of “our negotiations with yourself and the Burma Rifles Charitable Trust, we wish to give a high priority to the development of ethnography at Brighton” (Marks, 1991).

Shelton's report—*A Green Centre for Ethnography: A Museum for the 21st Century*—reveals the extent of his curatorial ambition (1991a). He proposed using the Burma Rifle Trust Fund to establish a “regional Museum of Ethnography”, “named after Colonel Green” and with activities that reflected “many of his life's interests” (Shelton, 1991a). The Centre, Shelton suggested, would have ten principal objectives, the first being “to devise and construct innovative, permanent exhibition galleries devoted to the arts of Africa, America, Asia and the Pacific”. The second was “a temporary exhibition programme” which would include devising touring exhibitions for the region. Further objectives included the creation of educational resources and activities, “multi-media events”, a centre for the research and conservation of ethnographic artefacts, a research library and a series of printed catalogues.

The Centre would also provide a stimulus for collection development with a new “inter-disciplinary focus” (Shelton, 1991a, pp.6-11).

In arguing the case for the proposed Centre Shelton also constructed a case for the value of museum ethnography in the context of an emerging global culture in which “a much improved knowledge about the nature and relationship between different cultural traditions will be necessary,” ensuring ethnography would become an “applied subject essential to any general education” (Shelton, 1991a, p.3). In this context the very conceptualisation of ethnography, he suggested, would be subject to revision and transformation:

The subject itself will undergo significant changes; exhibitions will not only be for aesthetic contemplation or consist of historically stagnant cultural contextualisations but will document the adventures of ideas, their meetings, juxtapositions, absorptions, reflections and reformulations which have formed part of the ongoing conversation between the West and the non-West for the past 2000 years. The strict division between the West and the non-West will itself become meaningless as it becomes increasingly apparent that neither of their histories can be written without reference to the other. To avoid the fragmentation of our own consciousness of the world and alienation from it, an ethnographic imagination will be a fundamental pre-condition for a multi-ethnic society (1991a, p.3).

Between August 1991 and February 1992, Shelton’s ambitious proposal was significantly revised, possibly under Marks’ advice. Considerably shorter and less discursive than the 26-page original, while still seeking to establish a regional centre for ethnography with the same ten originally stated aims, the revised proposal puts greater emphasis on Green and his collection, for example: “The Green collection would establish Asia as the most important region represented in the Museum and identify it as a focus for future research,” and “The Green Centre for Ethnography will provide an appropriate monument to the work and life of one such man” (Anon, 1992a, p.1). The estimated total cost of renovation and redevelopment for the proposed venue for the Centre³⁶ exceeded £500,000, with an estimated annual revenue cost of £78,000. On 25 February 1992 Marks wrote to Govett with “an update of developments”. In order to begin negotiations in a climate marked by “financial problems experienced by local government” Marks notes, he requests a financial commitment from the Trust, ideally a £100,000 investment as well as an agreed annual contribution (Marks, 1992a).

³⁶ The site suggested was Holy Trinity Church in Duke Street, Brighton which, since 1996, has been a contemporary art venue (Fabrica).

Govett's written response, dated 17 March 1992, reported that trustees had come to the view that the project was "so ambitious as to be unlikely to secure adequate long term funding, and that there would therefore be a very real risk of large sums of money being spent only for the project never to come to fruition" (Govett, 1992). He suggested that, instead of creating a centre in a separate building, that part of Brighton Museum be given over to displaying some of the Green collection. Govett further proposed an annual award of £40,000 which could "embrace expenditure relating to promotion, display, research and publication, and would not need to be confined to Burma, though some emphasis on South East Asia might be desirable" (Govett, 1992).

The next letter from Marks to Govett made light of any disappointment felt by museum staff, noting that "we are delighted that you and the other Trustees have taken such a positive and generous attitude to the establishment of the Green Centre for Ethnography" (1992b). While he acknowledged limitations of space in the museum, this, Marks suggested, could be overcome by the re-designation of two existing galleries, which:

would more than double the present area given to ethnography and provide adequate space to exhibit the Green Collection and more of the exhibition quality material presently in store, as well as provide a meeting and study room, which would be essential for the activities proposed in our original proposal (Marks, 1992b).

In further revised proposals dated June 1992 the emphasis fell on the redevelopment of the existing ethnography gallery and a former archaeology gallery as phase one (Anon, 1992b). The first space would "include a permanent exhibition based on comparative themes (e.g. worship, architecture, power and authority, etc.) and a temporary exhibition area. Part of the Green collection to be temporarily exhibited in this gallery" (Anon, 1992b, p.1). The second space would provide "a permanent ethnographic exhibition on the life, times and motivation behind four or five exceptionally important collectors, with a prominent position given to Colonel Green to be mounted in front gallery" (Anon, 1992b, p.1). Phase two of the project would, it was proposed, establish annual programming including a series of temporary exhibitions, catalogues, an annual conference, "low budget research and collecting trips to Burma, South East Asia and other areas prioritised in the section's collecting policy", educational resources and events (Anon, 1992b, p.2). The proposal was agreed to and at some

point in the second half of 1992 or first half of 1993 the Green collection was packed and transported to Brighton.

The redevelopment project would provide Shelton with an opportunity to visibly enact a critical museology and to progress his aspiration to “place Brighton at the forefront of museum ethnography and non-western art studies in Europe” (Shelton, 1993, p.4). In developing the design and interpretation of these new galleries, Shelton was responding to many of the concerns of the sector at the time. These included navigating the influence of postmodernist and poststructuralist theory, which had questioned the legitimacy of museums to maintain positions of monological authority. These theories had drawn attention to how meaning and authority were constructed within the museum. Similarly, the work of literary theorists working in these traditions, such as Roland Barthes, emphasised the extent to which readers made their own meanings from texts. Barthes’ work was brought into the museum sector by theorists such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, who proposed that “meanings are made by the reader at the moment of reading, and there is no guarantee that what was meant by the writer will be what is construed by the reader” (1997, p.5, see also Falk and Dierking, 2000). Hooper-Greenhill also called on museums to recognise “that there is no single valid view of the world but that many perspectives exist, and that reality is correspondingly partial and fragmentary” (1997, p.10) and thus that museums “have the potential to use their collections and their educational spaces to develop ways of developing, presenting and celebrating culturally diverse perspectives” (1997, p.10). In this Hooper-Greenhill was echoing the earlier words of Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine whose seminal edited volume, *Exhibiting Cultures* (1991), amongst other things called for “experiments in exhibition design that try to present multiple perspectives or admit the highly contingent nature of the interpretations offered” (1991, p.7).

The growing interest in issues of ‘cultural diversity’ in museums in the 1990s was partly the result of the booming field of visitor studies (Bicknell and Farmelo, 1993), which had identified that “museum visiting in the UK remain[ed] primarily a white upper/upper-middle class pastime” (Eckstein and Fiest, 1992, p.77). These findings spurred self-conscious attempts in the sector to broaden and diversify audiences, a process which would involve “consultation, listening and sympathetic negotiation” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1997, p.7).

The calls for a more reflexive and inclusive approach to exhibition making were evident in the development of the two new galleries at Brighton Museum. A workshop on the 'Politics of Exhibitions' was attended by "a wide variety of people, including representatives of Brighton's ethnic communities, special interest groups, teachers and local politicians" (Shelton, 1993, p.3). A series of lectures and seminars on Critical Museology were held at the University of Sussex and students undertook a survey of visitor responses to displays in the existing gallery.

The Cultures Gallery opened on 5 June 1993 in the space formerly known as the Native Art Gallery. It included a modest space for temporary exhibitions, which at the time of opening until September 1994 featured 'Burmese textiles from the James Green Collection', a selection of textiles accompanied by reproduced Green photographs. The Green Gallery of Non-Western Art & Archaeology opened on 30 September 1994 in the former Archaeological and Sussex Folk Life Gallery spaces. Focusing on collectors, it included a display dedicated to Green.

The Cultures Gallery in particular attracted attention within the sector for its radical interpretative approach. In place of the usual modes of presenting ethnography via cultural group or region, the Gallery adopted a comparative anthropology approach. Objects were organised by "activities, including performance, exchange, feasting, worship, etc., as well as subject categories such as gender, ancestors, strangers and power"; subjects felt to be "less ethnocentric than themes based on firm European notions of, say, religion, politics or society" (Shelton, 1993, p.3). The gallery sought to "celebrate cultural diversity" but by "comparing aspects of Western and non-Western cultures", it also intended to "emphasise similarities as well as differences": "Instead of treating objects as curiosities the new gallery will present them as cultural and artistic achievements that deserve the same regard as is reserved for Western material culture and art preserved in museums" (Shelton, 1993, p.3). In echoing the sector's interest in the visitor experience and role in meaning-making, Shelton sought to use the interpretation in both gallery spaces to "empower visitors to read the exhibition in different ways to the dominant reading code provided by the curator" and the galleries were intended to "address various audiences at one of a number of levels depending on time, interest and orientation" (Shelton, 1993, p.3).

Over the next two years, Shelton continued to pursue a critical museology. With the support of the Trust, who maintained an annual award of £35,000 in support of the section's "ethnographic projects" (Anon, 1992c),³⁷ Shelton directed a number of innovative display and exhibition projects as well as collecting initiatives.³⁸ His legacy was not only to establish Brighton Museum as a site for ambitious and experimental approaches to museum practice concerning ethnographic collections, but also to establish an ongoing financial relationship with the James Henry Green Charitable Trust (as the Burma Rifles Trust was renamed in 1993).

Museum work with the Kachin community 1996 - 1999

In 1995 Anthony Shelton left his role at Brighton to become the Keeper of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum. While Shelton had used the annual Green investment to commission collecting initiatives in places as diverse as Cote D'Ivoire, Australia, Vietnam and South West China, no activity had actually been undertaken in Myanmar which had been felt to be off limits. This was no doubt due in part to the international press coverage given to the 1988 uprising and its brutal quashing by the Burmese government, as well as the implementation of international sanctions (Dudley, 2003). However, contact had been established with some Burmese individuals living in the United Kingdom, including at least one exiled member of a former Shan ruling family (Dell and Dudley, 2003, pp.152-155).

In 1996 the museum appointed Elizabeth Dell as its new Keeper of World Art. Dell's experiences of working as an academic in South Africa gave her a different perspective on the Green collection and during the eight years she worked for the organisation she would take its development in a very different direction. While her tenure also included involvement in a major gallery redevelopment project, under her oversight the section's emphasis shifted from her predecessor's focus on exhibitionary activity, to one focused on collections research, documentation and digitisation activities and on engagement with a specific set of 'source community' representatives in Myanmar. Encouraged to give more consideration to the Green collection—the general feeling amongst trustees being that it had not been given

³⁷ Amongst the conditions of the loan was the requirement that "The ethnography gallery in the Council's Museum will display a minimum of 15-20% of the Green Collection at any one time" (Anon, 1992c).

³⁸ Exhibitions and displays over the period in which Anthony Shelton was in post at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery included *Epic, Dream, Satire: Puppet Theatre in Asia and Europe* (1991); *Kinyozì: The Art of African Hairstyles* (1993); *Hold. Recent Works by Shirley Chubb* (11 March-2 April 1995); *peep*, an installation by Sonia Boyce (28 April-31 July 1995) and *Fetishism: Visualising Power and Desire* (29 April-2 July 1995).

enough attention by Shelton—Dell would also develop an awareness of how the museum’s activities, and her own as its advocate, could play a role in the wider Myanmar pro-democracy movement.

While teaching at the University of Witwatersrand (“one of the most politicised universities in the country” (Dell, 6 April 2014)), Dell had felt keenly the frustrations of working under the international academic boycott made in response to apartheid, noting that “there was so much happening on the ground in South Africa that international academics couldn’t engage with” (ibid.), and as a former doctoral student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, she was also aware of some existing academic partnerships between individuals in Britain and Myanmar. Motivated by these experiences and keen to use the Trust’s funding in ways which directly benefited the Green collection, Dell reported at the Trust’s annual general meeting in May 1996 that “in publication and research, a renewed emphasis shall be placed on South East Asia”, adding that, “While the political situation in Burma makes research interests in the area at best complicated, the Keeper feels that, under advice from a number of specialists in the field, it is possible to pursue research projects within Burma”. Initial proposed activities included a programme of collecting textiles through fieldwork in Burma, a “celebratory exhibition of textiles arising out of the Green collection” and a “CD ROM development for the archiving of and public access to the Green collection of photographs” (Dell, 1996).

Dell’s association with SOAS brought her into contact with Mandy Sadan (née Pearson), a Southeast Asia Art & Archaeology MA student. Sadan was part of a SOAS student group visit to the museum where Dell showed the group some of Green’s images. In 1996, having been offered work as an English language teacher by the British Council in Yangon, Sadan took with her some 300 photocopies of Green’s images. Her investigations into ‘local’, Kachin interpretations of these photographs became the basis of her MA dissertation and, later, her doctoral thesis (2007a).

In late 1996 Dell made her first visit to Myanmar accompanied by Sandra Dudley, an Oxford University researcher whose doctoral research had been undertaken within a Karenni refugee camp on the Thai/Myanmar border and so was highly attuned to issues around ethnic politics. Part of the aim of the trip was to undertake field collecting of locally-produced textiles to

enhance the Green collection at Brighton Museum. To this end, Dell and Dudley visited Yangon, Mandalay, Amarapura, Inle Lake, Kalaw and Kengtung. Following contacts established by Sadan they also travelled to Myitkyina, capital of Kachin State, to meet with individuals engaged in cultural research. Like Sadan, Dell was keen to explore the possibility of securing ‘local’ interpretations of Green’s photographic images through ‘photo-elicitation’, a qualitative research technique which was well-established in the social sciences, including anthropology (Collier and Collier, 1986), but which had only more recently come to the interest of scholars working with visual archives in museums.

Dell’s interest in developing a relationship between Brighton Museum and cultural researchers in Myanmar was highly unusual. While the museum sector was beginning to consider its responsibilities to ‘communities’ more generally (Karp, Kreamer and Lavine, 1992), and to ‘source communities’ specifically (Clifford, 1997), Dell’s efforts to navigate these in the highly politicised environment of Myanmar was extraordinary. As noted, this commitment was a direct consequence of Dell’s experiences in South Africa, and her sense that “within the country there would be people wanting to progress things, needing contact ... *not* supporting the government but ... not having a choice in the matter [of their imposed isolation]” (Dell, 6 April 2014), as well as the resources made available through the Green Trust’s support.

In making their visit to Kachin State just two years after the ceasefire agreement was signed by the Kachin Independence Organisation and the Burmese government, it was evident to Dell and Dudley that the climate remained difficult for conducting cultural research. Those activities that were able to take place did so largely under the auspices of the quasi-official cultural committees established for each of the six recognised Kachin sub-groups. These committees managed the group’s cultural representations, including members’ participation at the large-scale traditional dance festivals (*manau*) and the circumscribed forms of ‘traditional’ dress associated with each group (Sadan, 2003, pp.169-177, see also my discussion of a 2002 ‘Nung’ calendar in 2.3.2). That the role and interests of these committees went beyond the purely ‘cultural’ was made clear in Sadan’s observation that they had to be “registered with the local SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) and [have] their activities closely monitored” (Pearson, 1997). It was also clear, Sadan later suggested, that some members used the committee structure “as a means of preserving their

own cultural identity [as well] as a cover for other work that may best suit their interests” (Sadan, 15 December 2013). As active agents for the preservation and promotion of Kachin culture, albeit often with a strongly nationalist ideology, these committees would be important to the development of Brighton Museum’s cultural research activities, in particular the Kachin Jinghpaw Cultural Committee, members of which Dell and Dudley met with in Myitkyina in December 1996.

The Kachin Jinghpaw Cultural Committee already knew about the Green collection through its contact with Sadan and members were keen to see if museum support could be secured for the committee’s own research activities. Dudley’s notes from the meeting, which include transcriptions of presentations by committee members, make it clear that the meeting was led by the committee who had a clear agenda:

The situation continually deteriorates and history is unwritten; people are unable to continue traditional new crop festivals, funerals, weddings and other ceremonies at which ‘priests’ traditionally recite oral literature, sometimes for several days at a time. Hence, oral traditions are disappearing. Problems are shortage of food and money, the need to recite oral traditions, and the need for the freedom to organise a cultural research programme – this latter is not political but is nonetheless prohibited politically. Outside support is needed (Dudley, 1996).

One ambition of the committee was to establish its own museum, although the way in which this ambition was expressed was revealing of the highly contested, and potentially divisive nature of any representation of ethnic identity which could be made in the area at this time, as Dudley’s notes recall:

The Committee wishes to set up its own ‘museum’ (it is unclear exactly what they mean by this) as they find the present [government-run] Myitkyina Museum unsatisfactory, because it includes many peoples other than Kachin (e.g. many Shan groups - who are resident in Kachin State!) (Dudley, 1996).

The chair of the Kachin Jinghpaw Cultural Committee, Pungga Ja Li, had been recording and transcribing the recitations of animist priests for several years. Traditionally Kachin people had maintained an oral culture and the lengthy memorised recitations of animist priests (*joiwa dumsa*), spoken in an archaic ritual language and transmitted down the generations, offered a rich source of data about Kachin history, tradition and belief systems (see, for example, Sadan, 2007a, 2007b, 2012). Ja Li’s research had previously benefited from the patronage of Kachin jade businessman Yup Za Hkawng through a specially-formed ‘Yup Uplift Committee’, which was formed of a group of elders connected with the Kachin Baptist

Church. However, as described in 1.4, one outcome of the ceasefire agreement, which facilitated the exploitation of natural resources in Kachin State by the military government and its cronies, was that the jade industry was taken under national government control thus removing a vital source of income to the Kachin community and reducing the ability of individuals like Yup Za Hkawng to patronise cultural research (Sadan, 2013, p.424). The committee, then, were looking for new sources of support.

In a report to the museum, Sadan describes Ja Li as “one of the key figures for cultural research in Kachin State,” making him ideally positioned to provide a ‘local’ interpretation of Green’s photographs (Pearson, 1997). A talented linguist, with an extensive knowledge of Kachin languages, Ja Li was formerly a Baptist pastor and a professor at Kachin Theological College as well as a member of the committee. He gave up his church post in the early 1990s, to focus on cultural research and his archive of recordings. Sadan noted the tension between the animist focus of Ja Li’s research and the emphatically Christian nationalist ideology being promoted by the Kachin Independence Organisation and Kachin Baptist Convention. While there were some in the Kachin community who recognised the value of *joiwa dumsa* recitations in providing evidence of a distinctive Kachin culture to set against the perceived attempts of the Burmese government to ‘Burmanise’ the country, there were many others who felt an exploration of an animist past had no place in a Christian present:

[There was] very much a political agenda in all this and [it was] very explicit at this time when you talk[ed] to them. They felt that ... their culture was being wiped out, [that] there was no form of self-expression and that if they wanted to actually provide a means of invigorating culture as a source of politics, that it had to come from this source. In that sense they’re also reacting against a lot of the movement within the Kachin Baptist Convention itself of the younger kind of missionary group, that wanted to see all this evidence of past, non-Christian culture obliterated (Sadan, 15 December 2013).

For these reasons Ja Li was careful to align his research with a Christian ideology:

Initially [Ja Li] used his missionising work as the forum for cultural research. He would record animist priests and would use the recording to help convert the person to Christianity by playing it back and closely analysing what was said and recontextualising it in a contemporary Christian way. He was also an active promoter of the idea of continuity of tradition from animist past to Christian present as a means of retaining pride in ‘traditional’ Kachin culture whilst ‘modernising’ it (Pearson, 1997).

However, it is clear that Ja Li’s research also had the potential to disturb the fragile political façade being created by Kachin nationalists, as well as to arouse the suspicions of Burmese

government officials, and Sadan describes “an atmosphere of great caution and distrust in the [Kachin] region making it a very difficult area to engage in research” (Pearson, 1997). Possibly for that reason, when the museum entered into partnership with Ja Li with an agreement that it would support his work on the *joiwa dumsa* recordings in exchange for commentary on Green’s photographs, the work took place in Yangon rather than Myitkyina. This process, for which Sadan served as facilitator, took 18 months (September 1997 to April 1999) and resulted in commentaries on some 50 Green photographs; the duplication of Ja Li’s recordings (audio and photographic) for archiving;³⁹ a number of *joiwa dumsa* recitations transcribed and translated into colloquial Jinghpaw; one—the *Lanyi* (a wedding recitation, chosen as it was felt to be “the least contentious in terms of the Christian community” (Sadan, 15 December 2013))—also translated to English and published; new video, oral and photographic recording of an animist funeral in Shwegu (Bhamo, Kachin State) in April 1998 by Hkanhpa Tu Sadan, Naw Tawng and Saw Loe Eh Soe, and a new photographic record commissioned for the museum documenting a 1999 expedition into the Northern Triangle by the same.

In undertaking this activity, Pungga Ja Li and Mandy Sadan were supported by other individuals including an administrative assistant, another Kachin elder and two Kachin students. One of the latter was Hkanhpa Tu Sadan, a Yangon university student heavily involved in cultural and political activities. In interview he recalled how, as the youngest son growing up in the “pure Jinghpaw” village of Du Ka Htawng near Myitkyina, it was his responsibility to maintain the cultural and spiritual heritage of his family (H.T. Sadan, 15 December 2013). As a student at Yangon University, he was the secretary of its Kachin literature and culture committee (*Jinghpaw Laili Laika hte Htungking Hpung*), “the only culture board organisation officially recognised by the government because it [was] part of the higher education department” (ibid.), which led cultural events and published a magazine (*Hparat Ning Hkawng*). Like many others involved in Kachin cultural activities, Hkanhpa Tu Sadan was also politically active, undertaking underground work for the Kachin Independence Army amongst other things (H.T. Sadan, 2016). Now living in the UK, he is the General Secretary of the Kachin National Organisation, a political organisation formed in 1999 by Kachin political activists living in exile (Mahkaw, 2016).

³⁹ This appears to have entailed putting audio tapes on CD. A report from Sadan notes that “The Museum has copies of all Sara Li’s material, with his agreement” (Pearson, 1999).

If the material being worked on by Ja Li, with Mandy Sadan and Hkanhpa Tu Sadan and others in Yangon was potentially problematic in itself, even more complex and sensitive was the process of undertaking collaborative work in Burma in the late 1990s.⁴⁰ Yangon was a focal point for ongoing political unrest including the inevitable tensions promoted by Visit Myanmar Year in 1996 and the ten-year anniversary of the 1988 uprising. The universities were subject to frequent closure, and curfews were common. Letters and reports from Sadan to Dell relay the everyday frustrations of daily power failures, limited access to technology (personal ownership of computers was illegal and any hardware was likely to be almost immediately made inoperable through power surges), and regular visits from military intelligence, travel restrictions, visa problems and ill health.

Working in a country beleaguered by a brutal militarist regime also posed psychological and methodological challenges to collaborative work. Invariably there were difficulties in project management, from getting funds into the country to ensuring the project met usual standards in accountability, transparency and reporting. Sadan noted how “this was a different world in the sense that there were no [western] people working in Burma at that time. They were all on the border. So [project team members] had no experience of what a western organisation might need in terms of accountability” (Sadan, 15 December 2013). There were also challenges in promoting cooperation and the sharing of research resources; secrecy and control being the normal *modus operandi* in Burma. For example, excitement amongst the Kachin community at seeing Green’s photographs quickly turned into a desire to restrict access to them:

[At] that particular moment ... it was so unknown what the outcome was going to be of the ceasefire and also what the outcomes might be of just engaging with this material. So, although this whole thing started off with [the Kachin Jinghpaw Cultural Committee] saying to Elizabeth [Dell] and Sandra [Dudley], we want a museum and a computer, within a very, very short space of time that had turned into, we don’t want anybody else to see this material. We will eventually have a place where we can put it but right now, you know, they wanted to control it (ibid.).

The tensions generated by Brighton Museum’s collaboration with Pungga Ja Li and the Yup Uplift Committee are illuminated in Sadan’s recollection that Committee members had suggested that Green’s images could form part of a “museum in a computer” (Sadan, 2016, p.224). Sadan reflects on the striking use of this phrase in 1996. Her surprise is largely

⁴⁰ As Sadan wrote to Dell, “all these individuals are in fact taking a great personal risk in having contact with us at all – it is illegal, after all, to make contact with unapproved foreign organisations” (Sadan, n.d.).

premised on the extremely limited and restricted use of personal computers. She wonders, despite this, at “how far and deep at least a basic awareness of the possibilities of digital cultures had spread” (2016, p.225). The use of the term ‘museum’ suggests a dual desire for preservation and the promotion of access to cultural resources. This, however, was not the case. Given the poor physical condition of Ja Li’s archival recordings, the Committee’s need for a ‘museum in a computer’ was to ensure that these could be duplicated in digital formats and “tucked away and kept safe until such time as a social space might be found in the heart of Myitkyina for them to put on public view in a controlled way” (Sadan, 2016, p.230). The failure of the project team to identify a secure, secular space, outside the control of the dominant nexus of nationalism centred upon the Baptist Church and the civil branch of the nationalist movement, the Kachin Independence Organisation, in which the ‘museum in a computer’ could be safely located and maintained, revealed much about the limited space for cultural heritage research activities in Kachin State in the period immediately after the ceasefire agreement.

Museum work with the Kachin community 1999 - 2002

If, in Myanmar, research activities on Green’s photographs by Pungga Ja Li, Mandy Sadan and others were conditioned and constrained by the political, cultural, economic and infrastructural difficulties that the country’s current political climate created, in the United Kingdom, Brighton Museum’s support of research in Myanmar could be more freely, if not unproblematically, aligned with the pro-democracy movement being led by exiled activists and others outside the country. Despite Aung San Suu Kyi’s appeals to the international community for non-engagement with the country, and for the application of sanctions and boycotts, Dell’s communications to the trustees of the James Henry Green Charitable Trust, defended the ethics of the section’s activities in the country:

The Green photo project work in Burma is very unusual and is significant for a number of reasons: it is working *within* Burma with local people on a project which was initiated by members of an ethnic minority group. It is being viewed as a possible model for work within the country among other ethnic minority groups, as a way of securing and emphasising the importance of the preservation of cultural history in the face of oppression and instability (1998, original emphasis).

In 1997, the museum’s work was a focal point for the creation of a new ‘Burma Archives Group’, which sought to bring together those working on cultural heritage and/or archival research projects in Myanmar and to locate secure, temporary repositories for at-risk

archives, including those relating to opposition groups, until they could be safely returned.⁴¹ As such its motives were clearly aligned with the pro-democracy cause and members included representatives from the Open Society Institute (OSI),⁴² as well as from various libraries and archives. At the request of OSI Elizabeth Dell addressed three international Myanmar focus meetings as an archive and material culture consultant.⁴³

In April 1999, following the publication of the *Lanyi*, Mandy Sadan and Hkanpha Tu Sadan, returned to England. Both undertook work at Brighton Museum on the Green collection. Mandy Sadan conducted research and writing in support of a Museum publication, *Burma Frontier Photographs: 1918-1935* (Dell, 2000a), and Hkanhpa Tu Sadan digitised Green's photographic collection in preparation for its documenting via a new database,⁴⁴ which would replace the initially anticipated CD Rom, as well as organising and cataloguing the museum's growing collection of textiles from Myanmar.

In 2000 the publication of the report *Stealing History: The Illicit Trade in Cultural Material* commissioned by ICOM-UK and the UK's Museums Association (Brodie, Doole and Watson, 2000), caused ripples across the museum sector. While focussed on archaeological material, the report presented damning evidence regarding the widespread illicit international trade in historic cultural materials and the complicity of auction houses, dealers and museums in this trade. These findings had implications for all kinds of museum collections, including those that might be considered ethnographic.⁴⁵ Much of the authors' opprobrium was directed at wealthy museums in the United States and East Asia which had been actively acquiring unprovenanced, potentially illicitly-acquired, antiquities from Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. However, in ways which would have resonated with Dell and her team at Brighton Museum, the report noted that: "Asian antiquities without published provenances continue to be bought by some UK museums" (Brodie, Doole and Watson, 2000, p.51).

⁴¹ The proposed repository was the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

⁴² The Open Society Institute, now part of the Open Society Foundations, was established by philanthropist George Soros in 1979. The Burma Project, established by the Open Society Foundations in 1994, is 'dedicated to increasing international awareness of conditions in Burma and helping the country make a successful transition from a closed to an open society' <<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/grants/burma-project>>.

⁴³ These OSI-organised events took place in March 1998 (Bellagio, Italy), May 1998 (International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam) and in March 1999 (Cultural Preservation conference, New York).

⁴⁴ Mandy Sadan and Pungga Ja Li's research was drawn upon in creating written introductions to many of the 'Kachin' images in the Green collection which were used on the database.

⁴⁵ The importance of recording contextual information in terms of ethnographic material, is specifically noted in the report (Brodie, Doole and Watson, 2000, p.11).

While the report made legislative recommendations, and called on museums to more rigorously apply ‘due diligence’, it also called for a culture shift towards collaborative partnerships with cultural agencies in the countries of origin of such antiquities, and away from the concerted pursuit of outright ownership:

Museums have bypassed many of the problems discussed above by experimenting with new ways of adding to their collections or displays, usually most successful when they develop partnerships with people whose histories and cultures they represent (Brodie, Doole and Watson, 2000, pp.53-54).

Stealing History may have caused museum staff to review their own collecting practices. Dell’s collecting trips to Myanmar had included the purchase of heirloom textiles including some acquired directly from staff at the government-run Kachin State Cultural Museum in Myitkyina, and, in 1999 the acquisition of a historic Burmese carved teak ceiling was considered and then rejected in light of the absence of documentation that could prove its legal export. Dell reported this decision at the annual general meeting with the James Henry Green Charitable Trust trustees, noting that the museum must “operate very carefully in relation to the current heated trade in illicitly exported Burmese artefacts” (Dell, 1999). With Mandy and Hkanhpa Tu Sadan working closely with museum staff, interest grew in an alternative model to acquiring heritage items, one which would use Green’s collection of textiles as the basis for commissioning new textiles from makers and weavers in Kachin State. With curatorial assistant Lisa Maddigan serving as project facilitator in the United Kingdom, Hkanhpa Tu Sadan as intermediary and his sister Sadan Ja Ngai, who was based in Myitkyina, as lead researcher in Myanmar, in late 2000 a museum-funded initiative evolved to commission a new body of Kachin textiles.

How the ‘Kachin Textile Project’ evolved reveals again the push and pull between museum agendas and those of local individuals and organisations. While the terms of the project were determined by the museum, so that the new textiles might have a tangible association with their historic counterparts,⁴⁶ museum staff felt they entered the project with a relatively open mind in terms of what the outcome would be, “what kind of commission it would be” (Maddigan, 4 February 2014). However, as the project evolved on the ground it became a tightly structured process which resulted in the production of 16 wedding outfits (Figure 4),

⁴⁶ Maddigan notes that “we have decided to focus on wedding outfits ... [so that] a link can be developed at the Museum with work already done by Mandy on wedding ceremonies; with the *Lanyi* book and with photographs that Green took of weddings” (Maddigan, 2001).

complete with accessories, representing men and women's dress for each of the six main Kachin groups (Jinghpaw, Lawngwaw, Zaiwa, Nung-Rawang, Lisu and Lachik) as well as for two Jinghpaw subgroups considered to have a distinctive form of dress (Jinghpaw Hkahku, Jinghpaw Htingnai).⁴⁷ The way in which these were modelled and photographed (at the highly-symbolic *manau* festival showground, Shatapru, Myitkyina - see Figure 4) evokes the popular ethnonationalist visual mode visible in Kachin printed calendars (see 2.3, below).



Figure 4: Models wearing outfits commissioned through Brighton Museum's Kachin Textiles Project. Photographed by Htoi Awng at the Shatapru *Manau* (dance festival) showground, Myitkyina, Kachin State, on 22 March 2002.

If the final expression of the project appeared to constitute a tidy set of representational elements that neatly concurred with the aims of Kachin nationalists, in various places Maddigan reveals many of the local complexities that the project entailed. Most of these complexities were unanticipated by museum staff who, from the vantage point of Brighton Museum, had considered the project entirely straightforward, even self-explanatory. In Myitkyina issues arose, for example, over the choice of weaver, the means by which the

⁴⁷ The project also involved the commissioning of a machine-woven, tailored two-piece woman's suit as an example of "a contemporary style of dress now commonly worn by Kachin brides at their wedding reception". (Maddigan, 2003b, p.161, 163 (ill.)).

project was documented and the way in which the commission was interpreted and understood.⁴⁸ Following the collection of the garments from Myanmar and their delivery to the museum, their cataloguing and the translation and dissemination of documentary records would also prove problematic, with Maddigan later reflecting that the project: “exposed a number of unanticipated issues about the Museum’s focus on both commissioning work and documentation from within communities, and on building shared archives” (2003b). Nevertheless an emphasis on research projects “based directly on the strengths of the existing collections” and on fieldwork projects which are similarly “inspired by the existing collections” and have a focus on working with “contemporary makers to commission new pieces for the collection” would become central elements in the section’s new approach to collections management, new research and collecting, as set out in a 2001 document for the James Henry Green Charitable Trust (Maddigan, 2001).

The tension between museum agendas and local ones, and the extent to which museum activities could inadvertently provoke local sensitivities is also evident in some of the debates that circulated around the dissemination, within Myanmar, of a museum-commissioned database created to manage digital surrogates of Green’s photographic collection and related information.⁴⁹ In 2002 OSI funding was awarded to Mandy Sadan for a ‘Kachin Oral History and Resources Project’, to be undertaken within Kachin State and in Mai Ja Yang. This initiative involved taking the database to the Pan Kachin Development Society Office in Mai Ja Yang, where Mandy Sadan led a history workshop in which:

Amateur historians of varying ages were brought together to discuss issues in contemporary Kachin historiography and to consider how a local methodology might be developed which could deal effectively with these issues. This also provided an opportunity to present the Green Collection database in full. This aroused great interest and led to discussions as to how local researchers could develop the material in ways that were appropriate to local concerns (Sadan, 2002c).

The database was also shown to a Karen History and Culture Research Committee in Mae Sot, Thailand, who were “running a training programme for a group of young people from nearby refugee camps, which will ultimately lead to the development of an ‘Online

⁴⁸ Some of these issues have been discussed by Maddigan (2002, 2003b).

⁴⁹ Dell commissioned Brighton-based company Desktop Display to produce a database for Green’s photographs which would function both as collections management system and, through the addition of a public interface, interpretative tool.

Museum” (Sadan, 2002c), and—in ways which again speak to the benefits of Kachin cultural heritage work to the Kachin nationalist cause—to the KIA leadership in Chiang Mai who, in early March 2002, was allowed to leave Myanmar officially for the first time.

But as with the Kachin Jinghpaw Cultural Committee’s idea of a ‘museum in a computer’, the database provoked difficult questions around the ownership and control of cultural resources, as well as revealing how research activities—and the cultural materials, like Green’s photographs, on which they were based—could open up fissures within the Kachin community and its different ethnic constituencies:

There is a desire by a number of communities to develop (or possess) the database in full for their own work, most of which is highly politicised. The photographs have already been used by one group to advance their case to be recognised as a discrete sub-group within the Kachin umbrella. As the ethnic label in question is highly contested and relates to an area of Kachin State which has in the past been the scene of much violent ethnic conflict, this is a serious issue (Sadan, 2002c).

Nevertheless, as various groups sought to control or “possess” the database, in the process digital surrogates of Green’s images slipped the net, transferring from a small number of museum-generated CD copies of the database into the wider realm of Kachin visual media, thus becoming a resource which could be drawn on in a wide range of contexts (see, for example my discussion of their use in a form of popular printed calendar, in 2.3).

The development of the World Stories Young Voices gallery (2012)

While ‘behind-the-scenes’ preoccupations—collections management, new research and collecting—were of key importance over the period 1996 to 2002, the World Art section at Brighton Museum also played a significant role in the total redevelopment of the Museum undertaken with the support of Heritage Lottery Fund monies. The refurbished museum opened in May 2002. A new gallery devoted to world art, the ‘Green Gallery of World Art’ replaced the ‘Green Gallery of Non-Western Art & Archaeology’ displays created by Anthony Shelton.⁵⁰ As before, a section of the new gallery displays were devoted to ‘Collectors’ and James Henry Green was one of the five featured. The database of Green images was located alongside this display. The gallery also included a small temporary display area. The display created for the opening of the redeveloped museum, in May 2002,

⁵⁰ In the redeveloped museum the space formerly occupied by the ‘Cultures’ gallery was given over to local history but world art collections materials also featured extensively in two interdisciplinary galleries: ‘Body’ and ‘Performance’ on the first floor of Brighton Museum & Art Gallery.

‘Collecting Textiles and Their Stories’ included garments from the original Green collection, from Dell’s fieldwork collecting and from the ‘Kachin Textile Project’. In a perhaps surprising fashion, displays in the new ‘Green Gallery of World Art’ appeared to reverse Anthony Shelton’s earlier efforts to create a visitor-orientated and critically reflexive display in preference of an art historical display mode which saw exhibits spot-lit and supported by limited, museum-authored textual interpretation and with no visual or audio-visual support materials, bar the database.

Dell left Brighton Museum in 2003 and staff changes and other project activity meant that Brighton Museum’s relationship with the Kachin community wasn’t revisited until 2011. The interests of a new Keeper of World Art appointed in 2008 (the author, who had served as curator of world art since 2002) brought an increased emphasis on audience development and participation with a desire to engage with locally-based non-traditional audiences and with international source communities; interests shared by the sector (Peers and Brown, 2003; Black, 2005; Simon, 2010). The aestheticized displays of World Art collection material created in 2002 no longer seemed to fit the aspirations of the section, and in 2010 the section’s ambitions to rethink and redevelop this display space were accepted as part of a national scheme, ‘Stories of the World’. The scheme had been developed by the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) and the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) to form part of a Cultural Olympiad associated with London’s hosting of the Olympic Games in 2012 (Mears, 2012).

All ‘Stories of the World’ partners were required to develop collaborative projects with the scheme’s target audience of young people aged 14-25 which would result in a series of temporary displays and exhibitions in museums intended to provide a ‘welcome to the world’ in 2012. The scheme’s ‘world’ focus meant that most of the participating projects involved ‘world cultures’ or ethnographic museum collections. Brighton Museum was the only scheme member which sought to develop a permanent gallery display. It was decided that the new gallery would present seven stories that demonstrated the value of ‘culture’ in the contemporary world. Some completely new stories would be created for the space alongside existing stories that would be recast under this new narrative. The wealth of material associated with the Green collection, and the Trust’s continuing support, made it a compelling potential focus, which could be developed through a focus on Kachin young

people. The chosen focus for the story was the visually spectacular *manau* festival, in which thousands of young people participate.

In January 2011 I attended the *manau* festival in Shatapru, near Myitkyina, Kachin State, with the intention of interviewing members of Kachin youth who were participating. Tensions had been growing in the region since the Burmese government's final deadline for the KIA to join its Border Guard Force passed in September 2010, and the 1994 ceasefire agreement between the two organisations had been declared null and void (see section 1.4, 'The Kachin and their recent political history'). Alongside increasing incursions made by the Burmese military into KIA territory, the Burmese government sought to co-opt the 2011 *manau* festival, which many Kachin people thus boycotted. Burmese military officers and Union Solidarity and Development Party members were highly conspicuous at the event (see Figure 5), and the Northern Commander, Brigadier General Zeyar Aung, took a prominent role (Farrelly, 2011; Mizzima, 2011). Helped by two Kachin student leaders, filmed interviews with young Kachin participants had to be undertaken behind festival structures, under pieces of tarpaulin, out of the sight and hearing of the ubiquitous presence of military intelligence personnel.



Figure 5: A high-ranking Burmese military officer joins the dance at the *Manau* (dance festival) showground. Shatapru, Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar. Photograph by the author. 10 January 2011.

The ‘World Stories Young Voices’ gallery at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery aimed to connect the voices and perspectives of members of international source communities with young people living locally; an ambition unevenly achieved (Mears, 2012). In the case of the Kachin *manau* ‘story’, in May 2011 an independent filmmaker and I visited a fundraising event organised by United Kingdom-based Kachins at Southall Baptist Church where they recorded short filmed interviews with younger members of the community. These were edited with those recorded in Myitkyina to produce a short film which appeared in the new gallery.⁵¹ The gallery narrative, ‘Celebrating the Manau’, also included a pair of Rawang outfits from the 2000/01 ‘Kachin Textile Project’, an early 20th century Rawang man’s outfit, as well as the result of a new commission to Kachin designer San Bawk Ra whose label Shayi specialised in the reinterpretation of traditional Kachin textiles in modern styles (Figure 6).



Figure 6: View of part of the ‘Celebrating the Manau’ display in the World Stories Young Stories gallery at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery. Photograph by James Pike, June 2012.

⁵¹ The short film created for the World Stories gallery was added to YouTube, but remains unlisted because of the possible risks to the Myanmar-based participants:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kafj_qDImUE&sns=em.

Museum work with the Kachin community since 2012

Contact with the United Kingdom Kachin community, a group of some 70 people that had evolved in the post-ceasefire period (see section 2.2.1, ‘Three Kachin diaspora communities’), and which centred on Hounslow, West London, created new possibilities for extending the work conducted by Brighton Museum with Myanmar-based Kachin cultural historians in the late 1990s. Inevitably this new relationship was framed by shared concerns about the conflict that had returned to the Kachin region following the June 2011 breakdown of the ceasefire agreement and the associated displacement of tens of thousands of people along the Myanmar/China border. In line with the new ethical discourse on museums which called for these institutions to become more socially responsible (for example, Marstine, 2011), I felt that I had to consider the Museum’s moral relationship to Kachin people. I lobbied locally, including through posts on the Museum’s website (Mears, 2011), and appeals to the local Member of Parliament for British intervention. With the support of London-based Kachins, I organised a museum event: a ‘Kachin Day of Solidarity and Celebration’ (28 September 2013). Combining talks on the political situation with cultural demonstrations, all profits went to the Kachin Relief Fund, a charity established by the London community to support internally displaced people in Kachin State (Hkangda, 2013, see further description of this event in 2.2.1, ‘Three diaspora communities’ (West London)).

The possibilities for partnership between the Museum and the Kachin community were further enhanced by the move of one member of the community to Brighton to pursue postgraduate studies at the University of Sussex. Alongside his studies Gumring Hkangda was offered casual work at the Museum, where he began improving the documentation of the Green collection. Hkangda’s interest in Kachin cultural heritage, and desire to make it the focus of his postgraduate study, led him to return to Kachin State with the images in tow, this time saved in high resolution on a hard drive.

Through Hkangda’s personal connections, he was able to develop a relationship with staff at a Laiza-based library and research centre: *Hparat Panglai Naura* (Figure 7). Laiza, a small town on the Myanmar/China border and capital of an area of KIO territory, is a place of strategic and symbolic importance for the Kachin community. Free from Burmese government control, it is considered the epicentre of Kachin political, cultural and intellectual life, with major figures from these worlds living there for security reasons. Moreover, as an

example of how the KIO can perform the functions of a regularised state, through providing urban infrastructure including schools, hospitals, tax and waste collection, Laiza provides a “powerful symbol of Kachin’s political and cultural aspirations” (Stiem, 2017).

The library and research centre were initiated and funded by Major General Sumlut Gun Maw, deputy chairman of the KIO who continues to live close by. A popular political figure, Gun Maw has maintained a commitment to the promotion of education and has supported various educational initiatives. He founded the centre in 2012 with his own collection of books and journals. Today, as well as welcoming local researchers and those who wish to read (or to use the wifi connection), the centre supports research activities including the publication of a bi-monthly research journal.



Figure 7: Image of *Hparat Panglai Naura*, a library and research centre in Laiza, a town on the Myanmar/China border. Photographer and date unknown.



Figure 8: Image of the new ‘Kachin museum and art gallery’ (*Kachin madun gawh htingnu*) built adjacent to *Hparat Panglai Naura*, which opened in 2015. Photographer and date unknown.



Figure 9: Visitors looking at images from the exhibition *Kachin Soldiers in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century*. Photographer and date unknown.

In early 2015, the construction of a new traditionally-designed building next to the original library was completed (Figure 8). Titled *Kachin madun gawh htingnu* (‘Kachin museum and art gallery’), the building was intended to provide an exhibition venue. For the first exhibition, library staff chose a series of images from the Green collection. Hkangda facilitated access to the high-resolution digital surrogates of Green’s photographs and worked closely with staff on the printing, framing and interpretation of the images. In the exhibition, which opened on 1 November 2015, reproduced images were displayed alongside extracts from relevant texts from the period as well as interpretations provided by local researchers under the title *Kachin Soldiers in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century* (Figure 9).

The particular significance of these historic images of Kachin soldiers at this time was inevitably connected to the 2011 breakdown of the ceasefire agreement and to local experiences of the conflict and displacement which followed. Laiza had been a hotspot for both of these: a target for Burmese military air strikes, and a town in close proximity to several internally displaced people's camps. This particular subset of Green's images was felt, by the library staff, to provide an appropriate focus for reflecting the current political situation. Intended to remain on display for a year, at the time of writing (late 2018), the exhibition remains in place.

As well as demonstrating the extent to which both museum-style institutions and Green's images can offer a political utility to Kachin people in the present, the partnership also raised interesting issues for the museum in working with Hkangda as a diasporic intermediary. In conversation after his return from Myanmar, Hkangda described the demanding nature of the collaboration.⁵² The dimensions of this were illuminated in an incident with Gun Maw. Ever busy, Gun Maw had been speaking to some visitors before he had to leave them, saying that he was sorry but he had business with a *shan hpraw* to attend to. *Shan hpraw*—literally 'white meat'—is a Jinghpaw phrase for describing a foreigner of European extraction. As Hkangda was born in Myanmar to Kachin parents, but educated in the United Kingdom, the use of this phrase to describe him was revealing of the internal power dynamics created through the diaspora experience. The benefits of working with diasporic intermediaries—or 'liminal experts' as they are more often termed in international development (Turner, 2010)⁵³—is further explored in 3.3, 'What might a diaspora-appropriate museum practice look like?'

Conclusion

The permanent loan of the James Henry Green collection to Brighton Museum from 1992, and the investment which accompanied it, generated a unique set of opportunities for progressing the curatorial ambitions of Brighton's World Art section and for testing out the possibilities of engagement with source community representatives in Myanmar and with members of the Kachin diaspora in London. In all cases, these engagements required

⁵² Gumring Hkangda, pers. comm., 11 November 2015.

⁵³ In international development the term is used to describe educated refugees who act as intermediaries between refugees and aid agencies.

navigating complex and highly-contested political terrain. They also revealed contradictory perspectives on the role and function of the museum. Always a highly symbolic entity which can add value to certain iterations of history and identity, tensions arose as to whether the museum's purpose was chiefly to preserve, manage and control, or to facilitate broad public access. If considered a "portable social technology, a set of museological processes through which ... statements and claims are represented, embodied, and debated," the examples given in this section demonstrate that the application of this "technology" is highly contingent on local political conditions (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.4).

In Part Two I move beyond this emphasis on the museum institution to consider the many other ways in which Kachin communities engage with Kachin culture and heritage. I am especially interested to consider how these have been transformed by experiences of migration and transnationalism, as well as the extent to which local conditions mediate articulations of a global, 'pan-Kachin' identity.

2.1 Introduction to Part Two: New contexts for an ‘old’ identity

In Part One I sought to establish the contexts and conditions through which, in the period following the 1994 ceasefire agreement between the Burmese government and the Kachin Independence Organisation, museum interests and Kachin interests in the research and dissemination of ‘Kachin culture’ were to converge. As the research was based largely on museum reports and the accounts of museum staff and researchers, the findings are inevitably museum-orientated.

In Part Two, I step away from the museum and use the opportunity presented by this research project to develop understanding of the cultural activities of contemporary Kachin diaspora communities. In undertaking research amongst three distinct communities—based in West London, United Kingdom; San Francisco, United States and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia—I address the contexts and conditions which frame and inform these activities. What are the goals of these activities and who are they aimed at? What role do locally-based organisations and Myanmar-based organisations play in them? Also, to what extent are perspectives on culture and heritage informed by local conditions, as well as by experiences of migration and life in diaspora? Given the desire, discussed in 1.4, ‘The Kachin and their Recent Political History’, for overseas Kachin communities to present a united front and set of ethnic representations as the basis for their lobbying for political intervention, how are local differences mediated in the need for a unified, consistent ‘pan-Kachin’ identity?

I then turn to a closer analysis of Kachin cultural forms which take their lead from new conditions of migration and transnationalism. While making claims for its authenticity and grounding in historic practices, it is clear that Kachin culture has been transformed by the availability of new information communication technologies and by the changing experiences of its constituents. In documenting cultural productions made under these new conditions I also begin to reflect on the implications for museum practice. How museums are responding to these new conditions then forms the focus of Part Three.

2.2 Making Sense of Kachin Culture in Diaspora

Introduction

In 1.4 ‘The Kachin and their Recent Political History’, the drivers behind the development of a globally dispersed set of Kachin diaspora communities were outlined. These included significantly reduced opportunities in northern Myanmar for economic activity, restricted access to education and employment, a sense of political and cultural marginalisation and—particularly since the breakdown of the ceasefire agreement between the KIO and Burmese government in June 2011—direct experiences of conflict. I also reflected on how, since 2011, these experiences have led members of diaspora communities to express a sense of being more connected, as well as more coordinated in terms of efforts around political advocacy and fundraising. The role of print and graphic design in facilitating these processes is explored in the next part of this section (2.3 ‘The printed calendar and the development of a Kachin visual identity’) and that of information communication technologies, including social media, in the final part (2.4 ‘Kachin culture and new media’).

Like other diaspora communities, overseas Kachin populations are highly motivated and proactive in terms of maintaining and preserving ‘Kachin’ cultural heritage. However, while the cultural and identity-making practices of other Asian diasporas have been subject to extensive writing and research, for example the Hmong (Vang, 2010; Pfeifer, Chiu and Yang, 2013), Vietnamese (Nguyen, 2009; Chan, 2011) and Tibetan (Bernstorff and von Welck, 2003; Hess, 2009) diasporas, little research has been undertaken on those of overseas communities from Myanmar (exceptions include Banki, 2006a, 2006b; Cho, 2011; Kubo, 2014, and five chapters in Hoffstaedter and Koizumi, 2015: all of which focus on the experiences of refugees), and even less on Kachin diaspora communities specifically. As noted previously, this seems especially surprising given the high levels of interest in ethnic identity formation in Myanmar and the widespread evidence of its mobilisation for political gain.

This chapter focuses on three Kachin diaspora communities: in Hounslow, West London (United Kingdom); the San Francisco Bay Area (United States) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). These three communities were selected for the extent to which they represent significantly different contexts for experiences of migration and diaspora. The London and San Francisco Bay Area communities share some similarities, in that they were established

by an earlier set of migrants, most of whom were pursuing educational or economic betterment. Many members of these communities came from urban environments in Myanmar and might be considered ‘elite’ in terms of the standard of education they had been able to attain prior to migration and the resources they had been able to marshal, usually from their extended family network, in order to undertake their outwards migration journeys. In contrast, many of the Kachin individuals living in Kuala Lumpur came from agricultural backgrounds, where they had had limited opportunities to access educational provision and first-hand experiences of the effects of conflict, which often included displacement from their rural homelands. They had entered Malaysia as refugees in the hope of being accepted on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR) Third Country Resettlement Scheme, but, in the absence of formal recognition of their refugee status by the Malaysian government, were living as undocumented migrants. These different ‘ends of the spectrum’ migration experiences overlap in the context of some United States-based Kachin communities, including the Bay Area, where the established migrant community is managing the influx of refugees resettled to the United States through a group methodology scheme being facilitated by the UNHCR (see below for further details of this scheme).

This chapter addresses how members of these three communities navigate the space and resources available to them to engage in cultural maintenance and preservation activities as well as the drivers for these activities. I am especially interested to explore the extent to which such activities mediate between local needs and pressures and the desire to identify with a global pan-Kachin identity, which can lobby effectively for political intervention on behalf of communities in northern Myanmar. In providing my assessments of these three communities, I draw on testimony given by individual members in interview with me and observations of community events.

Living in cities

It is important to note from the outset that the three communities discussed here are based in large cities: Greater London has an estimated population size of 8.8 million (Office for National Statistics, 2017), the population of the city of San Francisco is nearly 885,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2017) and Greater Kuala Lumpur, also known as the Klang Valley, is an urban agglomeration of 7.25 million people (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2018). While London and Kuala Lumpur are commonly described as ‘world’ or ‘global’

cities,⁵⁴ despite its much smaller population size, San Francisco has also been described as a world city on the basis of its contribution to business, technology and innovation (Dessibourg, Hales, and Mendoza Peña, 2017). The populations of all three cities are highly ethnically diverse.

In practical terms, densely-populated urban environments present both opportunities and constraints to members of diaspora communities. While offering a more extensive and potentially accessible labour market, housing prices, transportation fees and living costs in these places are often high. Language difficulties can complicate interactions with other city-dwellers,⁵⁵ and the challenges of navigating transport infrastructures can limit mobility.⁵⁶ The ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec, 2007) encountered in world cities can serve to promote greater tolerance of diversity and provide opportunities for solidarity between ethnic groups which may see themselves as having shared experiences, interests or political agendas. Similarly, it can facilitate greater access to goods and services tailored to specific communities. On the other hand, places of ‘super-diversity’ can put pressure on groups to compete for stretched resources, a process which can cause tensions. For members of Kachin diaspora communities, successful adaption to these urban environments was more likely to be considered to have been achieved by those who had previous experience of living in cities in Myanmar.⁵⁷ For those with less experience, such as Kachin refugees in Kuala Lumpur, who had grown up in rural environments, acculturating to city-living—especially as undocumented migrants—proved extremely challenging, as is discussed below.⁵⁸

In terms of diasporic identity-making projects, cities similarly offer particular sets of challenges and opportunities. Kevin Robins (2001) has proposed that the city provides a more

⁵⁴ These terms are generally used to describe cities which act as primary nodes in the global economic network.

⁵⁵ In the context of this research project, Kachin interviewees in the Bay Area described the impact of these language barriers. Nu Nu N-Dawng reported that some individuals were forced to rely on their children for language support, and that this “affects them emotionally” and they “feel low, feel down” (8 April 2015). SF-7 noted that one of her brothers was finding the language barrier difficult, was struggling to “fit in” and was fearful of job interviews (28 March 2015).

⁵⁶ In the Bay Area the perceived limitations in public transportation had created opportunities for some Kachin individuals, who had become Uber drivers, but drawbacks for others. Lashi Bawk Lu reported that she was one of seven female elders in the community, none of whom can drive (24 March 2015).

⁵⁷ One respondent suggested that Kachin people were more ‘urbanised’ than other ethnic groups from Myanmar and thus more able to adapt to new urban contexts in diaspora (Ja Htoi Pan Maran, 14 August 2015). Most overseas Kachin communities are based in large cities, and the same respondent noted the disappointment of those who, resettled to places on the outskirts of Jacksonville, Florida and Fort Worth, Texas, found themselves living in a semi-rural context.

⁵⁸ Several Kuala Lumpur-based interviewees described the feeling of shock they experienced on arrival in the city.

useful focus than the nation in thinking through the politics of diaspora; “The nation, we may say, is a space of identification and identity, whilst the city is an existential and experimental place” (2001, p.87). He argues that in these multicultural urban spaces people can rethink and re-describe their relation to culture and identity. Georgiou similarly identifies the city as a productive place for diaspora communities and cultures, noting that “urban diversity allows more space for diasporic populations to celebrate their cultural distinctiveness and particularity” (2006, p.8). However, as I discuss below, heightened levels of diversity can also challenge the legibility and intelligibility of expressions of ethnic identity.

Before beginning my account of the different experiences and perspectives of the three communities, I start by acknowledging the importance of the diasporic church. The influence of Christianity on the development and maintenance of Kachin ethno-nationalism in Myanmar has been much discussed (Sadan, 2013), and in diaspora it remains central to the community, and to the individual’s sense of self. As Helen Morton has proposed in her account of Tongan diaspora churches in Australia, such institutions “are not simply places of worship. They provide social opportunities, mediate between immigrants and their new society, and are sites for the reaffirmation and reconstitution of cultural identity” (1998, p.10). But like their congregations, churches also have to adapt to their new environment and to provide services tailored to local needs while also navigating their relationship with Christian organisations in the homeland.



Figure 10: Sarama Roi Ja leads Sunday School for children of the London-based Kachin community, before the church service begins. Southall Baptist Gospel Hall, Southall, West London. Photograph by Georgia Rooney, 23 April 2017.

The diasporic Kachin church

For many Kachin people, the diasporic Kachin church represents a beacon of strength and solidarity amongst the choppy waters of their new environment. As in Myanmar, where the church's role encompasses educational and welfare provision as well as, at times, political advocacy (South, 2008, p.193), in diaspora the role of the Kachin church goes beyond simply spiritual well-being. In terms of identity formation and maintenance, Kachin culture is indivisible from the church. As Mart Viirand has observed of Kachin communities in Myanmar, "Among contemporary urbanised populations, Christian identity has become practically interchangeable with being Kachin, and Christian organisations command unprecedented authority in public affairs" (2016, pp.26-27). The Baptist church is the most significant Christian denomination for Kachin people, spiritually, culturally and politically (Tegenfeldt, 1974), but there are also smaller congregations of Kachin Anglicans, Protestants and Roman Catholics at home and overseas. Since its foundation in 1890, but especially prominently in the post-ceasefire years, the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) has played a central role in Kachin society. Paul Freston, for example, has described it as "the leading institution in Kachin life" (2001, p.96). As is further discussed below, the organisation is

keen to extend its influence to overseas communities and formed the Overseas Kachin Baptist Convention to this end in 2013 (Overseas Kachin Baptist Communities Network, 2013).

Of particular relevance to this discussion is the church's role in cultural maintenance and preservation activities. In Myanmar, governmental restrictions on the promotion of minority languages, both in education and in publishing, have led Kachin churches to exploit the small chink of tolerance available to them (see 2.3 'The printed calendar and the development of a Kachin visual identity'). Kachin churches run Sunday schools and summer schools, both of which promote the teaching of Jinghpaw, and Kachin cultural practices, as well as providing a spiritual education. In the highly restrictive landscape of higher education in Myanmar, with very limited opportunities to study minority languages and cultures, theological colleges have evolved to meet the gap. As well as providing training for future church leaders, institutions like the Kachin Theological College and Seminary in Nawng Nang, Kachin State, promote the study of Kachin history and culture,⁵⁹ and provide a crucible for political activity. The intertwined relationship between spiritual faith and cultural maintenance and preservation activities established in northern Myanmar, continues to manifest itself in the spiritual and cultural practices of Kachin communities overseas.

The central importance of the church was emphasised in my interviews with members of the three diaspora communities. Many individuals relayed the difficulties they encountered in identifying the 'right' church to attend. The significant number of migrants and refugees from Myanmar living in the United States, for example, has contributed to a high number of tailored churches and church services; some of which are conducted in English language, some in Burmese and some in minority languages. In the example of the San Francisco Bay Area community, as a dedicated Kachin church needed time to establish itself, older Kachin migrants were more likely to have attended—and to continue to attend—Burmese-language services with congregations representing a diverse range of Myanmar minorities.⁶⁰ In contrast, younger individuals and recent arrivals were more likely to want to worship with other Kachin people and in the Jinghpaw language. SF-7, for example, described how, on being resettled to the San Francisco Bay Area through the UNHCR's Third Country

⁵⁹ This ambition is clearly set out in one of the goals of the Kachin Theological College, which is: "To solidify Kachin cultures and traditions according to the Word of God" (Kachin Theological College, n.d.).

⁶⁰ Shadan Zau Aung (24 March 2015), K Kai Din (24 March 2015) and SF-7 (28 March 2015) all reported that many of the Burmese church services in the Bay Area were led by Kachin pastors.

Resettlement Scheme, and being assigned to a Burmese-Chinese family, she found it hard to “choose the right church” (28 March 2015). She tried two Chinese-American churches but felt they didn’t have the right cultural orientation. She said that she wanted to be with the Kachin community and to speak Jinghpaw at church. From 2010 SF-7 began attending services at Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church in Oakland, which holds a Jinghpaw language service on Sunday afternoons.

As in Myanmar, the overseas Kachin church performs a significant role in cultural maintenance and preservation activities. As one United States-based interviewee observed, “church is where we do a lot of activities and [is] the main focus for culture” (Ja Seng Mai, 4 April 2015). This sentiment is echoed in the words of church leaders. Reverend Hkangda Naw San Dee, pastor of the San Francisco Kachin Baptist Church, said that he saw it as part of the church’s mission “to preserve and promote our cultural heritage” (22 March 2015). As with churches in Myanmar, the diasporic Kachin church generally offers Sunday school provision for children, before or during the main church service, and a summer school programme during school holidays. Most churches also organise retreats, where members of the congregation undertake a day visit, or short residential visit, to a specific location. While the main focus at these outings is on religious teaching and worship, cultural activities play an important role in these events, especially in the form of music and food. Children constitute an important focus for the diasporic church and are present at all church events. Most church services will include a section where the children are brought in to perform a song or poem, often wearing traditional dress. Their presence is especially prominent during Thanksgiving services where they perform a traditional poem, dedicated to a specific fruit or vegetable, which they hold (Figure 11).

The diasporic church provides both physical space for the community to gather—often a hard-won resource in diaspora,⁶¹ as discussed below—and a performative space where community members visibly renew their affiliations to a Kachin identity. As such, it provides an important focus for displays of ethnic identity, performed largely through wearing forms of ‘Kachin’ dress and, to a lesser extent, the incorporation of other forms of material culture. Children are a particular focus for wearing ethnic dress. Girls wear elements of traditional Kachin womenswear, often in the form of a skirt carrying characteristic patternwork (but generally made of stretchy machine-knitted acrylic rather than the traditional handwoven

⁶¹ As one United States-based interviewee observed, “We don’t have much places to go except for church... We don’t have much fund to rent spaces like hall” (Hpauwung Hkawn San, 7 April 2015).

cotton) or the typical black velvet jacket adorned with pieces of silver metal, and boys wear shirts, ties and suits (sometimes western-style, sometimes Chinese-style) onto which have been embroidered iconic motifs, such as the decorated posts which form the focus and centrepiece of the *manau* festival (*manau shadung*),⁶² or the crossed swords symbol of the Kachin Independence Organisation. Kachin adult women also wear elements of traditional dress, including skirtcloths or ‘modern-traditional’ two-piece tailored outfits displaying distinctively Kachin patterns. Men’s dress tends to be more restrained with a ‘Kachin’ affiliation being made on the basis of a simple headcloth, or a white shirt or tailored jacket carrying similar embroidered designs to that worn by boys. Other elements of material culture make an appearance, such as the *shingnoi* (traditional woven rattan basket, carried via a strap worn across the forehead) seen behind the children in Figure 11 (at this Thanksgiving event it has been covered in paper and had small plastic fruits and vegetables attached).⁶³ That these other forms of material culture are less in evidence is largely because most diasporic Kachin churches meet in rented spaces, which must be cleared before the congregation depart. Food also plays a role in the Kachin church. Most diasporic church services end with the sharing of a meal prepared by female members of the congregation,⁶⁴ but, similarly, there is often a pressure to clear up and get out of the space promptly.

⁶² See Sadan 2002 for a discussion of the status of *manau shadung* within Kachin popular culture.

⁶³ Similarly, in the Bay Area, Hpauwung Hkawn San talked about how her parents brought a *shingnoi* with them when she called them to join her in the United States, which is regularly loaned out for events (7 April 2015).

⁶⁴ This might be Kachin food but could also be Burmese or Chinese. The limitations of time and space at an Amsterdam Kachin church service meant the congregation was served instant noodles.



Figure 11: Children read poems at a special Thanksgiving service. Southall Baptist Gospel Hall, Southall, West London. Photograph by the author, 26 November 2017.

Beyond its spiritual and cultural role, the diasporic Kachin church was also considered to provide a role in social cohesion. A Bay Area-based interviewee noted that:

Church is a religious institution that has [a] big impact on the Kachin community in a positive way. Imagine if you don't have church, you have no place to meet people like regularly. On Sunday people go to worship, meet people and ... have a sense of togetherness. And, apart from the social event like wedding and funeral, the church is important in these Kachins' way of life (Shadan Zau Aung, 24 March 2015).

The diasporic Kachin church structures community life. Most church organisations run a series of committees responsible for its various functions (for example, fundraising, music, communications) as well as its differing constituencies (youth group, women's group). In a small community such as that based in West London, the human resources needed to sustain these different groups means that most individuals have to be willing to take on a committee role, which can be time-demanding.

The diasporic church also sees itself as having a socially instrumentalist role, in drawing the community together and discouraging younger members from behaviours seen as undesirable. Reverend Hkangda Naw San Dee said that he saw a role for his church in working "to connect the generations together" and to "find common ground" so as to learn "how to be a community" (22 March 2015). These responsibilities can also include sustaining relations with communities back home, a role which has grown in importance since the

breakdown of the ceasefire agreement in June 2011. Wherever they are based, most Kachin church services have two collection bags, one for the church's own funds, the other to collect funds for refugees displaced by the current conflict.

In the next section I provide a description of each of the three communities, outlining the challenges and opportunities faced by each, particularly in terms of the respect to which they engage with cultural maintenance and preservation activities.

2.2.1 Three Kachin diaspora communities



Figure 12: London Kachin Baptist Church fundraising event held at Southall Baptist Church. Photographs by the author, 1 August 2015.

West London

[The community is] quite young ... they think that they have to be very close to each other to be able to help each other, to support each other in this different environment because they arrive in this area recently. That's how they've started to, to form church and do activities together, to also keep their identity [and] and their culture (Hkun Nawng, 4 October 2014).

An estimated 70 Kachin people live in West London in the suburban districts of Hounslow and Southall, districts notable for the ethnic and cultural diversity of their resident populations, many of which hold connections to South Asia.⁶⁵ Several families occupy shared houses located a short walking distance from each other. Most adult members came to the United Kingdom on an individual basis, often on student visas.⁶⁶ Some, from 2008, were able to claim asylum, however a significant proportion remain on student visas which require regular renewal and can only be used for a limited period of time. As is characteristic of the diaspora communities I researched, while some individuals have been in the United Kingdom since the late 1980s, most came in the post-ceasefire period (so, after 1994). As in other

⁶⁵ In the 2011 national census the proportion of London Borough of Hounslow residents identifying as 'White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British' was recorded at 37.9% compared to 80.5% nationally. 'Asian/Asian British: Indian' residents made up 18.9% compared to 2.5% nationally. In the much smaller borough ward of Southall Broadway these figures were 3.5% ('White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British') and 47% ('Asian/Asian British: Indian'). Asian/Asian British: Pakistan represented 14.9% of respondents in this ward (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

⁶⁶ The UNHCR Third Country Resettlement Scheme has had less impact on the UK Kachin community than on communities in the US as Britain takes a much smaller number of UNHCR referrals for resettlement (typically 750 people a year through the Gateway Protection Programme).

communities, many now have children of their own and it is this new United Kingdom-born generation, members of which are, at the time of writing, generally aged ten and under, which is bringing particular urgency to debates around cultural identity and preservation. The majority of the community is made up of young families but the community includes two elders, Mahkaw Hkun Sa and his wife Nhkum Bu Lu, who play an important role in the community's political and cultural life. Mahkaw Hkun Sa, a former lawyer, politician and political prisoner in Myanmar, remains politically active through the Kachin National Organisation. Nhkum Bu Lu is considered a cultural expert. She often oversees the preparation of food at community fundraising events and provides guidance at cultural events, like *jahtawng htu*.

As was the experience of all three communities discussed in this thesis, the London community's religious activities had formalised over time. Initially starting with prayer meetings in individuals' homes, in 2003 the group founded a Christian fellowship organisation (Kachin Christian Fellowship-UK), moving on—as the community grew and became more established—to holding regular services in a borrowed church building. The community had established a relationship with Southall Baptist Church and its senior pastor who continues to facilitate their use of church buildings for regular Jinghpaw-language services and for special occasions, including weddings and fundraising events. Pastor Boyd Williams also leads a monthly communion service as the community does not, as yet, have an ordained minister. While fundraising events are held in the larger church hall (seen in Figure 12) so as to accommodate supporters from outside the community, a small 'gospel hall' belonging to the church, located a short walk away from the main building, is used for church services. Space is tight but the significance of occupying the hall is considerable and the community are, at the time of writing, in discussion with Southall Baptist Church as regards to buying it. The importance of the community having its own dedicated building was reflected in comments made by Zau Lahpai:

I think it's not [just] for being a Christian but for maintaining our culture, our language as well. Because ... here in the UK ... there are plenty of churches, Anglican, Methodist, you know, but we want to ... worship in our own language. That's the reason we want to build our church. And now, currently, we have so many children ... that we want to teach our kids the Kachin language as well and our culture as well (8 November 2014).

Owning (rather than borrowing or renting) a church building is the ambition of all overseas communities; an ambition as yet only achieved by the Jacksonville (Florida) community

which in 2014 bought a church building at 3264 Townsend Boulevard, Jacksonville. In the United Kingdom, the process of formalisation necessary to establish a registered church caused some heart-searching. Whereas Kachin Christian Fellowship-UK had been open to members of other Christian denominations, the transition to London Kachin Baptist Church (*London Jinghpaw Wunpawng Hkalup Hpung*) in 2015 effectively restricted membership to Baptists.

While the church looms large in the lives of Kachin people living in London, it is not the only institution which is engaged in cultural maintenance and preservation activities. London Kachins occupy a secure, if temporary, legal status making political activism possible. As the London Kachin Baptist Church structures members' spiritual, social and cultural lives, the United Kingdom branch of the Kachin National Organisation (KNO) provides a platform for political activism. A political organisation established in exile by Howa Ja La and Bawmwang La Raw in 1999 (Mahkaw, 2016), the KNO circulates news of political developments, stages political demonstrations and drives political advocacy. It plays an important role in advocating to host countries on behalf of Kachin refugees and thus has a particular interest in constructions of a Kachin ethnic identity, this being a necessary part of establishing refugee status (Mahkaw, 2016, p.350).



Figure 13: Left: Children perform at an event to mark the 57th anniversary of Kachin Revolution Day. Right: Hkun Nawng gives a speech at the same event. Event held at the Ramada Hotel, Hounslow, 3 February 2018. Photographs by the author.

As well as church services and secular fundraising events organised by the church, a subset of community members attend more explicitly political events organised by KNO. These include an annual event held to mark the anniversary of Kachin Revolution Day, the date on which the Kachin Independence Organisation was founded (5 February 1961). Typically held in a hotel conference room in Hounslow, these events are open to friends and supporters of the community. As at church services the visible signifiers of Kachin ethnicity are conspicuously manifested. Children perform wearing miniaturised versions of traditional dress (Figure 13: left⁶⁷), the speaker's podium is often draped in Kachin-style fabrics and male speakers wear tailored garments carrying Kachin-specific designs (Figure 13: right). The food served also carries ideological meaning. In the example seen in Figure 14, the decorations on a cake include the shape of 'Kachinland' and two decorated *manau* posts. The flags of the Kachin Independence Organisation and Kachin National Organisation have also been added.

⁶⁷ This display of traditional Kachin dress, worn by children, is unusual in that it just reflects Jinghpaw identities. More typically these displays represent the dress of all six official Kachin subgroups.



Figure 14: Cake served at an event to mark the 55th anniversary of Kachin Revolution Day. Event held at the Ramada Hotel, Hounslow, 6 February 2016. Photograph by the author.

Unlike church-organised services and events, Kachin National Organisation events tend to carry militaristic associations. Elements of military dress are worn (Figures 15 and 16),⁶⁸ the song *Wunpawng Mungdan Makhawn* (commonly referred to as the ‘Kachin national anthem’) is sung and revolutionary slogans are chanted.⁶⁹ Since 2013, as an outcome of the developing relationship between Brighton Museum and London Kachin community member Gumring Hkangda described in 1.5, reproductions of photographs by James Henry Green have become a feature of these events, forming museum-style displays, with labels (Figure 16) and even featuring as illustrations to speeches (Figure 15). In this respect, they can be seen to have become part of the rhetorical devices on which certain notions of ‘Kachin-ness’ can be advanced, in this case in the explicit pursuit of specific political agendas.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Since 2011, the amount of material culture carrying the visual identity and/or colours (red and green) of the Kachin Independence Organisation has proliferated. Flags, scarves, t-shirts and pin-badges regularly feature at these political events, as well as at protests. It seems unlikely, given what they signify, that these items are produced within Myanmar. One respondent suggested that they are made in Thailand (where she had purchased a number of red and green scarves for distribution amongst the UK Kachin community). This is an area for further research.

⁶⁹ *Wunpawng myusha ni shanglawt lu ai amyū / Teng sha byin tai lu na / Wunpawng myusha ni a tara rap-ra ai rawt malan hkrunlam / Teng sha awngdang lu na* (The Kachin revolution of justice, freedom and equality / To be achieved / The Kachin revolutionary goal of self-determination / To be achieved). Printed copy handed out at the 56th anniversary of Kachin Revolution Day, Ramada hotel, Hounslow, 4 February 2014.

⁷⁰ Pull-up banners carrying Green’s images are also often on display at community-organised fundraising events as can be seen in Figure 12.



Figure 15: Hkanhpa Tu Sadan, General Secretary of the Kachin National Organisation, uses a photograph by James Henry Green (of Nga Lang La) to illustrate his speech at an event marking the 56th anniversary of Kachin Revolution Day. Event held at the Ramada Hotel, Hounslow, 4 February 2017. Photograph by the author.



Figure 16: Reproductions of photographs taken by James Henry Green on display at an event marking the 56th anniversary of Kachin Revolution Day. Event held at the Ramada Hotel, Hounslow, 4 February 2017. Photograph by the author.

The community's skills and expertise in staging displays of Kachin identity, for internal and external consumption, were evident in an event they participated in at Brighton Museum. On 28 September 2013, the Museum hosted a *Kachin Day of Solidarity and Celebration*. Organised by the author, as Keeper of World Art, with the help and support of Gumring Hkangda, who was at the time working for the Museum,⁷¹ the event spanned both political and cultural agendas. In the morning a range of speakers discussed both historical and contemporary experiences of conflict in northern Myanmar and the efforts of the Kachin Relief Fund (a charity organisation established by the London community) to provide aid. In the afternoon, members of the London community provided a series of cultural activities: weaving demonstrations, musical performances, a fashion show and a *manau* dance. For the Kachin community, the Museum provided a valuable staging ground for the performance of an 'authentic' Kachin identity which could offer an increased profile for this identity; important at a time when the community was keen to build awareness of the ongoing political crisis in northern Myanmar. Initially hesitant at the political implications of the use of the word 'solidarity' in the event title, the Museum's leadership came to view the event as a useful means of engaging the public with displays in the recently-opened *World Stories Young Voices* gallery.

⁷¹ Gumring Hkangda subsequently wrote a short entry for the Museum's blog about the event (Hkangda, 2013).



Figure 17: Members of the London-based Kachin community at a *Kachin Day of Solidarity and Celebration*, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, 28 September 2013. Photographs by Zau Sam Gauzam.

Despite its relatively small size, the London-based Kachin community is highly active in constructing internally- and externally-facing displays of Kachin identity. As is discussed further below, these displays are motivated by a number of factors: historic experiences of political and cultural marginalisation within Myanmar, a desire to draw attention to what was seen as a current political crisis and urgent humanitarian issue and the longer-term aim of building an authentic identity to sustain the community in diaspora. As the first generation of Kachin migrants to the United Kingdom, members of the London community often face economic disadvantage, many working long hours in poorly-paid and insecure positions. The demands of maintaining a Kachin identity were considerable, in terms of time and money, however the importance of these efforts was never, it seemed, under question.

The San Francisco Bay Area

The San Francisco Bay Area Kachin community is not dissimilar in size to that based in London. Frequently-given estimates suggest a population of about 120 people. In terms of other Kachin communities in the United States, larger groups can be found in Fort Worth, Texas (an estimated 400 to 500 people) and Jacksonville, Florida (some 300 people).⁷² As is described in 1.3, ‘The Kachin and their Recent Political History’, the Jacksonville community is the outcome of a specific migration route taken by Kachin people through Guam, a United States island territory in Micronesia, which had operated a visa-waiver programme. Both communities have seen their size grow through absorbing refugees resettled through the UNHCR’s Third Country Resettlement scheme.

The basis of the Bay Area community was formed in the late 1980s when individual male migrants came to the area, often for educational purposes.⁷³ Reverend Zauya Lahpai, a Kachin minister based in San Jose, noted that by the late 1990s there were some 10 Kachin families in the Bay Area, as settled individuals called their families to join them (8 April 2015). Regular prayer meetings were held in individuals’ homes. In 2000 a Kachin youth group formed in the Bay Area, followed, in 2006, by the establishment of a fellowship organisation: the San Francisco Kachin Baptist Fellowship (SFKBF). From March 2008 SFKBF began to offer Jinghpaw-language worship services on Sunday afternoons at Lakeshore Baptist Church in Oakland, a practice which continues today. In 2011 SFKBF was renamed the San Francisco Kachin Baptist Church.

Unlike the London Kachin community, where several households live in close proximity, the Bay Area community is more dispersed, with members living in urban conurbations around the Bay, for example Union City and Daly City, but some as far away as Napa. Based in Oakland, a city on the east side of the Bay, Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church was considered to be a convenient location for people to drive to and, crucially, offered local parking. It was a borrowed space and, when I visited in 2015, the community were running a “2020 Vision” fundraising campaign to achieve their ambition of purchasing their own church building. Fundraising events included a community event I attended during my visit in March 2015

⁷² While these figures were commonly given as estimates, the Kachin Alliance is currently undertaking a census of US-based Kachin populations (*Kachin Alliance Mying Jahpan Project*).

⁷³ Shadan Zau Aung noted of early Kachin arrivals to the Bay Area that, “some people are individually come to go to school, to study, and some are coming to go to divinity school, theology school” (24 March 2015).

(Figure 18) and a fashion show held in September 2015, which featured a catwalk presentation of the designs of visiting celebrity Kachin fashion designer Seng Lat (Figure 19).



Figure 18: Images of a fundraising event organised by the San Francisco Bay Area Kachin community. Clockwise from top left: Children from the Bay Area community performing, wearing miniaturised versions of forms of women’s dress associated with the six official Kachin sub-groups; Two participants in a fashion show; Event attendees were able to purchase home-cooked food to eat at the event or to take away; Dancers end a traditional dance performance with a display of the Kachin Independence Organisation flag. Photographs by the author, 21 March 2015.

SAN FRANCISCO KACHIN BAPTIST CHURCH

NEW CHURCH BUILDING FUNDRAISING
FASHION SHOW

THE VERY FIRST KACHIN FASHION SHOW
 IN AMERICA WITH
 INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED DESIGNER
 SENG LIT (MARR)
 &
 MYANMAR FAMOUS TOP MODELS
 RUIN SENG, M SENG LU

SATURDAY LOCATION
 AUGUST 22ND, 2015 15301 WICKS BLVD.
 6PM - 10PM SAN LEANDRO, CA

FOR TICKET INFO CONTACT:

HOM DE SAN (415) 990-5902	LUSING ZAU TING (415) 801-5742	JA SENG BU (510) 414-3898	LAHRI AH MOON (925) 338-4010
LUSING NANG TAWNG (415) 819-4040	HEIDI (510) 779-8375	HPAUWUNG HKAWN SAN (510) 982-2451	
JULY JA SENG (415) 307-1215	HTOI RA LABYA (650) 219-5168		

PARTICIPATING CHURCH & COMMUNITIES
 SAN FRANCISCO KACHIN BAPTIST CHURCH,
 KACHIN COMMUNITY IN BAY AREA
 &
 MYANMAR COMMUNITY IN BAY AREA

DESIGN: BURCHAW PHOTO CREDIT TO ALL ORIGINAL PICTURES

Figure 19: Promotional poster for a fashion show organised by the San Francisco Kachin Baptist Church as part of its “2020 Vision” (new church building) fundraising campaign.

As in London, many of the original Kachin migrants to the area were from relatively affluent families and had grown up in metropolitan areas of Myanmar where they had been able to access educational provision. Reverend Hkangda Naw San Dee described them as “all educated”, “college graduate” (22 March 2015). Those who arrived in the Bay Area in the late 1980s and 1990s were more likely to have integrated into larger and more established Burmese and Burmese-Chinese migrant communities and to attend church services in Burmese. Younger community members were more likely to attend the Jinghpaw-language church service at Oakland. Some complained that the elders were conspicuous by their absence from church and community events, with one interviewee commenting that they “don’t get that involved” (Hkangda Brawng Awng, 18 March 2015). In contrast, a Kachin minister from a local Burmese-language church noted that his church had lost a significant proportion of its Kachin congregation when the Lakeshore Church started holding services in Jinghpaw. “Wherever the Kachin are, they want to be together”, he observed (Reverend Zauya Lahpai, 8 April 2015).

An emphasis on education was in evidence both in church sermons and activities and in the sentiments of members of the congregation that I spoke to. This was partly a reflection of the area’s high living costs and the high levels of education needed to access some local job markets, for example, the technology industry.⁷⁴ While the high cost of accommodation was considered a drawback to living in the area, state-sponsored initiatives aimed at providing access to education for those on low incomes were viewed as a positive benefit. Many members saw taking advantage of local educational infrastructure as a kind of responsibility. Interviewee SF-8 said “this is a good opportunity for me to study here. It creates a better opportunity for my country” (4 April 2015). Education, I was told, was considered less of a priority amongst the Kachin communities in Florida and Jacksonville where lower living costs and access to low-skills employment, such as in factory work, meant a reasonable standard of living could be achieved without a college education. There was a certain implicit snobbery in this, with one Bay Area interviewee noting drily that Kachin people in Texas are “not much interested in education” (Reverend Hkangda Naw San Dee, 22 March 2015). Given that a key driver for improving one’s education was to contribute to Kachin society

⁷⁴ Interviewee SF-8 noted that available work in the Bay Area tended to be in office work, information technology or in childcare unlike in other parts of the United States, where there were greater opportunities to access jobs in industry or in factory work (4 April 2015). K Kai Din noted the local emphasis on the technology industry which requires a high level of education to enter (24 March 2015).

after one's return to Myanmar, there was a sense that those not interested in pursuing this line were not fulfilling their responsibilities.

As in London, cultural education was also deemed important. A Sunday school runs alongside the regular church service in an adjacent room, with the children brought out to join the main service at key points. The church also hosts a week-long summer school in July at which children receive intensive instruction in the Jinghpaw language, are taught Jinghpaw songs and learn about aspects of Kachin culture, including the kinship system and how to prepare certain traditional foods.⁷⁵ Jinghpaw was less widely-spoken amongst the children of the congregation than in London and the church minister noted that he used a mixture of English and Jinghpaw to speak to them within the service.

In contrast to London, members of the Bay Area community were less likely to be involved in political activism. Despite the fact that one of the founders of the Kachin National Organisation, Howa Ja La, lived in the area, as did the founder of *kachinlandnews.com*, political activism was limited. This might be partly the result of having existing, national-level advocacy for United States-based Kachin's political interests in the form of the Kachin Alliance, a political advocacy group which was established in 2012. The Kachin Alliance is based in Washington DC and seeks to influence United States policy concerning Myanmar and the Kachin specifically. Like the KNO, the Kachin Alliance also plays a role in the lobbying for the recognition of Kachin refugees and for their swift resettlement and regularly undertakes negotiations with the United States government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to this end. The organisation's aspirations to take a more global role in the promotion of Kachin political interests, were evident in the Alliance's hosting of the first 'World Kachin Conference' (with the Kachin Canadian Association), 18-19 May 2018 in Washington DC. Conference delegates included "more than 60 Kachin community leaders from 14 US states and representatives from Europe, North America and ... Southeast Asian countries" (*Kachinland News*, 2018).

One of the most significant developments for United States-based Kachins has been the impact of the UNHCR's Third Country Resettlement scheme. While the United States has taken referrals through the scheme since 1975 (UNHCR, 2014, p.2), in 2005, in an unusual arrangement, the United States government agreed to accept refugees from Myanmar ethnic

⁷⁵ As detailed by Lashi Bawk Lu, an older Kachin woman, who was a church deacon and who led the summer school programme (24 March 2015).

minorities under a group methodology. Such schemes, also known as ‘Priority Two’ referrals, target “specific groups of special concern (within certain nationalities) as identified by the Department of State in consultation with NGOs, UNHCR, DHS [Department of Homeland Security], and other area experts as well as some in-country programs” (UNHCR, 2014, p.4).⁷⁶ From 2006 until 2010,⁷⁷ the United States accepted group referrals from:

Ethnic Minorities and others from Burma in camps in Thailand

Individuals who have fled Burma and who are registered in nine refugee camps along the Thai/Burma border and who are identified by UNHCR as in need of resettlement are eligible for processing.

Ethnic Minorities from Burma in Malaysia

Ethnic minorities from Burma who are recognized by UNHCR as refugees in Malaysia and identified as being in need of resettlement are eligible for processing (UNHCR, 2014, p.5).

The scheme—which is now processing the final accepted applicants—has enabled some 95,000 Myanmar refugees from ethnic minority backgrounds to resettle in the United States.⁷⁸ Kachin refugees have made up an estimated 2,000 of this total.⁷⁹ Some of this number have resettled in the Bay Area but most have chosen to base themselves within the larger communities in Texas and Florida, where living costs are lower. Reverend Hkangda Naw San Dee suggested that those Kachins that came to the Bay Area did so largely because they had family members in the area who could help support them, observing that “I have a lot of relatives who are living around here because I can support them in one way or another, through transportation or helping them find a job” (22 March 2015).

In contrast to established members of the Bay Area Kachin community who, as the Reverend observed, had to be “rich, educated, or lucky” to be offered residency in the United States (22 March 2015),⁸⁰ the new Kachin arrivals represent a different demographic. As described above, many were raised in rural parts of Kachin State and Northern Shan State, were from

⁷⁶ In the language of United States resettlement policy, Priority Two (‘P-2’) is a group referral scheme. Priority One (‘P-1’) deals with individual cases only. In a P-1 referral, the UNHCR specifies what resettlement category the individual falls into via a Resettlement Referral Form. Within group referrals (P-2), there is generally no designation of an individual’s need for resettlement as they are simply included in the group definition.

⁷⁷ In order to qualify for resettlement, individuals who wished to be considered had to be registered with the UNHCR before 17 August 2010.

⁷⁸ Interview with Rachel Demas, UNHCR, Kuala Lumpur, 3 August 2016.

⁷⁹ Estimate given by the head of the Kachin Refugee Committee, Kuala Lumpur, August 2016.

⁸⁰ The latter to get a Diversity Immigrant Visa which are awarded via a lottery scheme.

agricultural backgrounds and had had very limited access to educational provision.⁸¹ Few had had the opportunity to learn English and this, in hand with the experience of spending several years in Kuala Lumpur, as part of a tightly-knit Kachin community awaiting processing by the UNHCR (see below), was making assimilation, both into the United States Kachin community, and American society more broadly, challenging. One interviewee described this situation by saying that recent arrivals were still “binding with culture back home. [They want to] be very authentic [and] want to do the same thing here [as they would in Myanmar]. [They] don’t want to change” (SF-7, 28 March 2015).

The symptoms of this culture clash are particularly apparent in a recent schism which has appeared in American Kachin churches between established *Madung* churches, which are typically affiliated to a United States-based religious organisation (such as the American Baptist Church, as is the case with the SFKBC, for example), and more recently founded ones, generally those established by more recent incomers, which prioritise their relationship with the Kachin Baptist Convention as a direct link to the homeland. In trying to secure its own influence and connection to overseas Kachin churches and their congregations, the Kachin Baptist Convention formed a new arm, the Overseas Kachin Baptist Convention in 2013 (Overseas Kachin Baptist Communities Network, 2013). In the same year it also established the KBC Churches of the USA and put pressure on United States-based Kachin churches to align themselves to this new organisation.⁸²

Reverend Hkangda Naw San Dee described the situation as follows:

We have now almost like 20, I would say about 20 Kachin churches in America. About 10 of them have been established here more than 5-10 years ago. They have different value, and they have different perspective on how to be Kachin-American. And there are these new groups coming from Malaysia, a lot of people come with their family, so already because they have more close, urgent attachment with the homeland. So their vision is a little bit different. So now, we have between some churches, there are some divisions going on now that we need to take some time to figure out how to best to be together as a Kachin community (22 March 2015).

⁸¹ My observations, and conversations with interviewees and others, suggests that this is broadly true but there are, of course, exceptions. One respondent noted that as immigration restrictions into the United States had tightened over time, individuals from more ‘elite’ backgrounds who may previously have pursued a different migration route, had taken the Malaysia/UNHCR path. I met one Bay Area-based Kachin family in which the adult siblings had taken different migration paths. Further research is required to develop a fuller understanding of motivations for migration and of the migration paths taken by individuals who identify as Kachin.

⁸² Reported by Reverend Zauya Lahpai (8 April 2015).

The split thus set up a tension between more pro-integration or assimilation models, such as that pursued by the SFKBC, which rejected the call to be part of the KBC Churches of the USA in preference to maintaining its links with the American Baptist Church, and those that adopted a position which might be considered more isolationist, in prioritising a relationship with the homeland church organisation.

Notably, in revealing the ambition of overseas Kachin organisations and individuals to present a ‘united front’, the perceived split in the church and the internal conflicts it has generated were viewed with dismay by the wider community. As a non-Kachin researcher, several people I spoke to were clearly taken aback, even embarrassed, that I should know about the issue, which has been little discussed in print. As such, it perhaps underscored the extent to which I, and other non-Kachins, were being presented with designed performances in regards to what it meant to ‘be Kachin’, which emphasised unity and a consistent voice and perspective. The sense of embarrassment and frustration that the church split was causing was reflected in a comment made by Howa Ja La, a community elder:

We have a little problem among the Baptist community. The traditional and liberal and things like that. Don’t go do that here in America in front of people. Don’t show them that. I’m scolding them all the time. I said, “You don’t do that. Don’t bring all your baggage and dirty linen here in America. We should be united” and stuff like that (21 March 2015).

The split in the Kachin American church has had other impacts, some perhaps unanticipated. A young female participant at a Kachin Christian Family Camp held at Warren Willis Camp in Florida, 26-29 May 2017, was reported to complain that, “The dating pool has become even smaller after the split of KBC and Madung churches” (Tsa Doi La, 2017). These family camp events are organised and sponsored by the Kachin American Association; a volunteer-run Christian organisation established in 2006. Until recently, camps have been held annually, over the Memorial Day weekend in late May.⁸³ Hosted by different American Kachin communities, they typically attract 200-300 people, occasionally 500, from across the States and even further afield, for a spiritual retreat as well as a cultural enrichment programme. To this end these events include religious services and lectures throughout the day as well as nightly entertainment in the form of stage shows and fashion shows. In the afternoon, there are volleyball and soccer games. The camp usually also includes a *manau* dance (Figure 20).

⁸³ The high costs involved in hosting and attending the camp means that, from 2017, the decision was made to make the event bi-annual rather than annual (Tsa Doi La, 2017).

The aims of the camps are five-fold:

- To not lose our Christian faith in this new land.
- To promote higher education among Kachin.
- To encourage community involvement.
- To foster a volunteering spirit for Kachin causes
- To maintain our languages/traditions and to not forget Kachin IDPs from motherland. (Tsa Doi La, 2017)

In reflecting the role of the church in promoting social cohesion and encouraging “community involvement” (ibid.), young people are a particular focus for the camp. One respondent talked about the community’s concerns for young Kachins growing up in the United States. She noted that the community is very “aware about that” and is “working hard about that” (SF-8, 4 April 2015). One of the motivating factors behind the annual summer camp was to encourage younger members of the community “to keep their culture”, “to take care of culture” (ibid.). As the young woman’s comment above suggests, it was also considered a useful forum for meeting a potential Kachin partner as marrying within the community is generally considered the ideal.



Figure 20: Image of participants in a *manau* dance at the 21st Annual Kachin Christian Family Camp. The camp was organised by the Jacksonville Kachin community and was held in Warren Willis Camp, Florida, 26-29 May 2017. Image by Sara Palawng Naw Tawng (Tsa Doi La, 2017).

While young Kachin-Americans might be a cause for concern amongst community elders, members of this demographic are also increasingly articulating their own identity projects and creating their own cultural representations. In a Youtube video created by the Kachin American Baptist Association (KABA) Youth Committee, participants at a KABA Youth Camp (held at a conference centre in Lynchburg, Tennessee, 1-4 July 2016) reflect, in English, on their experiences of being Kachin American.⁸⁴ Many described the experience as being “in two different worlds”. For most this was considered to offer positive benefits but one interviewee complained about not feeling fully accepted within either Kachin culture or American culture: “you’re like in-between” (KABA, 2016, 01:24). Another complained about a lack of recognition for the specificity of her identity. In the United States, she noted, “They group all Asians as Asians” (10:04). Moreover, “no one knows where Burma is” (09:56).

⁸⁴ The video apparently builds on and responds to a camp lecture given by Pastor Zau Sam Lahtaw: “Rise up and build: Today’s Kachin American Perspectives (Hybridity)”. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj_zzP3-BSS [accessed 8 December 2018].

Another interviewee, Jap Ja Ngai Awng, proposed a model of hybrid identity which emphasised its economic benefits. In her interpretation, being Kachin American meant moving from “immigrant” or “survival mode” to becoming a member of America’s professional classes. Only then, she suggested, could one see beyond one’s own immediate needs and engage with the wider Kachin community, including those in the homeland. Jap Ja Ngai Awng’s commitment to education as a vehicle for social mobility and for fulfilling responsibilities to the homeland has been further developed in a magazine, *Our Voices*, issued by the organisation Kachin-American *Ramma* (Kachin American Youth), three editions of which have been published since 2014.⁸⁵ Jap Ja Ngai Awng is the editor-in-chief of *Our Voices* and Jap Bu Ra Lu, her sister, is the design editor. The magazine is distributed free of charge at family camps as well as made available online. Written almost entirely in English, the articles offer an alternative perspective on issues relating to Kachin identity formation. Why such a perspective might be needed is hinted at in a review of the 2016 Kachin Christian Family Camp carried on the Kachin-American *Ramma* website. The camp was organised by the San Francisco Bay Area community and held at Redwood Glen Camp, California (27-30 May 2016). A positive feature of the camp was, the writer suggests:

Late night conversations with a handful of young Kachins about our everyday struggles and our views on the current Kachin affairs. Most of the things we said to each other were things that we would never dare to say to older and traditional Kachins and the reverends in fear of mistakenly being seen as Debbie Downers, liberals, Americanized, extreme, condescending, godless, etc. (Kachin-American *Ramma*, 2016a).

Our Voices, then, is about creating space for a different set of perspectives:

Our Voices is different from most of the existing Kachin publications in that it lies outside of the auspices of the establishment. The voices are not coming from the elders, the reverends, or even the progressive adults. All the opinions, constructive criticisms, and artistic expressions originate in the minds of individual young Kachins who want to see nothing more than a strong, united, and forward-moving Kachin community in America (Kachin-American *Ramma*, 2016b).

As such, the content offers up an expanded notion of ‘Kachin-ness’. An article in the 2016 issue, for example, criticises the Kachin community’s tendency to marginalise the children of mixed marriages, noting that “narrowly defining a Kachin identity based on blood has split up our community and created a critical Kachin population problem” (Jap Ja Ngai Awng, 2016, p.7). Other articles emphasise the contribution made by Kachin women “in education, political endeavours, as well as social and professional life” (2016, pp. 15-23).

⁸⁵ Issues were published in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

In seeking to find common ground between the liberal, pro-integration perspectives of its established members and the conservative, more inward-looking values held by more recent incomers with refugee backgrounds, the Bay Area Kachin community's outlook and experiences reflected some of the wider tensions inherent in undertaking Kachin identity-making projects in the United States. On the whole, the community's orientation remained outward-looking and expansive. There was an unusual level of accommodation shown to non-Jinghpaw speakers, as Reverend Hkangda Naw San Dee made clear, noting that "You don't have to necessarily speak very well Kachin to be a Kachin. Just thinking about Kachin and knowing about your roots ... that's kind of an accomplishment" (22 March 2015). Relationships and marriages to non-Kachin partners were relatively commonplace,⁸⁶ and there was also a considerable degree of flexibility shown to the undertaking of 'traditional' cultural practices. In describing the community's approach to the *manau* dance—which had on occasion drawn criticism from visiting elders—the Reverend observed:

There's nobody to, no elders to teach you how to do the proper *manau* dance so we [do it] like that, we have to learn for ourselves, a little bit different. If the people from Burma, the older generation come, they will not be happy with the way we do it, but we're doing our best and we're happy with that (ibid.).⁸⁷

In this respect, the Bay Area community's perspective differed significantly to that of Kachins based in Malaysia, where adherence to traditional protocols was more strictly maintained.

Kuala Lumpur

The Malaysian Kachin community is the largest overseas Kachin community, with an estimated 3,000 individuals contributing to one of the world's largest urban refugee populations.⁸⁸ At the end of October 2018, the UNHCR reported the presence of 162,430 refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia, 87% of whom originally came from Myanmar

⁸⁶ For example, Nu Nu N-Dawng noted that she had a Chinese boyfriend (8 April 2015), Hkangda Brang Awng (18 March 2015) and Hpauwung Hkawn San (7 April 2015) were married to Chinese-Kachin partners, Howa Ja La (21 March 2015) was married to a Filipino woman and Reverend Zauya Lahpai (8 April 2015) said that one of his daughters was married to an African-American man and another to a white American man.

⁸⁷ This level of pragmatism was not specific to San Francisco. An established member of a Pennsylvania Kachin community was similarly able to be relatively laissez-faire about the inevitability of cultural loss, believing that it inevitable that America-based Kachins will "lose some of our culture and identity," especially within small communities where it's "difficult to do cultural stuff" (Ja Seng Mai Lahkyen, 4 April 2015).

⁸⁸ Estimate provided by Hkawng Dau Zakhung, head of the Kachin Refugee Committee, Kuala Lumpur, August 2016.

(UNHCR, 2018).⁸⁹ A large proportion of this population, including most Kachin refugees, live in the Greater Kuala Lumpur (Klang Valley) area. Pei Palmgren has recently described how Malaysia's refusal to sign the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees which recognises refugee rights, means that members of this community exist in a state of "*protracted liminality* – a prolonged situation of insecurity and uncertainty regarding legal status, length of stay, and future moves" (2016, p.2, original emphasis). This fact impacts significantly on the community's ability to integrate itself into broader Malay society and its efforts to actively promote and preserve Kachin culture.

While those Kachins who travelled to Malaysia in the 1990s did so in pursuit of work, along with other immigrant workers attracted by and tolerated because of the country's demand for a continuous supply of cheap labour for its building boom (Project Maje, 2007; McGregor, 2014; Nah, 2014), today most are in Kuala Lumpur in the hope of securing a place on the UNHCR resettlement scheme. My research within the community suggests that Kachin refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia share a similar background to those Kachin refugees who have already been resettled: most originate from rural parts of Kachin State and Northern Shan State, were displaced by conflict and unable to complete their education. As registration for the group methodology resettlement scheme offered by the United States closed in 2010, anyone who arrived after this date is unlikely to be offered resettlement unless they have an urgent protection need, generally a critical health issue. For those Kachin individuals who arrived in Malaysia after 2010, their chances of UNHCR registration are very low, and of resettlement even lower. For the few that are accepted for resettlement, the process can take many years.

As most of those Kachin individuals who undertook it lacked passports or other official travel documentation, the Myanmar to Malaysia journey was highly risky. Most individuals I spoke to had undertaken the trip by boat, car and bus with the costly assistance of human traffickers, often travelling by night in overcrowded vehicles, in constant fear of being stopped and detained. On arriving in Kuala Lumpur, they found little guarantee of safety or security. The absence of legal recognition means that refugees are treated as illegal immigrants by the Malaysian government and are prevented from obtaining residence or work permits; they are

⁸⁹ This is the number of asylum seekers and refugees registered with the UNHCR. Of the Kachin community I was told that an estimated 25 percent have not yet had the chance to register (interview with Htu Lai Magawng, head of the Kachin Refugee Committee, 24 July 2018) so the number of asylum seekers in the country is likely to be considerably higher.

excluded from the formal economy and denied driving or trading licences; they cannot open bank accounts; refugee children cannot attend government schools; and refugee access to healthcare services is limited and expensive (International Rescue Committee, 2012). The criminalisation of refugees—and consequent lack of access to legal recourse—also makes them vulnerable to detention, extortion and crime (Hoffstaedter, 2014; Palmgren, 2016).

On arrival in the city, most Kachin refugees registered with the Kachin Refugee Committee (KRC), one of several such organisations representing different Myanmar minorities.⁹⁰ Registration and an annual membership fee are rewarded with an identity card, although this card carries significantly less weight with Malaysian authorities than those given to individuals recognised as refugees by the UNHCR.⁹¹ Unlike members of other communities seeking asylum, for example those from Pakistan, Yemen or Syria, who can register directly with the UNHCR, because of the large numbers involved, individuals from Myanmar are represented by their ethnically-based advocacy organisation. These organisations support UNHCR activity in maintaining lists of potential refugees and being a conduit for UNHCR information regarding policies and services (Palmgren, 2016). They also intervene in individual cases (for example, where a community member has been the victim of crime, has been detained or is in need of urgent medical attention), provide translation support and advocacy for the community more generally. They also organise some educational provision, in the form of two refugee learning centres for younger children (the Malaysian government does not allow these facilities to be called ‘schools’); one in Bukit Bintang, one in Setapak. As Meagan Floyd, Michael Zeller and Jason P. Abbott have observed, “In the absence of assistance from the government, these organizations are the tools refugees use to strive for security and the protection of their rights, educate themselves and even provide their basic health needs” (2015). Similarly, Palmgren has described how such organisations offer a “valuable source of resettlement-orientated social capital” (2016, p.6). In recent years, the large number of Kachin individuals registered and resettled by the UNHCR have caused a drop in KRC revenues, prompting an office relocation (into a shared space) and some staff

⁹⁰ There are more than twenty such ethnic-based organisations supporting refugees from Myanmar. These include, for example, the Chin Refugee Committee, the Rohingya Arakanese Refugee Committee, the Shan Refugee Organization and the Malaysia Karen Organisation.

⁹¹ Bearers of a UNHCR-issued identity card also benefit from a 50% reduction in healthcare fees. Those asylum seekers without this document have to pay high ‘foreigner’ rates. The card is valid for three years.

members (all of whom are, themselves, asylum-seekers or refugees) to voluntarily accept a reduced salary.⁹²

As with other Kachin communities, the church is an important source of social capital and plays a central role in the lives of its congregation. There are six branches of the Malaysia Kachin Baptist Church (MKBC) with a lead pastor, who is also an asylum seeker. Services are held in borrowed church buildings and in small meeting spaces hired across the Klang Valley. The Pudu church service, for example, is held in a Chinese Baptist church,⁹³ which is hired just for the service slot because of its a convenient location. As with other Kachin churches, MKBC is the umbrella organisation for a complex structure of committees and subcommittees which coordinate its various activities (prayer meetings, the provision of music at church services, youth programmes). It also provides a kind of social welfare system, with church collections being used to make small grants of rice or cash to members in crisis. In other ways the church tries to meet the gap in state welfare and educational provision. For example, the church car doubles as a community ambulance, taking labouring women to hospital and others for emergency treatment, and church volunteers offer a programme of night-time English language lessons for Kachin youth to attend after finishing long shifts in local restaurants.

Setapak (Genting Klang)	(35%)
Sri Hartamas / Mt. Kiara	(20%)
Bukit Bintang	(20%)
Kepong	(10%)
Damansara, Ampang	(10%)
Butterworth, Johor, Seremban	(5%)

Figure 21: Areas where members of the Kachin Refugee Committee reside, by percentage. Data provided by the head of the Kachin Refugee Committee, Kuala Lumpur, by email, August 2017.

The high cost of living in the city and the hostile environment encourages members of the Kachin community to share living accommodation. The majority live in cramped apartment buildings in or near central Kuala Lumpur (Figure 21). Many members work illegally, in restaurants or construction, but have to accept lower pay than local workers and the risk of being arrested in regular raids conducted by the Malaysian immigration authorities. Most

⁹² Meeting with the head of the Kachin Refugee Committee, Kuala Lumpur, August 2016.

⁹³ Chinese Methodist (Cantonese) Church, 362-A Jalan Gajah, Pudu, 55100 Kuala Lumpur.

individuals prefer to limit the time they spend in public, where the risk of being picked up by the police or being a victim of crime is always high, preferring to stay out of sight at home.⁹⁴ Alice M. Nah has highlighted the “cluster of strategies” that Myanmar refugees and asylum seekers use to reduce their public visibility. These include avoiding public spaces and adjusting one’s appearance “so as to ‘blend in’; to ‘look like a Malaysian’ in order to avoid attracting unwanted attention from law enforcement officers” (Nah, 2014, pp.156-157). These tactics were in evidence in my own findings. Interviewee SF-7, now a United States citizen, described her experiences in Kuala Lumpur, where she was told her that, in order to avoid the attention of the police, “you have to not talk Burmese in public, avoid events and crowded areas” (28 March 2015). Similarly, Nu Nu N-Dawng, who had also sought asylum in Malaysia, said that she had found it useful that she naturally “looks Malay” (8 April 2015). Her observation that she also avoided speaking Jinghpaw in public suggests what is at stake in making cultural representations in Malaysia. Many people I spoke to in Kuala Lumpur noted that they had to avoid wearing traditional clothes especially, in the case of men, the traditional skirtcloth or *lungyi* that would clearly mark them out as coming from Myanmar. In this context I was surprised to see several individuals out on the streets wearing t-shirts emblazoned with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) flag design or with the popular slogans and images which call for support and protection for internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Kachin area. I was told that, while no-one would wear a garment which carried the Burmese flag, which would be immediately identifiable, no Malaysian official would recognise the KIA flag. To my mind, it still seemed to pose an unnecessary risk in this acutely hostile environment but perhaps the fact that such items of clothing are worn is indicative of the strength of feeling associated with the ongoing conflict in the Kachin area.

The fact that refugees from Myanmar have to avoid public space, to “remain in the shadows of the city”, and constantly in limbo, never knowing if or when they might get the call from the UNHCR, has led Gerhard Hoffstaedter to define Malaysia as a non-place, merely a transit point for refugees from Myanmar (2014). In following Augé (1995) he defines a non-place as “a space we traverse but do not engage, or are able to be in dialogical engagement with” (Hoffstaedter, 2014, p.876). Yet while space, both public and private, is extremely limited for the Kuala Lumpur-based Kachin community, and quickly exhausted by the demands made on

⁹⁴ Partly for this reason, and partly because most working members of the community work late shifts in restaurants, the community follows a semi-nocturnal existence with most families going to sleep around 3 or 4am and not waking until early afternoon.

it,⁹⁵ these conditions appear to be contributing to the intensifying of cultural activity. For example, while there are notably few opportunities to wear traditional dress, the creation of these is given close attention. Interviewee KL-6, a young Lawngwaw woman, recalled how the traditional Lawngwaw-style garments she wore for her wedding (held at the Pudu church) were commissioned from a Kuala Lumpur-based Kachin tailor, who works out of her Bukit Bintang apartment (1 August 2016). Other traditional elements—for example, the sword (*nhtu*) carried by the groom and the silver decoration (*soi*) for her black velvet jacket—had been brought over specially by a visitor from Myanmar. Amongst the wider community, Jinghpaw-speaking is the norm,⁹⁶ and kinship marriage restrictions are closely observed.⁹⁷ Despite the fear of public visibility, an unmarked Kachin restaurant operates from a building set just back from the main run of food vendors on busy Jalan Alor. Moreover, in contrast to the recent schism in the Kachin-American church, in Malaysia a close relationship is maintained with the Kachin Baptist Convention manifested in a visiting minister, whose living costs are met through collections made at church services. As evident in the example of the wedding dress, cultural traditions are followed as carefully as possible. Despite the limited resources available to community members and in contrast to the more flexible approach taken by the Bay Area community, improvisation is avoided wherever possible. During my stay, the head of MKBC told me that the church recently invited over members of a Myitkyina-based cultural committee to offer advice and training to committee members regarding the correct protocol for arranging dowries, and for maintaining the kinship system, although he was rueful about the fact that several of those that received training from the group had already moved on (3 August 2016). The challenge, the MKBC pastor went on to explain, is retaining cultural knowledge within this transient community (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, while Malaysia is considered by most Myanmar refugees and asylum seekers as a waiting room, a transit point, a place where time is spent ‘meaninglessly’ while individuals endure the long wait for a call from the UNHCR, it is clear that significant cultural investment is

⁹⁵ The MKBC hires an office space in Bukit Bintang, which as well as providing a space for church meetings and prayer groups, has to accommodate a visiting Kachin Baptist Convention pastor during his three-year term, occasionally the church car driver too. During my stay I witnessed several double-bookings as different factions of the community – women, youth, men – had to negotiate access to this precious space. The newly-installed entrance security system, which requires the caller to be let in by someone already inside the room, was indicative of how much is at stake in claiming this as a safe space for the community.

⁹⁶ In interview, the MKBC pastor underscored the importance of the Jinghpaw language to the Kuala Lumpur-based Kachin community, noting that “we only stand in our language ... we pray in our own language” (3 August 2016).

⁹⁷ A special fund was recently established by MKBC to offset the high cost of Kachin weddings, believing that this might be a disincentive for young people to marry within the community.

being made by the Kuala Lumpur-based community, an investment which is following its members into new diasporic settings.

While it seems counter-intuitive that a hostile environment which meets displays of ethnic or cultural difference with punitive action would engender cultural activity, this is offset by the extent to which ethnic identity plays an important role in the recognition of certain groups or individuals as appropriate candidates for refugee status. In Malaysia, it also plays a related role in facilitating access to sources of social capital, for example in the form of refugee advocacy groups like the Kachin Refugee Committee, and religious groups like the Malaysia Kachin Baptist Church. As Hoffstaedter has observed “The urban refugee experience in Malaysia is dominated by one’s ethnic identity, as it is this key identifier that determines one’s community support networks” (2015, p.202). For those fortunate to be recognised as refugees by the UNHCR and to be accepted for resettlement, ethnic identity would continue to play an important role in the assessing and processing of their claim, in the allocation of resources and in facilitating their access to new forms of social capital in the new location. Thus, while Lashi Brang Aung complained that “we want to keep our culture but the situation does not encourage us to do that” (30 July 2016), in fact it seemed that the reverse was true.

Inevitably, the privileging of ethnic identity in processes of refugee recognition and resource allocation, as in Myanmar, can be a cause for inter-ethnic conflict and resentment, some of which is apparent—in the Kachin case—in the split of some Rawang members from the Kachin Refugee Committee to set up their own refugee advocacy group in 2015, complaining that “leaders of the more populous Jinghpaw ethnicity had marginalised other Kachin sub-ethnicities during support activities and had acted as exclusionary gatekeepers to UNHCR-funded assistance programmes” (Palmgren, 2016, p.8). Individuals that I spoke to also expressed resentment at the perceived privileging of the Rohingya by international organisations, including the UNHCR, in the allocation of resources and resettlement processing. As Egreteau reminds us, “Burmese politics are as divisive in the diaspora as they are at home” (2012, p.132).

Conclusions: Kachin culture in diaspora

In all three diasporic contexts, the maintenance and preservation of Kachin culture remained a central preoccupation despite the difficulties often encountered. When asked, in interview, why this work mattered, interviewees almost always pointed to the widely-held fear of cultural annihilation by the Burmese government, which they considered to be engaged in a process of ‘Burmanization’. The comments of London-based Hkun Nawng were typical in this respect:

We feel we are losing our identity gradually because of the Burmese government’s domination of their, what we call Burmanization in terms of language, culture, everything, in every sector. So, we started having a feeling of fear. To overcome that fear the Kachin also started to think, how to keep our identity alive—in terms of culture, language—in the long run, before we get our political goal [...] I think that’s what makes us really think a lot these days (4 October 2014).

In this frequently-repeated narrative, Kachin individuals point to the ever-present fear, founded in Myanmar, of being part of a diminishing population constantly at risk of assimilation if not cultural obliteration. The cited evidence of this is manifold, and is recounted in various places throughout this thesis, including historic restrictions on minority languages in education and publishing, displacement from the territorial homeland through conflict and the promoted in-migration of non-Kachin populations, as well as restrictions on cultural and spiritual practices. These issues are at the heart of what it means to ‘be Kachin’, and form the basis of the logic which justifies Kachin resistance—in the form of the Kachin Independence Organisation and its armed wing—to the policies and practices of the Burman-led state.

The sense of being part of a diminishing minority pervades diasporic communities and was often mentioned in interview. It sometimes manifested in ways I found discomfoting including, for example, in the expectation, amongst elders, that young Kachins should marry within the community and that Kachin women should be encouraged to have many children.⁹⁸ Even in Singapore, where in August 2016 I briefly met with members of the local Kachin Baptist Church (the congregation of which represents one of the more elite diaspora communities), I was asked to find research evidence of how small diaspora communities can resist cultural assimilation. As described above, partly for this reason, there was a widespread

⁹⁸ This was especially problematic in Kuala Lumpur, where it was a keenly felt pressure despite the lack of access to affordable healthcare and the high risks of living in the city as an undocumented migrant. I was told that this expectation is most strongly affirmed within Myanmar, where the Kachin Baptist Convention gives awards to women who have had large numbers of children. Patriarchal gender norms amongst the Kachin community have been explored in the work of Jenny Hedström (for example, Hedström, 2017).

concern about children and young people; a worry that they would lose their culture or forget their language. The anxieties inherent in the words of interviewee Zau Lahpai, who noted that “for the community of UK Kachin, it’s the first to think about our children, those who are born here” (8 November 2014), were shared by many.

However, whether because of or despite these fears about cultural loss, as is evident in the above descriptions diaspora appeared to be a highly productive place for culture and for identity formation and maintenance activities. Indeed, many interviewees noted the extent to which their sense of ethnic identity had been activated by the experience of migration. The pastor of San Francisco Kachin Baptist Church, for example, described how members of his congregation “learned how to be Kachin here” (Reverend Hkangda Naw San Dee, 22 March 2015). He noted how some young Kachin people came to the United States without knowing how to speak or read Jinghpaw but chose to learn it after arrival. His explanation for this was that, in the United States (as throughout the refugee assessment and resettlement process), ‘having an ethnic identity’ took on heightened importance: “You have to define yourself, so young people started learning Kachin language and how to be a Kachin here, again. They will never know as much as they know now if they live in Burma” (ibid.). In similar ways, a London-based Kachin individual suggested to me that while in Myanmar 10 percent of Kachin people are interested in ‘being Kachin’, in London 90 percent are. This was perhaps not surprising given how ‘having an ethnic identity’ provided a rationale for living in exile, as well as access to kinship networks, communal support and the possibility of political solidarity.

A San Francisco-based interviewee provided another explanation: “When I was in Myanmar I didn’t think about [Kachin culture]. Here we are very few. Every day we have to communicate with people from other cultures, other backgrounds. That motivates me” (SF-8, 4 April 2015). Living amongst ‘super-diversity’ both motivated cultural representations but also sometimes frustrated their visibility and intelligibility. While the majority of interviewees emphasised their pleasure at wearing, and seeing others wear, examples of traditional Kachin dress,⁹⁹ one London-based interviewee regretted how its cultural specificity got lost amongst the ethnic diversity on display in Hounslow and Southall:

⁹⁹ Interviewee SF-7, for example, noted that “it is good to wear [traditional clothes] in front of other communities to show what we have” (28 March 2015).

Wearing our traditional clothes is not very different from African. That's what I feel. When I was back home, I think this is very distinguished but after I've seen this African costume then I think it's quite similar and I don't feel, 'Oh, if I wear my costume, then everybody can know me as a Kachin' (Zau Lahpai, 8 November 2014).

Another important aspect of diasporic Kachin cultural practices is the extent to which they are prompting the revitalisation of culture amongst Kachin organisations in Myanmar. New resources and sources of guidance are being produced by Kachin cultural, religious and political organisations to meet the needs of diaspora communities. One interviewee noted, for example, that a current aim of the Kachin National Education Committee (a KIO department) is the development of a Kachin curriculum system, "because people outside are asking for this" (Ja Htoi Pan Maran, 14 August 2015). This phenomenon has other manifestations as well. The content and distribution of Kachin popular culture is increasingly being shaped by the widening geographic spread of its consumer base (see, 2.4, 'Kachin culture and new media', for further discussion of this). Several Kachin musicians (for example Ah Ba Di and Nor Ni) have undertaken tours of United States diaspora communities, performing at family camps and other events, and are increasingly reflecting diasporic experiences in their lyrics.

Despite the fears amongst elder and senior figures that children and young people from Kachin families living overseas would 'lose' their culture and language, it was often young people who appeared to be driving cultural activity through organising cultural shows, performing music at church, sharing popular music, and coordinating retreats.¹⁰⁰ In the Bay Area, for example, the youth group affiliated with the San Francisco Kachin Baptist Church helped make weddings, funerals and christenings more affordable for community members by setting up the buffet, laying out table settings, serving food and cleaning up afterwards. However, as evident in the example given of the publication *Our Voices*, there was a tension, at least in the United States, between the more open and flexible forms of ethnic identification being made by some Kachin youth, and those more traditional, conservative forms associated with the Kachin 'establishment' (often represented by senior Kachin Baptist Church figures).

¹⁰⁰ Violet Cho draws a similar conclusion from her research with the New Zealand-based Karen diaspora, noting that while Karen youth were unlikely to be involved in political activism, they were likely to be involved in cultural activism. In also highlighting the importance of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) to cultural maintenance, Cho notes a Karen youth group which was established with the objective of preserving Karen culture and traditions, "after one young leader and his colleague in Auckland had seen and learnt cultural-based activities online, which were carried out by Karen communities overseas. The youth group was established in response to the perceived inaction of senior New Zealand-based Karen organisations" (Cho, 2011, p.206).

Why then, given the evidence that Kachin culture is thriving in diaspora (and even arguably providing an engine for driving cultural developments back home), do ideas about cultural annihilation continue to manifest themselves? Partly, as noted above, such sentiments are at the heart of Kachin nationalism, which presents itself as a ‘natural’, logical response to Burmese incursions on Kachin territory (*wungpawng mungdan*) and the repression of Kachin cultural practices.¹⁰¹ In nationalist rhetoric culture is indivisible from territory and so the essentially territorial demands made by the Kachin Independence Organisation, its “political goal”, to repeat the term given in Hkun Nawng’s quote at the head of this section, are commonly framed in terms of history and culture. These issues are further discussed in the next two sections, 2.3, ‘The printed calendar and the development of a Kachin visual identity,’ and 2.4, ‘Kachin culture and new media’, with specific examples.

While Kachin culture has to be tied to a specific geographical locale (*wunpawng mungdan*), Kachin nationalism also draws strength from the geographical diversity of its membership. Despite the differences I witnessed on the ground in terms of how different factions of overseas communities approached Kachin culture, there was a clear desire for a sense of unity and consistency in how the Kachin community made external representations. Howa Ja La, in recalling the founding of the organisation which became the Pan-Kachin Development Society, pointed to the psychological saliency of this strategy:

when we founded an NGO called Kachin Development Cooperation based in Chiang Mai, I coined the word Pan-Kachin so that our friends and followers alike will know that we may be just a small group in Burma but we do have our kith and kin on both sides of the border, China and India, so it combine. Not that we add [up] to a great number of Kachin people. But, psychologically, there might be (21 March 2015).

To this end, internal differences and disagreements were minimised or covered over so as to project a united front which could be effective in securing political advocacy. Community leaders discouraged fragmentation and division. As one interviewee noted, “we are very small. If we separate, we are very weak. We have to be together when we’re here” (SF-8, 4 April 2015).

In the next two sections I consider the mechanisms through which the community has sought to visualise the extent to which it is “together”. Despite the varied experiences of Kachin people living under different conditions, Kachin media has found effective strategies through

¹⁰¹ In this respect the sentiments of the late Kachin cultural specialist Pungga Ja Li, who said “We are left with culture only, which means everything to us,” are shared with many in the Kachin community (Ba Kaung, 2011).

which to communicate shared concerns and to emphasise the unity of geographically dispersed populations. These strategies are explored in the next two sections which address, firstly, a form of popular print and, secondly, the use of information communication technologies.

2.3 The Printed Calendar and the Development of a Kachin Visual Identity



Figure 22: An image of a bedroom in a Kuala Lumpur apartment occupied by refugees from Myanmar. Image from the online exhibition *Hidden Lives, The Untold Story of Urban Refugees*. Available at: <http://hidden-lives.org.uk/>.

Introduction

While living in diaspora often provided individuals with the catalyst for a stronger identification with a ‘Kachin’ identity, this identity had been under construction for several decades. As described in 1.3, ‘The Kachin and their Recent Political History’, a shared language (Jinghpaw), shared Christian faith and shared experiences of political marginalisation and cultural repression, had established the necessary conditions for an emergent Kachin ethno-nationalism. Print cultures were to play a significant role in the expansion and consolidation of nationalist sentiment including, for example, the publication *Jinghpaw Shi Laika* (Jinghpaw News), which, as Sadan has noted, helped “collapse the distance between the widely dispersed and [local] ... church congregations” in the Kachin area (2013, p.379).¹⁰² In this section, I consider a popular graphic medium which emerged in

¹⁰² For more on early Kachin language print media see Kurabe and Imamura, 2016.

the post-ceasefire period and provided a new interpretative vehicle for certain notions of ‘Kachin-ness’. It is a medium which followed Kachin people into diaspora and in marked ways reproduced a set of tropes which would go on to be manifested through social media (see 2.4, ‘Kachin culture and new media’). It is also a medium which has made use of reproductions of the photographs of James Henry Green and thus provides an example of how museum materials might be drawn into new social, cultural and political contexts through their appropriation by diaspora communities.

I argue here that the kind of popular printed calendar which circulated amongst Kachin communities in the post-ceasefire period should be considered a form of alternative archive. In drawing together materials with heritage associations, including Green’s photographs and images of models wearing ‘traditional’ forms of dress, these calendars are evidence of the kind of “independent heritage-making actions and projects” driven by “those ‘outside’ the authorised realm of heritage discourse,” described by Ashley and Frank (2016, p.501). Their role as a form of visual archive is evident too in the ways that calendar pages from different years are used to cover the walls of Kachin homes, offices and businesses, for example in the bedroom of a refugee’s Kuala Lumpur apartment (Figure 22). This kind of archival layering, especially of printed images which carry visual references to an even earlier past, help provide a sense of enduring historical continuity, despite the uncertainties of the present.

In my analysis of five examples of Kachin calendars, I explore how rhetorical devices adopted in their design and their means of circulation made this print medium an effective vehicle for the transmission of ethno-nationalist sentiment at a time of limited political freedom. In discussing the work of an individual calendar designer, I also demonstrate how the challenges posed by the limited availability of visual and historical materials and restricted access to publishing and print technologies could be mitigated in order to produce a new visual language which spoke directly to contemporary concerns. While this designer, Zakhung Hkawng Gyung (‘Ko Z’), continues his graphic design practice in both print and online formats, he has more recently established himself as a fine artist. As with his graphic design, Ko Z’s artistic practice draws on a historical imagination which it imbues with a nationalist sentiment and I consider the extent to which it provides a ‘Kachin-appropriate’ form of heritage discourse.

2.3.1 Calendars and the construction of a visual counter-narrative to Burman hegemony

While visiting Myitkyina in Kachin State in 2005 to attend the annual *manau* festival I was struck by the presence, in every home, business and workplace, of colourful printed calendars. These were distinctively ‘Kachin’: the imagery they carried included line-ups of young people wearing traditional forms of Kachin dress, and its modernised equivalent, and views of popular beauty spots in Kachinland. In some homes, calendars from previous years covered the walls. When I asked about them I learned that, while printed calendars were popular across the whole of Myanmar and amongst different ethnic nationalities, in the Kachin area it was only after 1994, in ceasefire conditions, that calendars of this kind could be produced so readily and of such relatively high quality and therefore had become so widespread. Given the tight governmental restrictions that pertained to the printing and circulation of published material during this period, their presence could not be taken for granted.

I came to realise that these visual representations of Kachin identity provided an important vehicle for ensuring the visibility of popular Kachin nationalist aspirations in a period otherwise marked by an increasing sense of disenfranchisement from the political mainstream, including not only that of the Burmese regime but also the KIO, which, as described in 2.3, ‘The printed calendar and the development of a Kachin visual identity’, was facing heightened critical public scrutiny at this time. In a highly controlled social environment, in which the influence of the governing State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) could be felt in every aspect of communal life (including in the reproduction of its national slogans, on billboards in public spaces across the country, as well as in all published and broadcast media (Watkins, 2007, p.274)), these calendars appeared to provide an ideal medium for conveying and maintaining Kachin nationalist sentiments in subtle yet nonetheless politically significant ways. Their ubiquity evoked Michael Billig’s observations on ‘banal’ nationalism: “In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations... a reminding so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding” (1995, p.4). While the SLORC sought to present its rule as extending to every corner of public space and even into private life, as Douglas E. Haynes and Gyan Prakash have reminded us, power is constantly at risk of being “fractured by the struggles of the subordinate” (1992, p.2) and the calendars demonstrated the ability of

Kachin nationalists to exploit a small chink in the façade of state rule by offering a visual counter-narrative to that of the hegemony of the military state.

The calendars thus provided evidence not only of the possibility of Kachin nationhood but also of the limitations of state rule. This was apparent in some of the subversive tactics that were effectively deployed to circumvent official restrictions on printing and to ensure wide distribution of such materials. After the military coup d'état by Ne Win in 1962, the Printers' and Publishers' Registration Law was enacted. This law required all printers and publishers to register and submit copies of their publications to the Press Scrutiny Board (renamed the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division in 2005), under the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs (later under the Ministry of Information).¹⁰³ Although the freedom to teach and publish in minority languages would be, in theory, enshrined in law by the 1974 constitution, these freedoms were granted only if they did not "offend the laws or the public interest" (Article 21). Effectively, this meant the virtual disappearance of minority languages in education and the dramatic reduction of publications in minority languages, except in areas under insurgent control.¹⁰⁴ The only exceptions were domestic or religious-based texts, which were approved by the Press Scrutiny Board for circulation in limited numbers. Despite the limited freedom given to religious organisations to produce printed materials, which were assumed to be a-political, sensitivities nonetheless remained. For example, I was told that if words with spiritual associations, such as 'eternal', appeared on the calendars, this could cause difficulties in this Buddhist-dominated state. Nonetheless, until 2000, most calendars that were produced for Kachin consumption tended to be associated with churches and theological organisations like the Kachin Theological College.

In principle, all items for publication had to go before a Press Scrutiny Board censorship committee, a process that could take several months and would invariably result in requested amendments as an assertion of power. However, the printing of 300 'draft' copies of texts was permitted without the Board's approval and created a loophole that could be exploited. Thus canny designers added some text to their calendar design to suggest that the item was

¹⁰³ The 1962 Printers and Publishers Law was revised in 2014 and the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division disbanded in 2012. The new law no longer facilitates prior censorship, and the penalties imposable under it are relatively modest. Oversight over the printing and publishing sector has been partly transferred from the government to the courts but concerns remain regarding ongoing restrictions on press and other publishers (see, for example Article 19, 2018).

¹⁰⁴ Justin Watkins has described how language has formed a central plank of the state's Burmanizing agenda: "For the government, the Burmese language functions as an important element of its general effort to consolidate control over the country and has accordingly been promoted and spread throughout the nation with considerable effort" (2007, p.263).

one of a limited number of draft copies. Many calendars, therefore, included the English words 'Limited Circulation' despite the fact that several thousand copies might be printed.¹⁰⁵ The use of English language on calendars was also intended to provide reassurance to any governmental official encountering them as, more likely to be able to read English than Jinghpaw, these officials would be able to grasp that it had been produced by a religious organisation, that it was explicitly Christian in emphasis and was one of probably less than 300 copies, thus reducing the risk of incurring penalties. All of these strategies enabled Kachin groups to exploit grey areas in the government system of control, while the new arrival of desktop publishing and digital printing enabled the gestetner copier to be dispensed with and bright, attractive and higher quality publications with visual messages of the condition and aspirations of Kachin society broadly defined to be circulated widely.

With these chinks in the armour of the censorship system ably exploited, the calendars rapidly became ubiquitous in Kachin public and private spaces. Indeed, their ubiquity in the private domestic sphere echoes Laur Kiik's assessment of Kachin popular analyses of conflict (2016a): narratives of opposition that come to be circulated and repeated widely in ways not easily controllable by a dominant political authority. Like the kinds of cultural representations made by diaspora communities, these visual representations not only reflect but also shape and confirm popular analyses of the situation and condition of 'Kachin society' in the present, as well as express its collective aspirations. Moreover, as a highly portable print medium, in the days before the easy exchange of images and information facilitated by the Internet was widely available to people in Myanmar (see the following section on 'Kachin culture and new media'), calendars provided a convenient means by which Kachin nationalist sentiments could be shared amongst a dispersed community. As described in 1.3, the long years of war had led to significant demographic change, as many Kachins formerly living in rural parts of northern Myanmar, moved to urban areas like Myitkyina or Bhamo for safety, and those who could afford it sent their children down to Yangon or Mandalay for schooling. Moreover, as discussed in 1.4, 'The Kachin and their recent political history', from the late 1980s the tendency increased amongst Kachin families, like others in Myanmar, to send a young member to another part of Asia where they might be able to secure a higher income and to make remittances to support the family. The calendar, distributed through Kachin networks, provided a convenient means by which these

¹⁰⁵ Kurabe and Imamura have noted that the same strategy was used for church newsletters (2016).

sentiments could be shared and made visible amongst the constituents of an increasingly dispersed community.

As families stretched across time zones—initially into other parts of Southeast Asia and East Asia, then, from 2001 onwards, in Europe and North America—calendars provided not only a visual touchstone for community members, they also recorded the secular, religious and political anniversaries which brought a temporal focus for community activities around the globe. Christmas Day, Thanksgiving and Mothering Sunday had long been important dates in Kachin consciousness, alongside political commemorations like Kachin State Day (10 January, which marks the anniversary of the creation of Kachin State in 1948) and Kachin Revolution Day (5 February, which marks the founding of the Kachin Independence Army in 1961) but recently these have been joined by new annual commemorations. These new dates include a ‘Global Day of Action’ which marks each anniversary of the return to conflict in the Kachin area on 7 June 2011, and a memorial service held to mark each anniversary of the rape and murder of two Kachin Baptist Convention volunteer teachers, Maran Lu Ra and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin, allegedly at the hand of *Tatmadaw* soldiers, on 19 January 2015. Calendars, then, offer both a visual surface through which can be read the changing concerns of Kachin nationalism, and an insight into how these concerns play a meaningful role in the structuring of Kachin lives at home and abroad.

2.3.2 The Calendars

New Ethno-Histories: A 2002 Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee calendar

One of the biggest challenges for Kachin nationalists following the ceasefire was how to prevent fragmentation within the Kachin ethno-political movement, potentially along the fault lines of its numerous Kachin sub-groups. The first calendar to be discussed, produced by a newly-formed Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee, sought to bring new social recognition to the distinctiveness of the Nung Lungmi as a sub-group of the Kachin and in doing so drew upon historical forms of documentation preserved within a British museum.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ This 2002 calendar produced by the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee is formed of two gloss colour printed sheets (715 x 405 mm). The calendar was acquired in Myitkyina in early 2002 and has been discussed by Mandy Sadan (2003, p.176).

As Sadan has described, Kachin nationalist rhetoric dictates that the category 'Kachin' is comprised of six principal lineages, all of which are deemed to be descended from a common ancestor, but which, inevitably, "have historically been contested, reconfigured and renegotiated at both local and national levels" (2007b, p.34). The extent to which sub-ethnic identities within the broader Kachin "super-ethnic category" (Chit Hlaing, 2007, p.116) have been able to be explored in the ceasefire, and now post-ceasefire, period has been severely limited because of the risk of political fracture. The tensions between different factions of the Kachin community, particularly those caused by perceived Jinghpaw dominance, have been attempted to have been managed internally by the self-conscious adoption of the term '*wunpawng*' (Sadan, 2007b, pp.57-60). However, in short, any agency, Kachin or non-Kachin, wishing to make representations relating to the Kachin has to be prepared to manoeuvre the great complexity and heightened political sensitivity engendered by debates on Kachin ethnic identity and the calendars, in many cases, offer oblique commentary on this issue in their use of groups of models in different forms of 'Kachin' ethnic dress.

Writers on nationalism have noted that its effectiveness relies on the appearance of the nation as a "solid, reified entity that has existed from time immemorial as an apolitical reality that is there regardless" (Máiz, 2003, p.199). For ethnic nationalities in Myanmar, an additional challenge is to evidence a history that is culturally recognisable, desirable and distinctive from the Burman and Buddhist-centric national historical account. Kachin calendars draw on a number of visual strategies to situate recent manifestations of Kachin nationalism within a longer historical narrative, including through the use of historical images as is apparent in the Nung Lungmi calendar.

It should be noted here, however, that until the ceasefire period, there was a noticeable lack of historical visual material upon which these imaginings could draw and Sadan has observed how Kachin people were presumed to have no history "given the supposed absence of artefacts and records" (2000, p.57). One of the changes brought by the signing of the ceasefire agreement was that, after many years of relative isolation, it became possible for emerging civil society groups in the Kachin region to make tentative connections with foreign donors and other organisations. The ceasefire created new opportunities for (limited) international engagements and reconnections, which in turn influenced the development of Kachin civil society during these years.

While many foreign NGOs and others were directly concerned with social and economic development projects, arguably the interaction of Brighton Museum & Art Gallery with

Kachin cultural researchers during the mid-late 1990s described in 1.4, represented a significant cultural intervention in the ceasefire setting, of as much relevance to a burgeoning Kachin civil society as any directly social-development oriented involvement at that time. As discussed, this interaction enabled local access to the series of historic photographic images taken by James Henry Green. These images of the Kachin region in the 1920s, when reintroduced in the late 1990s were directly readable by local people from this area, who had in recent years moved to Myitkyina because of pressures in their local areas. They recognised the communities and even some of the individuals depicted in these historical photographs. As a result of these interactions, the photographs became available to the broader Kachin community as a visual resource through their reproduction in a museum publication, *Burma Frontier Photographs: 1918-1935* (Dell, 2000a), which was distributed to organisations and individuals in Myitkyina. The several hundred ‘Green’ photographs reproduced in the book were eagerly appropriated and became a conspicuous feature of Kachin graphic media, appearing in books, pamphlets, magazines, cultural events (Figure 23) and in calendars such as the one under discussion here.



Figure 23: Images reproduced from the publication *Burma Frontier Photographs: 1918-1935* (Dell, 2000a) seen at the *manau* festival in Shatapru, Kachin State, in January 2005. On the left as illustrations to a display about Kachin weaving techniques (in a specially-constructed marquee) and, on the right, as a large graphic image flanking a subsidiary festival stage. Photographs by the author.

This calendar (Figures 24 and 25) was produced by the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee in 2002. As noted in 1.4, each of the six official Kachin sub-groups—Jinghpaw, Lawngwaw, Zaiwa, Nung-Rawang, Lisu and Lachik—has an official cultural committee which manages the group’s cultural representations, including its members’ participation at *manau* festivals and the circumscribed forms of ‘traditional’ dress associated with the group. The Nung

Lungmi calendar was part of a process by which the committee sought to verify its status as a distinct group under the Kachin ethnic umbrella, in particular with a view to disambiguating the Nung-Rawang connection by which in recent years these distinct communities had been officially hyphenated (Lahtaw, 2007, p.239). The Nung Lungmi group hoped to do this by evidencing a distinct historical and cultural presence, which Green's photographic representations were used to illustrate.

Nung Lungmi

htunghking hpung komiti
2002 CALENDAR



GARU MYIN.
HPUNGZI JA BAWK (NEN ZI)

နိံ လၢ်ကၠုၤန့ၤအံၤ, လၢ်ကၠုၤန့ၤအံၤ, လၢ်ကၠုၤန့ၤအံၤ, လၢ်ကၠုၤန့ၤအံၤ

Figure 24: Front cover of a calendar produced by the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee, 2002.

Nung Lungmi

htunghking hpung komiti
2002 CALENDAR



SHHPAN DI RAM, NDUP THIN WAN, DAKAW NEN, SHHPAN NANG MAI

7 2002
July

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 _{st}	2 _{nd}	3 _{rd}	4 _{th}	5 _{th}	6 _{th}
7 _{th}	8 _{th}	9 _{th}	10 _{th}	11 _{th}	12 _{th}	13 _{th}
14 _{th}	15 _{th}	16 _{th}	17 _{th}	18 _{th}	19 _{th}	20 _{th}
21 _{st}	22 _{nd}	23 _{rd}	24 _{th}	25 _{th}	26 _{th}	27 _{th}
28 _{th}	29 _{th}	30 _{th}	31 _{st}			

8 2002
August

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 _{st}	2 _{nd}	3 _{rd}
4 _{th}	5 _{th}	6 _{th}	7 _{th}	8 _{th}	9 _{th}	10 _{th}
11 _{th}	12 _{th}	13 _{th}	14 _{th}	15 _{th}	16 _{th}	17 _{th}
18 _{th}	19 _{th}	20 _{th}	21 _{st}	22 _{nd}	23 _{rd}	24 _{th}
25 _{th}	26 _{th}	27 _{th}	28 _{th}	29 _{th}	30 _{th}	31 _{st}

9 2002
September

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 _{st}	2 _{nd}	3 _{rd}	4 _{th}	5 _{th}	6 _{th}	7 _{th}
8 _{th}	9 _{th}	10 _{th}	11 _{th}	12 _{th}	13 _{th}	14 _{th}
15 _{th}	16 _{th}	17 _{th}	18 _{th}	19 _{th}	20 _{th}	21 _{st}
22 _{nd}	23 _{rd}	24 _{th}	25 _{th}	26 _{th}	27 _{th}	28 _{th}
29 _{th}	30 _{th}					

10 2002
October

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 _{st}	2 _{nd}	3 _{rd}	4 _{th}	5 _{th}
6 _{th}	7 _{th}	8 _{th}	9 _{th}	10 _{th}	11 _{th}	12 _{th}
13 _{th}	14 _{th}	15 _{th}	16 _{th}	17 _{th}	18 _{th}	19 _{th}
20 _{th}	21 _{st}	22 _{nd}	23 _{rd}	24 _{th}	25 _{th}	26 _{th}
27 _{th}	28 _{th}	29 _{th}	30 _{th}	31 _{st}		

11 2002
November

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 _{st}	2 _{nd}	
3 _{rd}	4 _{th}	5 _{th}	6 _{th}	7 _{th}	8 _{th}	9 _{th}
10 _{th}	11 _{th}	12 _{th}	13 _{th}	14 _{th}	15 _{th}	16 _{th}
17 _{th}	18 _{th}	19 _{th}	20 _{th}	21 _{st}	22 _{nd}	23 _{rd}
24 _{th}	25 _{th}	26 _{th}	27 _{th}	28 _{th}	29 _{th}	30 _{th}

12 2002
December

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 _{st}	2 _{nd}	3 _{rd}	4 _{th}	5 _{th}	6 _{th}	7 _{th}
8 _{th}	9 _{th}	10 _{th}	11 _{th}	12 _{th}	13 _{th}	14 _{th}
15 _{th}	16 _{th}	17 _{th}	18 _{th}	19 _{th}	20 _{th}	21 _{st}
22 _{nd}	23 _{rd}	24 _{th}	25 _{th}	26 _{th}	27 _{th}	28 _{th}
29 _{th}	30 _{th}	31 _{st}				

ဗိုဗို ယဉ်ကျေးမှုအဖွဲ့၊ ဓာတ်မီတီမှ မေဓမ္မဗွဲ့တော်အဖွဲ့တို့ ကူညီထောက်ပံ့ထားပါသည်။

Figure 25: Second page of a calendar produced by the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee, 2002.

In terms of the composition of the calendar, on its first page (Figure 24) a young contemporary couple, in a recognisably ‘traditional’ form of dress, stand front left at almost the right scale to be able to enter the large Nung headman’s house behind them, the subject of a reproduced photograph by Green (‘Nung houses at Nhkum Ga and girls pounding rice in the porch’). Another Green image is reproduced in the top right (‘Nung Naushawng [dance leader] at Masang’). Both images evoke the historic material and spiritual wealth of the Nung Lungmi with which the contemporary representatives are visually associated. On the second page of the calendar (Figure 25), two women and two men stand in a line in the foreground. All wear a modern interpretation of ‘Nung’ costume.¹⁰⁷ In a parallel line behind them, slightly bigger in scale, is a reproduction of a Green photograph captioned ‘Five Nung recruits’. In this image, five young Nung-Rawang men stand in a line, four of whom have their *nhtu* (sword) positioned conspicuously across their chest. In the top right, another of Green’s images is reproduced, a portrait of a young Nung woman ‘Nang’, who appears in several of his photographs.

The layering of images evokes the layering of time and a distinctively ‘Nung’ cultural continuity. A clear line is drawn from the early twentieth century (the time of Green’s photographs) to the year marked by the calendar (2002). However, as well as implying an authentic, historical basis for the Nung Lungmi community identity, and thence for official recognition, the calendar also works against the Burmanising rhetoric of the state by providing visual evidence of divergent histories and alliances, including with the British (Smith, 1991(1999), pp.35-36). This is important in that it helps to restate the conventional narrative of the Kachin ethno-nationalist movement as a whole, rather than challenging it. It is one of the ways in which the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee were able to situate their claims for group distinctiveness within a model of Kachin unity that prevailed within the dominant ethno-nationalist discourse, rather than challenging it.

The 2002 Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee calendar thus reflects some of the forces operating within and upon the Kachin community in the ceasefire period. In seeking to progress Nung Lungmi claims for ethnic distinctiveness whilst simultaneously reaffirming a broad Kachin ethno-nationalist identity, the calendar illuminates some of the tensions inherent in the pursuit of greater political autonomy on the basis of ethnic identity. The

¹⁰⁷ Sadan has described how Nung Lungmi attempts to gain official recognition as a Kachin sub-group included the creation of a modern ‘traditional’ costume to represent their group. The woman’s jacket includes silver *soi* to reflect a common Kachin identity: “The new jacket is a way of incorporating notions of modernity, development and ethnic unity through dress – all of which are contemporary political concerns.” (Sadan, 2003, p.176).

calendar's use of historical materials also reveals potential new 'spaces' created by new (limited) international engagements and reconnections, many of which would have enduring impacts on civil-political life in the Kachin region.

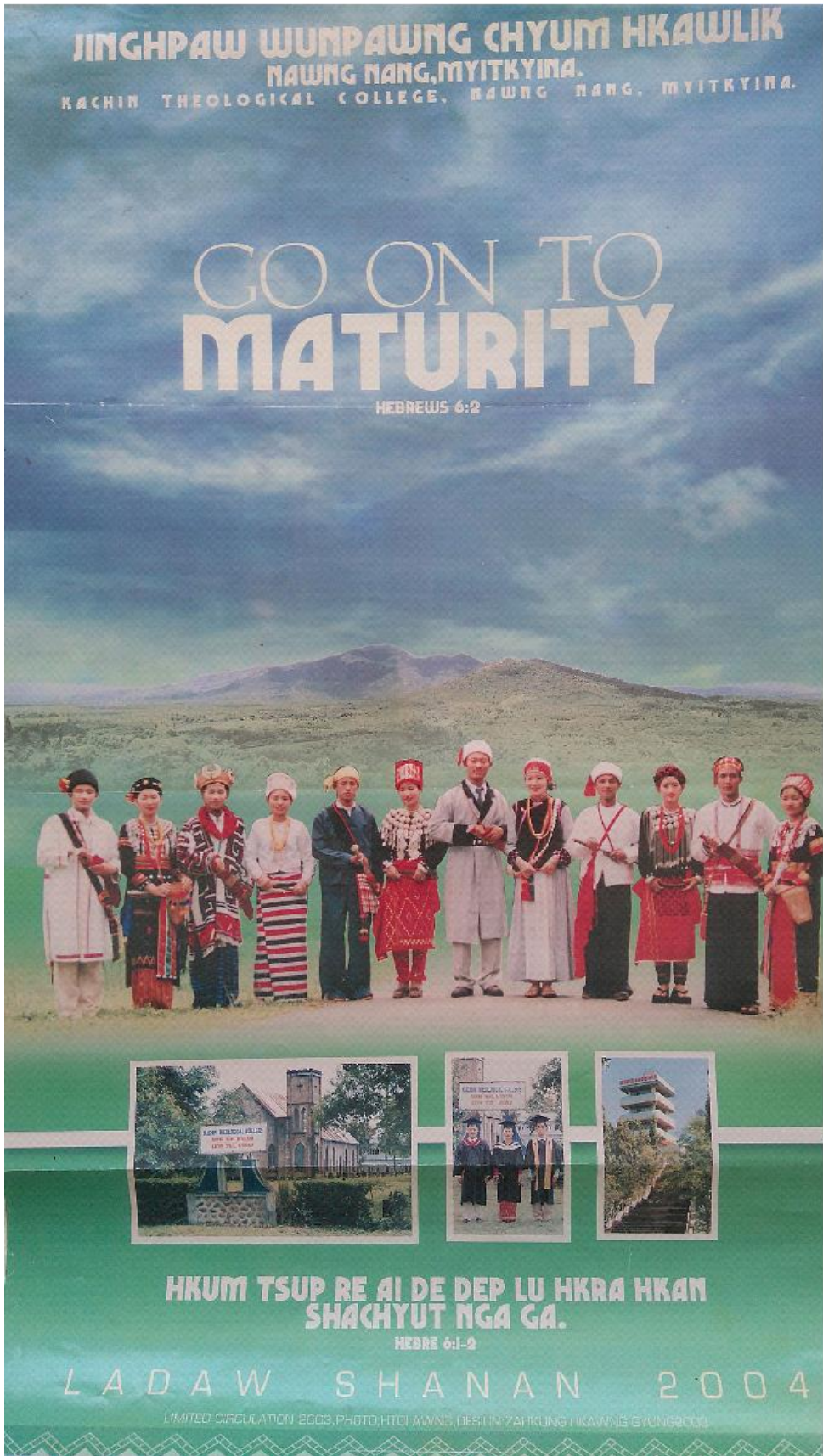


Figure 26: Front page of a calendar produced by the Kachin Theological College, 2004.

Exploiting a new graphic medium: A 2004 Kachin Theological College calendar

As previously acknowledged, religious organisations were permitted a privileged position within the state's censorship apparatus, but they were not entirely excluded from it. A 2004 calendar produced by the Kachin Theological College and Seminary in Nawnng Nang, Kachin State (Figure 26), demonstrates some of these issues further.¹⁰⁸ It was produced by a committee of staff and students at the college, popularly referred to as KTC, but it was designed by 'Ko Z' (Zahkung Hkawng Gyung), a Yangon-based Kachin graphic designer and artist responsible for a significant percentage of all print media produced by the Kachin community in and outside Myanmar, whose graphic design and artistic practice is described in more detail below. Images and text for the calendar were assembled by the KTC committee, a representative of which then delivered these to Ko Z. Government sensitivities meant that the postal system had to be avoided so the representative would wait to view proofs and then courier the printed calendars back to their organisation in Nawnng Nang, a two-day journey.

The calendar is typical of Kachin calendar design in showing a line of twelve young people, in six pairs, wearing the traditional forms of dress associated with the six officially-recognised Kachin groups: (from left to right) Lachik (La:cid, Lashi), Rawang, Jinghpaw, Lisu, Zaiwa (Atsi, Atzi) and Lawngwaw (Maru, Lhaovo, Lhaovar), against a distinctively 'Kachin' topographical image. The models were KTC students and their clothes, I was told, were borrowed from people in Myitkyina. Htoi Awng, a Myitkyina-based commercial photographer who took the group image, told me that the choice of models in such calendars was not important; although there was usually a correlation between the model's own ethnicity and the outfit in which they were photographed, this was not a major concern. However, in Kachin calendars, the people represented did have to be Kachin, and in a small, highly cohesive community, it would be known if this was not the case.

Images such as this, where all six Kachin groups are represented, were one of the strongest visual expressions of pan-Kachin unity during the post-ceasefire years, and remain so (see the discussion in 2.2, 'Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora', about group representations made at cultural shows and political events). Here the image is set against a dramatic mountainscape, above which clouds swirl portentously. I was told that it is an image of *Nhkai*

¹⁰⁸ The KTC calendar is formed of a gloss-printed full-colour cover page (625 x 370 mm) and a single thin inner page on which the months have been printed in three colours. It is bound at the top by means of a thin metal strip with white cotton loop inserted for hanging. The calendar was acquired from a Kachin Theological College staff member in January 2005.

Bum (a hill visible from the road between Myitkyina and Myitsone) but it also evokes the mythical *Majoi Shingra Bum* ('naturally flat mountain') from which the Kachin community's ancestors are said to have descended. Much as Burman nationalists sought to emphasise the shared ethnic roots of all Myanmar's races, this Kachin calendar implies a common ancestral origin for groups which, in truth, have only become closely associated politically in recent history (Sadan, 2013). It also establishes a visual relationship between the Kachin community and a physical 'homeland' or territory. Above the mountainscape, the top third of the calendar image is dominated by a biblical quotation given in English: "Go on to maturity" (Hebrew 6:2). It is an edict of direct relevance to KTC students, but is also reflective of Kachin nationalist aspirations. At the bottom of the calendar's cover page is a row of three smaller images, one of the KTC church, one of three students in graduation dress and a third of a Myitkyina landmark building famous for having four storeys in an area where most buildings then had just one or two. The three images mutually reinforce each other in articulating Kachin spiritual, educational and modernising aspirations.

Most Kachin calendars have tightly controlled distribution networks and the display of a calendar thus often reflects one's active political, ethnic and/or spiritual affiliations. This calendar produced by KTC, for example, was distributed as part of KTC's annual gospel campaign in December 2003, which took staff and students to twenty-four places in Lower Myanmar, Rakhine State and the Shan States. Sold for 200 kyat (about twelve pence) to those encountered on the course of the campaign, the calendar provided a visual record of the individual's encounter with the student group and offered a tangible connection to a wider Kachin congregation.

The 2004 KTC calendar demonstrates some of the creative ways in which Kachin ethno-nationalist sentiment was able to be disseminated in the highly controlled social environment of the ceasefire period. The distribution networks which ensured the calendar's circulation to remote communities—networks which would be even more significant in the context of the post-1994 growth of Kachin diaspora communities—also generated visual evidence of the reach and appeal of Kachin nationalism.

Pan-Kachin affinities: A 2005 Zaiwa Literature and Culture Committee calendar

While Kachin calendars served as a focal point for the expression of nationalist sentiments amongst an increasingly dispersed membership, they could also serve to visualise, and thus strengthen, the allegiances between Myanmar-based Kachins and their ethnic kin: Singpho groups in India and Jingpo groups in China. A 2005 calendar produced by the Zaiwa Literature and Culture Committee (Figure 27), for example, points to the formalising of pan-national and pan-ethnic affiliations which brought new dimensions to negotiations with the Burmese and Chinese governments on the subject of conflict in the border region.¹⁰⁹

Like many of the six Kachin groups, the Zaiwa community straddles national boundaries, in this case also forming a significant population in southwest Yunnan, where it dominates within the Jingpo national minority identity in China. The exchange of such calendars across the border has been one of the ways in which new cross-border connections have taken on wider significance as people use them to visualise the condition of their cross-border compatriots (Ts'ui-p'ing, 2016). While Kachin calendars are able to evoke these pan-national, pan-ethnic alliances they are also able to relate these to a 'local' Kachin topography. On the cover page of the Zaiwa calendar, for example, a photograph of a young couple in recognisably 'Zaiwa' dress has been superimposed onto a background image of a river with forested banks with a snow-laced mountain range just visible in the distance. The river image was probably taken near Mali Zup, the confluence where the Mali Hka and Nmai Hka meet to form the Irrawaddy, which has become the contested site of a proposed hydro-electric dam (Kiik, 2016b; Kim, 2016). The evocation of places of great emotional importance to the community, such as the confluence or the *bum sum shi* ('thirty mountains') area near Kutkai, is a common trope in Kachin popular art forms including *buga shakawn mahkawn ni* ('homeland praising songs'), a Kachin music genre. Notably it is a trope which appeared at a time in which the Burmese government was using the ceasefire agreements to extend its authority and control over the borderlands and many of these same sites became infamous as locations for highly-contentious government-driven military and natural resource extraction initiatives. Thus calendars played a significant role in the visualising of a deep attachment to place, even during a period when Kachin people themselves were increasingly dispersed.

¹⁰⁹ This calendar consists of a cover page of gloss-printed full-colour paper (500 x 380 mm) backed with four sheets of thin paper printed in red and blue bound together at the top edge with a thin metal strip with a red cotton loop inserted. Each of the four sheets provides a grid calendar for three months. The calendar was purchased at the Shatapru *manau* ground, Myitkyina, Kachin State, on Kachin State Day, 10 January 2005.



TOKYO KACHIN BAPTIST CHURCH

Youth Department



Sumsing lamu gaw, Yehowa a lamu rai nga ai, Ginding aga hpe chyawm gaw
shinggyim masha ni hpe ap ya sai. *Shakawn Kungdawn 115:16*
Heaven belongs to the LORD alone, but he gave the earth to man. *Psalms 115:16*

January 2005

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
30	31					1 <small>New Year's Day</small>
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9 <small>Kayin New Year's Day</small>	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

February 2005

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11
	12	13	14	15	16	17
	18	19	20	21	22	23
	24	25	26	27	28	

■ Hkring sa nhtoi (Japan) ■ Hkring sa nhtoi (Myen)

Model- Shd.La Hkri La Htoi, Shy:N.Ding Marip Nang Raw Awng Photo-Grace Design-Zahkung Hkawng Gyung

Figure 28: First page of a calendar produced by the Youth Department of the Tokyo Kachin Baptist Church, 2005.

Creating connections with the diaspora: A 2005 Tokyo Kachin Baptist Church calendar

Section 1.4 describes how economic conditions in Myanmar in the late 1980s and early 1990s led many to seek work overseas, particularly in Malaysia, Singapore and Japan: places where increased economic activity fuelled the demand for cheap, imported labour. Both through their economic activity, in providing remittances, and through (where possible) their political campaigning via organisations like the Kachin National Organisation, these communities have continued to play a significant role in Kachin economic, political and cultural life as was discussed in detail in the preceding section.

A calendar produced by the Youth Department of the Tokyo Kachin Baptist Church (Figure 28) reflects how, in the period before Myanmar came online, diaspora communities remained connected with people, organisations and events at home.¹¹⁰ Each of its six full-colour glossy pages features a young couple wearing outfits associated with one of the six official Kachin subgroups. Each couple is pictured in an animated pose: playing music, reading the bible, kneeling in adoration, against an inspirational background image (a field of yellow flowers, the crucifixion scene, the nativity, a church, etc.). Below the image a biblical verse is reproduced, first in Jinghpaw and then in English (significantly the calendar includes no Japanese script). The biblical verse on the first page—“Some, however, did receive him and believed in him; So he gave them the right to become God’s children. (John 1:12)” —invites a reading of those pictured inside as ‘God’s children’ but, equally importantly, as children of the Kachin nation, sharing a temporal if not geographical location with those in the Kachin homelands. No visual acknowledgement is given to their adopted country of residence.

This calendar was also designed by ‘Ko Z’ (Zahkung Hkawng Gyung). It was the first calendar he had made for the Tokyo group whom he said in previous years had produced their own.¹¹¹ The group had supplied photographs of the models and the biblical verses and, using a limited internet connection, Photoshop software and a small scanner, Ko Z had sourced the background images and designed the layout. The calendar is of a higher print quality than most calendars printed inside Myanmar during the period and it is clear that, living in Tokyo, the group’s members must have had access to enhanced design and print technologies than in their home country but chose to use a Myanmar-based Kachin designer.

¹¹⁰ This calendar, produced by the Youth Department of the Tokyo Baptist Church, is formed of six gloss-printed full-colour sheets, each representing two months of the year, covered by an additional sheet of thin, matt paper (510 x 380 mm). It is bound with a white metal spiral binding at the top edge. The calendar was acquired from its designer in Yangon in January 2005.

¹¹¹ Zahkung Hkawng Gyung, pers. comm., Yangon, January 2005.

Ko Z said that he regularly produced calendars for Kachin cultural groups in the United States, Malaysia and Singapore. Other aspects of his graphic design work for international communities are described below.



Figure 29: Front cover of a calendar produced by the *Jinghpaw Wunpawng Laili Laika hte Htunghking Hpung, Dakkasu Ni Myitkyina* ('Myitkyina University Kachin Literature and Culture Committee'), 2015.

“Difficulties are Opportunities”: A 2015 Myitkyina Universities Kachin Literature and Culture Committee calendar

It is clear that the new print and digital technologies that entered the Kachin region following the ceasefire agreement of 1994 had a significant impact upon the capacities of civil society groups and others to represent Kachin ethno-nationalist aspirations in new media that could be widely distributed. While they offered scope for the creation of counter-narratives to Burmese nationalist visions, they also provided a means of integrating across a wider society a form of popular analysis of the travails affecting the Kachin peoples in the face of still-ongoing limitations on freedoms despite ostensibly the removal of censorship controls. Kachin people know that their activism is unlikely to be considered a tolerable part of a ‘diversity of voices’ when the KIA is actively engaged in armed hostilities against the *Tatmadaw* and creative ways have to be found to mitigate opportunities for the suppression of Kachin nationalist views by hostile government authorities.

Produced nearly four years after the renewal of fighting in northern Myanmar, a 2015 calendar distributed by *Jinghpaw Wunpawng Laili Laika hte Htunghking Hpung, Dakkasu Ni Myitkyina* (Myitkyina Universities Kachin Literature and Culture Committee) in order to raise money for a new building, appears to show no sign of the trauma and mass displacement caused by recent conflict (Figure 29).¹¹² Instead it seems to offer an optimistic vision of a youthful, educated, motivated and resourceful and diverse Kachin community. The calendar’s motivational message is spelt out in quotes reproduced in Jinghpaw and English at the bottom of two pages:

Mayak mahkak ni gaw, anhte hpe ahkaw ahkang jaw ya ai / Difficulties are opportunities

Ta tut n lawm ningmu gaw, shingran yupmang rai nga ai. Ningmu n nga ai galaw ai bungli gaw hkrit hpa yupmang rai nga / Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare (Japanese proverb)

¹¹² The 2015 calendar produced by the *Jinghpaw Wunpawng Laili Laika hte Htunghking Hpung, Dakkasu Ni Myitkyina* (Myitkyina Universities Kachin Literature and Culture Committee) consists of five glossy colour pages (510 x 380 mm) joined at the top edge by a plastic strip with added hoop. It was acquired in Muse, Northern Shan State, Myanmar in January 2015.

The first page of the calendar (Figure 29) shows a group of fourteen young people, in seven pairs representing the usual six Kachin sub-groups with the addition of a couple wearing Jinghpaw Hkahku costume,¹¹³ walking towards the viewer, smiling, hand-in-hand. Above them is a montage of brightly-coloured images of four Myitkyina college buildings, including its technological university and computer university. The message is clear: Kachin aspirations, including for the education and potential of their young people, will not be lowered by the experience of conflict. This message is echoed across pages two and three which offer images of university academics, also student groups, in traditional Kachin costume and in student uniform, posing at the Shatapru *manau* ground as well as in action: dancing, selling produce, welcoming visitors.¹¹⁴

The last page of the calendar (Figure 30) draws together a series of images reflecting student activities over the years to construct an image of a coherent and self-sustaining community. These include (top left) an image of a student group at the 2014 Kachin Baptist Convention gathering at Hpakant (notably some of the women in the front row are holding small versions of the KIA flag, a provocative act of defiance that would not have been made so assertively before the collapse of the ceasefire). On the same line is a 1993 image of Myitkyina students fundraising in the Hpakant area and a 2006 image of recently qualified student teachers. Below this is a line of images from the 2011 ‘*JLH Fresher Welcome and Farewell Lamang* [Programme]’, followed by further lines of images showing student fundraising activities in Waingmaw, programmes of talks and events in Shatapru and a 2014 football match organised as part of an ‘International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking’. Drawing not, this time, on historical images but on a collage of images of student activities spanning the period 1993 to 2015, the message seems to be of social and cultural survival despite political change and conflict.

¹¹³ There has long been a tendency to see Hkahku identity as a distinct branch of the Jinghpaw and this is one of the main counter-representations to the notion of six groups that has been experimented with since the ceasefire. However, as the Hkahku claim themselves to be Jinghpaw, it doesn’t challenge the primary orientation of the sub-groups, merely recognises their distinctive dialect and dress.

¹¹⁴ These images are likely to have been taken at the 2011 Kachin State Day *manau* festival, which took place just months before the conflict broke out. The festival was not held again until January 2015.

Conclusion

Benedict Anderson has underscored the importance of the growth of print-capitalism to the development of “imagined communities” of nation, observing how books and newspapers enabled members of these communities to maintain deep attachments to each other in the absence of face to face contact: “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983, p.6). The calendars provide for such an image, drawing on a rich array of rhetorical devices to make visible and self-evident the basis of Kachin rights to self-determination. As is apparent in the next section, these tropes—which constitute themselves through the use of historical images, modes of ‘traditional’ dress and the picturing of ‘homeland’ topographies—would be similarly manifested across new media forms, including social media. If the calendars can be considered to provide an effective vehicle through which to broadcast a unified, historically-grounded and culturally distinctive pan-Kachin nationalist identity across an increasingly dispersed membership, Facebook would further extend their reach. Before considering the use of social media in the construction and dissemination of Kachin identities I briefly discuss the creative output of Ko Z, who has contributed extensively to the development of a Kachin visual identity.

JLH Htingnu Gaw Gap Alu
SHATA HTI LAIKA

2015 NING JLH

(37) Lang na KBC Hpung Shawa Zuphpawng hta Dawjau shang lawm ai JLH Dakkasu Jawng ma ni

1993 Ning JLH Dakkasu Jawngma Fund tam Hpung, Hpakant Gihra.

Sara Bum Chyang Gum Ja Naw JLH Amu Madu Jawngma prat 2005-2006 Hpaji Ladaw

2011 ning JLH Fresher Welcome & Farewell Lamang

JLH Dakkasu Jawng ma ni a Ka-ni Nanghpam Ningmu Jahpaw Lamang, Walmaw.

Laili Laika hte Htungking hkaw tsun hpawng, Shatapru.

Mungkan Ka-ni Nanghpam Ningkap Masat Ninghtoi Gawdin Shingjawng Poi 26-6-2014

10 OCTOBER 2015

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

11 NOVEMBER 2015

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

12 DECEMBER 2015

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	Christmas 25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Ta tut n lawm ai ningmu gaw, shingran yupmang rai nga ai. Ningmu n nga ai galaw ai bungli gaw hkrit hpa yupmang rai nga ai.
Vision without action is a daydream, Action without vision is a nightmare. (Japanese Proverb)

DESIGN LA HTOI PADANG OFFSET

Figure 30: Final page of a calendar produced by the *Jinghpaw Wunpawng Laili Laika hte Htungking Hpung, Dakkasu Ni Myitkyina* ('Myitkyina Universities Kachin Literature and Culture Committee'), 2015.



Figure 31: Art installation incorporating historical photographic images by James Henry Green, created by Ko Z for the *Kachin Liberation Art Exhibition* held at Kachin Theological College and Seminary, April 2015. Photograph reproduced with artist's consent.

2.3.3 'Ko Z' (Zahkung Hkawng Gyung)

In 2015, James Henry Green's photographs were to appear again in the Kachin region, this time as part of a *Kachin Liberation Art Exhibition* created by Ko Z. The exhibition coincided with a youth conference organised by the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), a large-scale event held at Kachin Theological College (KTC) in Nawnng Nang, Kachin State. While the conference is held every year, every fourth year additional resources invested in it swell its scope and ambitions. Ko Z estimated that the 2015 youth conference attracted some 15,000 participants, many of whom had travelled significant distances to attend the week-long event (20-27 April 2015). Ko Z's use of Green's photographs in an art installation designed to secure a strong emotional response from conference goers reveals the potential utility of museum-held resources for the communities which once constituted their source.

While long-established as a graphic designer and creator of satirical illustrations for Kachin print media, the *Kachin Liberation Art Exhibition* constituted the culmination of Ko Z's more recently-established fine art practice, albeit in a form tailored to a relatively conservative

conference-going public.¹¹⁵ The appearance of Green's photographs formed one element within a series of installations which made use of the host organisation's buildings and grounds (Figure 31). Other elements included a ladder embedded into the ground which reached, unsupported, into the sky; a display of large portraits of important figures in Kachin history which, like James Henry Green's photographs, were printed onto large boards and, in this case, arranged outside a newly-constructed KTC main building; a display of his graphic works; an installation using two dry trees, from which the bark had been removed and replaced with small shards of embedded black iron, and large-scale lettering used to spell out the words 'KACHIN' (in letters covered in mirrored glass) and '*SHANGLAWT AI MUNG DAN*' ('sovereign nation') (in red, white and green lettering: the colours of the KIO flag).

As in his illustration practice, the series of installations created by Ko Z at the youth conference were intended to elicit a strong emotional response from conference delegates. The installation of Green's photographic images was situated in a small area of woodland, within the grounds of KTC. The images were all of faces, many of which had originally appeared in larger images which had been carefully cropped by Ko Z to remove all other content, leaving just the face of the photographed subject. Mounted on boards, and then supported by a wooden post, the images were accompanied by a soundtrack of recorded traditional Kachin drumming music. No context was given to the photographs, no museum-style labels or other explanatory texts. Instead, these faces from the 1920s stared out at their modern contemporaries, inviting an immediate, unmediated emotional connection. Despite the widespread use of Green's images in the graphic design practice of Ko Z and others in the Kachin area, Ko Z reported on the sense of amazement with which conference delegates encountered these images, many seeing them for the first time.

An emotional connection, grounded in a Kachin nationalist sentiment, was also sought from viewers of two installations in the main KTC building. Here, they were accompanied by a display of Ko Z's satirical illustrations and by a display of the work of two Kachin documentary photographers—Hkun Lat and Hkun Li—whose practice has attracted national and, increasingly, international attention. Hkun Lat's work has included features on the

¹¹⁵ Ko Z also works in performance, a medium which was particularly popular amongst Myanmar-based avant-garde artists as it made censorship more difficult to enforce. In 2009, a year after Cyclone Nargis had caused devastation in lower Myanmar, Ko Z, with fellow artists Myat Kyawt and Ko Jau, founded V30, a Yangon-based environmental art movement. Using performance, the group called its work 'ENVIROFORMANCE' and sought to reify nature, by using the body in juxtaposition to its natural surroundings.

difficult living and working conditions of Myanmar's jade and gold miners, the cultivation of and campaigns for the eradication of opium poppies in the Kachin region, as well as soldiers at the KIA frontline. Hkun Li's work has largely focussed on the experiences of internally displaced people (IDPs) generated by the conflict in the Myanmar-China border area.

The installations created by Ko Z and positioned in front of photographs by Hkun Lat and Hkun Li were, like the photographs, clearly embedded in the politics of the day, as well as in a staunchly Kachin nationalistic mode, which has become a signature of the artist's work. The first piece (Figure 32) consisted of a large-scale cut-out of a woman's torso, wearing an immediately recognisable traditional Kachin (probably Lawngwaw) jacket of black velvet embellished with silver disks. From the neck of the torso emerges a clenched human fist coloured red. Above and behind the fist were small clouds, suspended from the ceiling, and the whole structure was embedded in a pile of rubble made up of stones, pieces of metal, cans, shoes, wood: "things burnt during the war" (Ko Z, August 2016). The work was called 'Motherland', and Ko Z's own interpretation of it was that it showed how "Mothers rise up from there; this lady, our land, rising up from war". Its emotional effect, then, can be seen to draw on the deep-seated connection made by many Kachins, in common with other nationalists, between women/tradition and the nation/territory (Yuval-Davis, 1997). A not dissimilar appeal was made via a second work, which was formed of a wooden bedstead covered in red-toned prints on paper of photographic images of IDPs (Figure 33). A small tree with thin branches, painted red, emerged from the middle of the bed, on which rested a sky-blue pillow. From the branches of the tree hung a number of knives, suspended over the bed. Below the bed were piles of stones, painted red. In making its emotional impact the work drew on the known struggles of those living in IDP camps on the Myanmar-China border as well as on the violent deaths of two Kachin women earlier that year. Maran Lu Ra and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin were KBC volunteer teachers at a local school in Northern Shan State. In January 2015 they were found murdered, their bodies badly mutilated and showing signs of sexual assault. Although no-one was charged with their deaths (Legal Aid Network and Kachin Women's Association in Thailand, 2016), the perpetrators were believed to be *Tatmadaw* soldiers from a locally-based battalion. While the incident was not the first example of abuse carried out against Kachin women by members of the Burmese military, it evoked an exceptionally strong response from the global Kachin community. An estimated 100,000 people attended the women's funeral and candlelight memorial services were held (and continue to be held annually) in Myanmar and amongst overseas

communities. Facebook became a focal point for the sorrow, anger and frustration felt by the whole Kachin community and a commemorative graphic created by Ko Z circulated widely.

Ko Z's ability to distil elements of the shared Kachin condition into an effective visual shorthand has led to him being one of the community's most in-demand designers. The following section provides a brief summary of this work in this field, emphasising the extent to which—while Ko Z remains in Yangon—his graphic design practice has provided a visual identity around which a newly globalised Kachin community might cohere.



Figure 32: 'Motherland.' Artwork created by Ko Z for the *Kachin Liberation Art Exhibition* held at Kachin Theological College and Seminary, April 2015. Photograph reproduced with the artist's consent.



Figure 33: Artwork created by Ko Z for the *Kachin Liberation Art Exhibition* held at Kachin Theological College and Seminary, April 2015. Photograph reproduced with artist's consent.

Designing for the Kachin community

Since the late 1990s, Ko Z has been one of the Kachin community's most important graphic designers and his signature can be seen on a wide variety of magazines, logos, brochures, calendars, adverts, posters and CD covers. He remains the 'go-to' designer for certain Kachin organisations, like the Kachin Baptist Convention (and its Overseas branch) and the Kachin Theological College, and also produces work for Kachin musicians and filmmakers, as well as a few non-Kachin companies and individuals in Myanmar. His greatest impact on Kachin visual culture, however, has been through his satirical illustrations and, more recently, his logo designs. In terms of the former, Ko Z has produced satirical designs since his work for Kachin student magazines began in the 1990s and his acerbic illustrations are revealing of Kachin nationalist sentiments which have evolved over this period (Figure 34). Common themes include the rampant extraction of natural resources from the Kachin area, the activities of cronies, the self-interest of corrupt officials, including self-appointed mediators in the peace process, and the overall failure of the peace process. Remarkably, given his clientele, the Kachin community has not been immune from his satire and his illustrations

have included images which are critical of the Kachin church,¹¹⁶ as well as of Kachin senior leaders and peace negotiators, and the community more broadly. The illustrations constitute an extraordinary body of work, not least in how the creator has been able to negotiate Myanmar's strict censorship controls as well as, until quite recently, the limited technological infrastructure available. Recent developments in both fields have enabled the images to be seen as a body, and Ko Z has organised displays of his illustrations, including at a *manau* festival held in Banmai, Thailand, in 2012 and at the *Kachin Liberation Art Exhibition* described above (Figure 35).

Ko Z's influence can also be felt in a crop of logo-style designs, which have served as a form of branding for the global Kachin community. An example is a logo produced for a 2015 camp event organised by the Kachin community in Sydney, Australia, which drolly translates the iconic designs associated with *manau shadung* (*manau* posts) onto surf boards (Figure 35). Ko Z's impactful designs have also been used to commemorate more tragic events, for example the murder of the KBC volunteer teachers in 2015. A square-shaped design he created which incorporated the smiling faces of Maran Lu Ra and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin and the words "*Galoi Mung N Malap Ai / Never Forget*", was quickly adopted as the Facebook profile image of Kachin around the world. Ko Z's designs motivated by the resumption of conflict in northern Myanmar since 2011 have been particularly popular as t-shirt designs (Figure 36), worn by diasporic Kachin youth.

¹¹⁶ In one image, produced in 2005, a female prostitute and an old man are left outside the walls of the compound of a Kachin church, from which the sounds of singing emerge. Ko Z interpreted the image as follows: "Some churches very, very rich, develop their compound like a fortress, forget to look after their people" (Ko Z, August 2016).



Figure 35: Display of illustrations created by Ko Z, as shown at the *Kachin Liberation Art Exhibition* held at Kachin Theological College and Seminary, April 2015. Photograph reproduced with the artist's consent.

Conclusion

In ways which resonate with Ko Z's practice, Arjun Appadurai has identified how mass media makes possible a "community of sentiment" (1990). Through providing a neat visual shorthand which can summarise and communicate the contemporary Kachin condition, as with the calendars Ko Z's graphic designs address an imagined community able to imagine and feel things together. The dissemination of such imagery through media channels, Appadurai suggests, can provide not only a focus for feelings of empathy, but also a catalyst for collective action, an aspect considered further below. In the following section I consider more fully the opportunities generated by new forms of media for new identity formations and forms of heritage-making.



Figure 36: Logo design created for the Kachin community in Sydney, Australia by Ko Z. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.



Figure 37: T-shirt designed by Ko Z in 2017 to mark the 6th anniversary of the return to conflict in the Kachin area.

2.4 Kachin Culture and New Media

Introduction

In 2.3.1, I argued that the circulation of Kachin printed calendars helped bring a sense of cohesion to a fragmented community, within and beyond Myanmar's borders. In this respect they might be considered evidence of how, as Roza Tsagarousianou has discussed, "media operating at the transnational level can provide a sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity to the dispersed populations that make up a diaspora and to their everyday lives" (2004, p.62). Understood in this way, the calendars can be seen to offer "common experiential frames" embedded in a shared temporal framework to facilitate "new ways of 'coexistence' and 'experiencing together'" (2004, p.62).

While a relatively novel medium, the effectiveness of the printed calendars in creating a sense of connectedness across a fragmented community relied on their effective evocation of the longstanding preoccupations of nationalism: history, territory and tradition. In projecting an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) over space and across time, the calendars presage the impact of information communication technologies (ICTs), which despite their modernity and apparently de-territorialised nature continue to reveal a heightened interest in matters of history and territory.

Research undertaken on the impact of ICTs on dispersed communities has emphasised the extent to which these have "augmented a sense of diasporic awareness" (Georgiou, 2006, p.18). Media theorists such as Myra Georgiou argue that the Internet, and social media, have had a transformative impact on the ability of transnational communities to "sustain cultural continuity and distinct identities through time while keeping links with their original homeland and with populations of the same origin spread across the world" (2006, p.2) and Thomas Hylland Eriksen has observed how ICTs have become a "major medium for the consolidation, strengthening and definition of collective identities, especially in the absence of a firm territorial and institutional base" (2006, p.5). Yet, the calendars demonstrate that this was not an entirely new phenomenon. As such, in the discussion that follows, which considers the means by which new media has transformed cultural practices and representations made by and amongst Kachin communities, these transformations are considered to represent the extension of existing messages and ideas into new contexts. Jon Anderson has warned how "New talk has to be distinguished from new people talking about

old topics in new settings” (1996, p.1) and, as this section demonstrates, whatever the novelty of the medium, the nationalistic preoccupations of Kachin communities appear to remain largely consistent.

What is particularly significant about Kachin use of ICTs is the speed with which these arrived and were adopted. Also of importance is the recommencement of conflict in northern Myanmar from 2011, which established the Internet as a crucial communications channel as well as a platform which could be used as a catalyst for collective action. After years of very limited or no internet access, not until around 2013 did Myanmar eventually come online. While it had been possible for diaspora communities to communicate online between themselves, the swift growth of internet access within Myanmar brought a new emphasis to diaspora-home country interactions, especially in the context of conflict. Writing in 2012 Ja Htoi Pan Maran observed how the “Kachin use of the Internet and social media to connect to each other and express nationalism has drastically increased. Many new Kachin websites and blogs have emerged and activities on social media such as Facebook and Ning¹¹⁷ (*Wunpawng Zupra*)¹¹⁸ have dramatically escalated” (2012b).

In what follows I seek to demonstrate how, while the message (and even the materials) has not changed, the medium provides a new perspective on Kachin identity-making and cultural practices. As Andoni Alonso and Pedro Oiarabal have argued, not only can ICTs enable relationships to be maintained across time and space they also permit a different kind of sociality (2010). Moreover, unlike more traditional forms of media which until recently remained under the tight control of the institutions that produced them (largely the church) and at the mercy of state censorship controls, the internet offers a less easily policed, more individualised and discursive space in which to explore different identity positions; a space especially attractive to younger people, including second-generation migrants. As Peter Mandaville has observed, part of the appeal of such media technologies is their ability to “provide channels for new or previously disenfranchised voices to be heard” and to refigure, even to displace traditional structures of authority (2001, p.169). As noted in 2.2, ‘Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora’, young Kachin people are playing an increasingly important role in cultural activism and this is especially the case online. As demonstrated in the examples given here, young people in diaspora are using ICTs to construct new identity

¹¹⁷ Ning is an online platform for people and organisations to create customised social networks.

¹¹⁸ *Wunpawng Zupra* (‘union meeting place’) was a Kachin social networking site, which also served as a platform through which to meet a potential partner until overtaken by Facebook (Kurabe and Imamura, 2016).

positions and—in terms of Kachin music particularly—to create alternative cultural resources through which to sustain these positions. The means by which these resources are constructed are also revealing of their creator’s diasporic consciousness. Understanding the motivations which drive these activities will help institutions like museums consider how they could support cultural preservation work led by diasporic activists.

This section presents three examples which reveal the different ways in which ICTs are influencing Kachin cultural and identity-making practices: firstly, in an introduction to the practice of Jinghpaw Tingsan, the pseudonym of a Kachin activist based in the Netherlands, whose website—which promotes Kachin popular music—has a huge following; secondly in the analysis of a music video of one of the artists promoted by Jinghpaw Tingsan, Bawmwang Jaraw, and thirdly in a discussion of a project led by a non-Kachin academic which has sought to use aggregated social media content to construct an “autoethnography” of the transnational Kachin community (Tan, 2016, p.74). Each of these initiatives presents an opportunity not only to examine how Kachin heritage is being transformed by experiences of migration and diaspora, but also to consider how culture is mediated by ICTs, and what this might mean for heritage resources such as those that might be found in museum collections. Of particular interest here, then, is the use of digital surrogates of photographs by James Henry Green employed in the video created by Bawmwang Jaraw: *Labau hte nga ai amyū* (‘A race with history’).

As ICTs have a distinctive and very recent history in Myanmar, before moving to the analysis, I briefly summarise this history, including by addressing the central importance of Facebook.

New Media in Myanmar

While still far from universal, access to mobile phone technologies and to the Internet in Myanmar has increased exponentially since 2013. Before then, access to ICTs was severely restricted, with the government-run Myanmar Post Telecommunication (MPT) monopolizing the sector. Mobile phones and SIM cards were available but only to those who could afford

their high cost.¹¹⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly then, Myanmar had the lowest mobile penetration rate in the world.

Government restrictions, slow connection speeds and prohibitive costs also kept Internet usage low. As late as 2009, there were only an estimated 111,000 Internet users in Burma, representing a 0.2 percent penetration rate (OpenNet Initiative, 2012). Most users accessed the Internet through a limited number of Internet cafés located in urban areas. These services had to be government-registered and operated under strict controls. Even if users were able to get online, content was tightly restricted. Regulations issued in 2000 subjected online content to strict filtering (OpenNet Initiative, 2007). Access to content concerning human rights, political opposition and the pro-democracy movement, for example, was blocked as, usually, was access to Yahoo! Mail, MSN Mail, Gmail, YouTube, Facebook Messenger, Google's Blogspot, and Twitter. Nevertheless, some Internet café owners enabled their customers to circumvent these by providing access to proxy pathways despite the use of these being officially prohibited. Because of the high costs of ADSL broadband and mobile phones, these often formed part of unsolicited 'gifts' made by senior government officials to churches and educational organisations, especially in the run-up to elections (*Kachin News*, 2009).

As part of the reforms implemented by the Myanmar government under President Thein Sein, systematic state censorship of traditional and electronic media was lifted in 2012. Then, in June 2013, after a high-profile international tender, the government selected Qatar-based Ooredoo and its Norway-based competitor Telenor as the only foreign telecommunications companies allowed to operate in the country, alongside government-run MPT. Their license awards were delayed until a new Telecommunication Law could be legislated,¹²⁰ after which agreements to provide nationwide services were finalized in early 2014 (Dale and Kyle, 2015). Multi-billion-dollar investments were pledged by both companies to develop Myanmar's telecommunications sector, including its infrastructure, this constituting the biggest obstacle to the expansion of the market.

These investments appear to be paying off. Mobile phone ownership has increased rapidly, helped by the availability of low-cost Android smartphones from China. Access to the internet has also increased exponentially with the vast majority of users using their mobile

¹¹⁹ The price of SIM cards halved in 2011 (from US\$625 to between \$312 and \$250 (Myers, 2013)) but remained high for several more years.

¹²⁰ The 2013 Telecommunications Law transformed the industry but introduced a defamation provision which has been used to jail internet users for political speech (Freedom House, 2016).

data to go online. In contrast fixed broadband is relatively rare, partly because of its comparatively high cost (Freedom House, 2016). In 2016, it was reported that Myanmar had more than 39 million internet users (representing a 72 percent penetration rate) and that its telecommunications operators had sold 43.72 million SIM cards (Nyunt, 2016).¹²¹

Demand for mobile technologies has quickly outstripped the capacity of Myanmar's telecommunications infrastructure. While network expansion will bring benefits to those living outside the country's entrepôts where Myanmar's ethnic majority, Burmans, predominate, it may also exacerbate existing divisions between urban and rural populations; rural areas being the location of many ethnic minority communities. Any expansion of infrastructure is contingent on access to reliable electricity, a utility which less than 30 percent of the population benefit from (Dale and Kyle, 2015). 70 percent of Myanmar's electricity is hydroelectric, most of which is generated from dam projects in rural areas. It is an irony not lost on ethnic groups like the Karen and Kachin that the power generated by new hydroelectric facilities being developed, often contentiously, in their territories, will contribute to a telecommunications boom which is likely to remain beyond the reach of much of their own states. As Freedom House has observed, "[u]sers in most provincial towns have much poorer quality connections in comparison with the few urban cities, let alone those in rural villages. Chronic power outages, service interruptions, and insufficient transmission towers continue to impede efficient internet usage" (2016).

In Kachinland today, urban areas under government control (for example Myitkyina and Bhamo) offer some Myanmar-provider mobile phone and Internet coverage, whereas mobile phone users living in borderland areas, including those under Kachin Independence Organisation-control (for example the towns of Laiza and Mai Ja Yang), have to rely on Chinese networks. The availability of Chinese mobile phones, although officially illegal, meant that some communities in the Kachinland area had early access to mobile phone technologies thanks to access to Chinese mobile networks.¹²² In order to circumvent Chinese government prohibitions on certain online platforms, such as Wordpress sites, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Google (which have prevailed, even while similar controls were lifted

¹²¹ The high level of penetration suggested by this latter figure—89 per cent—however, should be treated with caution as the Telenor and Ooredoo's limited infrastructure means mobile phone users often subscribe to multiple providers and switch SIM cards to overcome connection issues.

¹²² Kurabe and Imamura have noted how "Chinese CDMA networks reached the Kachin areas near the Chinese border, including Myitkyina, by the early 2000s, a full decade before networks were made widely available in Yangon" (2016). That these networks were uncensored made them particularly useful to political activists (Hkanhpa Tu Sadan, 15 December 2013).

by the Myanmar government in 2012), borderland users adopted the practice of using virtual private networks (Ja Htoi Pan Maran, 14 August 2015).

Facebook

Coming online as recently as 2013 means that Myanmar users skipped the long lead-in time to ICT development, bypassing the email habit and moving straight onto social media platforms, particularly Facebook. The impact of Facebook in Myanmar cannot be overemphasised. As David Madden, founder of a Yangon-based innovation lab, has observed, “Facebook is effectively the internet in Myanmar” (quoted in MacGregor, 2017). In 2016 it was thought to have some 9.7 million active users in the country, a figure which had doubled over the previous twelve months. The highest concentrations of users are in metropolitan areas: nearly nine out of 10 users access Facebook from Myanmar’s two main cities, Yangon and Mandalay, and their surrounding areas (Trautwein, 2016).

In Myanmar, Facebook provides a key medium not only for social engagement, but also for catching up on news, making purchases (as the site is commonly adopted for e-commerce), browsing the latest music and fashion and organising aid efforts and campaigns. However, despite the freedoms it offers, Facebook is not without its threats. A lack of digital literacy amongst new users in Myanmar has led to not enough attention being given to usual protocols regarding privacy and cases of cyberbullying are not uncommon. Moreover, despite the apparently increased freedoms regarding publishing and broadcasting in Myanmar, censorship is still active and there have been several high-profile cases of individual users being prosecuted. These include Kachin aid worker and human rights activist Patrick Khum Jaa Lee, who was arrested in October 2015 and charged under the 2013 Telecommunications Law for a posting an image on Facebook of a man in traditional Kachin clothes stomping on Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing, the Tatmadaw’s commander-in-chief (*The Irrawaddy*, 2016).

For Kachin communities, the dissemination of news and content through Facebook, as well as through exile media channels like *Kachinland News* and the *Kachin News Group* (the reports of which are often repeatedly reposted on Facebook by Kachin users) is a means of staying in touch, with one’s own family and friendship networks and with the wider Kachin community. In writing about the Kachin use of Facebook Ja Htoi Pan Maran has observed how the platform serves as a meeting place for Kachin people abroad and a means by which

they can “mediate their identity, mostly through symbolism” (2012b). In the exchange of music videos, news reports, NGO reports, videos of Kachin church services and cultural shows, the foundations of a Kachin identity are continually reaffirmed. In light of ongoing conflict, Maran has also noted how the exchange of news reports (which regularly include graphic images of civilian death and injury) has served to mobilise people, prompting a “rising social awareness and activism” (2012b). As Jinghpaw Tingsan has observed of post-2011 developments, “The media is very important for this war. Everything is Facebook” (27 August 2017).

2.4.1 Alternative archives: Jinghpaw-language music in diaspora

Jinghpaw Tingsan

Alongside news reports relating to ethnically-oriented conflict in northern Myanmar, music provides the focus of a high proportion of the traffic on Kachin-related social media channels, particularly Facebook. The two are not entirely unconnected. The Myanmar government’s suppression of minority languages (through its insistence on Burmese as the medium of instruction in schools and through the many restrictions on printing and publishing in minority languages) has inadvertently served to promote the popularity of music in these languages. Violet Cho, in researching the Karen diaspora in New Zealand, has suggested that listening to music in minority languages constitutes a political act which relates to broader attempts to preserve Myanmar’s minority cultures against a background of ‘Burmanization’. Cho has noted how:

For participants from ethnic minority backgrounds, maintaining language and culture was of key importance. Those participants tended to use the internet to read and listen to music in their own language, which was often articulated as a type of resistance to the perceived threat to their languages from the Burmese government (2011, p.207).

Until recently, the challenge for young Kachin people living in diaspora was how to access Kachin language music as Myanmar’s censorship controls meant it was not available on the kinds of online platforms commonly used by musicians in the West, for example YouTube. Like the calendars, access to music CDs and DVDs thus relied on hand-to-hand contact, with those able to travel to and from Myanmar bringing copies of these with them, which would

then circulate amongst diaspora communities. Jinghpaw Tingsan (JT),¹²³ a Kachin activist based in Amsterdam, sought to address this challenge by creating an online archive of Kachin language music. Hugely popular at its height, in recent years the functionality of the site has become increasingly redundant as in-country access to YouTube means Kachin musicians are able to promote and publish their work online directly. However, JT's high levels of motivation in respect of cultural maintenance and preservation activities have led him to explore other means through which to promote Kachin culture.

JT was born in Kutkai, Northern Shan State, in 1982. Now in his mid-thirties and living in the Netherlands, JT's family history is revealing of some of the migration trends which have been pursued by members of Kachin society in the post-ceasefire period. One of five children, JT's father died when he was young. In 1996 his mother left Myanmar for improved economic opportunities in Japan. The children remained in Myanmar with their grandmother. After passing matriculation, JT studied Computing at Mandalay University but had to leave in his final year of study as he was at risk, having been involved in a political demonstration in 2007. With the help of an aunt he hastily got the necessary papers together to enable him to leave Myanmar. Having no personal preference for destination country, JT was advised by his aunt to go the Netherlands, where an uncle was already living. Today, JT's mother continues to live in Japan, with one of his elder brothers. Another brother is living in Malaysia while his two sisters remain in Myanmar.

When JT arrived at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam there were just six other Kachin people living in the Netherlands. The earlier arrivals had struggled to secure asylum, spending time in custody and having to recruit legal assistance. For JT and those that followed, the path had become easier as, in processing the earlier claims for asylum, the Dutch government had become more familiar with Myanmar's ethnic politics. Nevertheless, technicalities meant that JT had to wait two years until he was awarded asylum. Bored and isolated, JT was keen to use this time to develop his interest in computer studies. Frustrated by the difficulty of accessing Kachin music online, he taught himself online publishing and started his own blog. In time the blog evolved into a sophisticated website (<http://jinghpawtingsan.blogspot.com/>) which provided an online archive of thousands of tracks by Kachin musicians, all of which could be freely downloaded by users.¹²⁴ The name of the site, *Jinghpaw Tingsan*, which is the

¹²³ As a former political activist, Jinghpaw Tingsan prefers to use this pseudonym rather than his name.

¹²⁴ Reflecting JT's interest in computing, the site also offers download links, guidance and online tutorials to various software packages and a Myanmar kyat currency conversion widget.

name JT uses as a pseudonym, refers to the iconic kind of woven textile shoulder bag popular with Kachins of all ages and backgrounds. JT justified the name by saying that “in the bag we have everything; from *tingsan* you can get everything” (27 August 2017).

In terms of building the website’s content, JT noted that Myanmar’s limited internet availability and slow network speeds, as well as its expensive and unreliable postal system, meant that getting music out of the country posed a real challenge. His solution was to use a network of in-country contacts to source music. He asked his contacts to collect CDs, tapes and DVDs representing “every single name, every song, even Chinese song – don’t miss it” (27 August 2017). As well as acquiring music of every genre and period he also sought to collect music in Kachin minority languages (for example in Lawngwaw, Zaiwa and Lachik languages, as well as in Jinghpaw) and from Kachin communities in China and India. Over time, the *Jinghpaw Tingsan* website also grew to encompass Kachin music videos and DVDs.

To get music out of Myanmar JT was reliant on friends and associates who were travelling between Myanmar and Europe and could bring CDs and DVDs out by hand. Processing the material so that it could be offered as a download file on the website was laborious. After receiving a CD, tracks had to be converted into MP3 format, a process which could take several hours for each individual song. Managed by an individual with limited resources, the site was very vulnerable. In 2016, the website lost its connection to the server and thousands of tracks were lost. JT began the painstaking task of replacing them but reported that the process was still unfinished and that many older tracks were still missing.

In interview, JT described how, given the limited access to the Internet in Myanmar and slow network speeds, when the *Jinghpaw Tingsan* site was first launched in 2009 it was aimed at Kachin people living overseas. He noted that most of its users at that time were based in Thailand, the United States, Japan and Europe. As Myanmar came online around 2013 JT noticed an increase in the numbers of Myanmar-based users. However, in-country access to online platforms like YouTube would also effectively bring about the site’s demise as Myanmar-based musicians became able to publish their music online directly.

In the early years of the *Jinghpaw Tingsan* site several Myanmar-based musicians complained to JT of copyright infringement. JT took a pragmatic perspective on this, responding to any artist who challenged him of distributing their works in contravention of their intellectual property rights, that people wouldn’t even have heard of the artist without

his promotion of their work. As the site's profile grew, JT noted that this had become less problematic and in more recent years "most of the time people [were] asking for their music to feature on it" (27 August 2017).

As noted above, music has an important role to play amongst diaspora communities. In the Kachin case, it serves to provide a connection to home, and, as Cho has described, a form of resistance to the Myanmar government's suppression of minority cultures. As members of overseas communities have described the impact of conflict on the Kachin diaspora, so Kachin music is reflecting the changing conditions of Kachin society. JT noted how, since the return of conflict to northern Myanmar in June 2011, Kachin musicians have increasingly turned away from their traditional foci of love, romance and relationships to use their music to talk about conflict and the experiences of the large numbers of displaced people. He suggested that, "if you want to know about Burmese politics, just listen to Burmese comedy. If you want to know about Kachin politics, listen to Kachin music" (27 August 2017). Moreover, as their customer base has become increasingly geographically dispersed, many Kachin musicians have sought to connect with their new constituencies, both through undertaking overseas tours, and through reflecting diasporic experiences in song lyrics.

JT's interest in Kachin music spans both archival, preservation-focussed activities and creative ones. As well as the *Jinghpaw Tingsan* website, JT has created music books. One was a collection of Jinghpaw songs and was available in print as well as online as in Portable Document Format (PDF). As with the website, the songs spanned multiple genres including hymns, love songs, Thanksgiving songs and Sunday school songs. JT paid a musician to transcribe the guitar chords, another individual to spellcheck the book and a Yangon-based designer to lay out the book. JT self-funded the creation and publication of the book which he sold to diaspora communities in the United States, Europe, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Australia and Japan: "most countries used it," he observed (27 August 2017). Music is important to all Kachin communities, especially in the context of church services and community events, and the book fulfilled a need amongst diaspora communities for access to a library of Jinghpaw-language songs and musical scores, which could be easily shared. All profits raised through selling the book went to supporting an IDP camp on the Myanmar/China border.

As well as promoting cultural preservation, JT's activities also have a self-conscious social utility, in a way which is characteristic of much Kachin cultural activity in recent years. Of

the creation of the music book, JT noted that he hoped it would motivate other members of overseas communities to fundraise for Kachin IDPs. JT himself expressed a strong personal commitment to his home country. He felt that all overseas Kachins should return to Myanmar and “give back” in whatever way they could: “we must go back one day; we give; we share”, he said (27 August 2017). He had been back to Myanmar on several occasions to distribute the aid monies he generated to IDP camps on the Myanmar/China border.

Having established his interest in archiving and making accessible existing Kachin music, JT had recently become interested in music production, producing one album which aimed to raise funds for Kachin IDPs and, for the first time, an album of his own music, entitled *Hkum Wa Nu* (‘Don’t Come Back’). Significantly, his own album was intended to reflect the experiences of Kachin people living outside Myanmar; in his words to convey “some different meaning about some overseas life” including experiencing loneliness and missing family members (27 August 2017). The videos which accompany each of the tracks were commissioned from young Kachin filmmakers based in different locations (Japan, the United States, Denmark, Malaysia, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Myanmar). JT said that he gave each filmmaker a piece of music and an idea of the “message”. Still in production at the time of writing, JT intends to launch the album in Myanmar and, unusually, to market it both to Myanmar-based and overseas Kachins. One practical problem still to be overcome was the different price points, with albums typically selling in Myanmar for 3,000 kyat (about three euros) whereas the overseas community would expect to pay 10-15 euros for an album. Getting copies of CDs out of the country without incurring large customs duties was also going to be risky he noted.

JT’s cultural activism also encompasses sport. Over the last few years, he and individual members of Europe-based Kachin communities have organised a series of pan-Kachin football matches. Inspired by other Asian diaspora communities who had been organising matches for some years (JT mentioned Chinese, Nepali and Tibetan groups),¹²⁵ each annual match is hosted by a different European community (the Netherlands in 2014, Denmark in 2015, the Netherlands again in 2016, Norway in 2017 and Germany in 2018). In similar ways to the Kachin Christian Family Camps organised by United States Kachin communities, the football matches form part of a week-long programme which includes women’s activities, worship services, lectures from visiting pastors, children’s activities and cultural events in the

¹²⁵ The importance of football to the wellbeing and social integration of refugees and asylum seekers is well-documented in the literature. See, for example, Stone, 2018, on the UK context.

evening including a fashion show and children's show. The exact programme depended on the local host: on "what we can do," JT said (27 August 2017). Keen to extend the social interactions enabled by the football matches to Kachin communities living in and near Myanmar, JT had begun planning a Kachin "World Cup" event to be hosted in Chiang Mai, Thailand. "That's my big dream", he said (27 August 2017). His overarching ambition was to use social interaction, and shared cultural and sport activities, to bring Kachin communities overseas and those in Myanmar into closer alignment. This interaction, JT hoped, would help overcome the disparities created by unequal access to educational provision. He observed that the educational opportunities afforded to Kachin people in Myanmar were very different to those of "the overseas people, [who were] thinking their education is quite different from their own country – I don't want to see such a big difference," JT said (27 August 2017). In reflecting the concerns of many Kachins of being part of a diminishing minority, he saw such events as also providing a much-needed opportunity to meet a potential partner as "we don't have enough Kachin boy or girl overseas" (27 August 2017).

Bawmwang Jaraw

Bawmwang Jaraw is one of the artists whose music has been promoted through the *Jinghpaw Tingsan* website. Like JT, the experiences of Bawmwang Jaraw (called "Valerie" here as this is the name she preferred to use in our correspondence)¹²⁶ also reflect wider Kachin migration trends, although, as a member of the Kachin elite, Valerie has more mobility than most of her fans.

Valerie's Jinghpaw name is well-known within the Kachin community, less for her musical output than for the high-profile career of her father, the jade businessman and politician Bawmwang La Raw (whose activities are outlined in 1.4, 'The Kachin and their Recent Political History').¹²⁷ While Bawmwang La Raw's aspirations for the development of transnational solidarities amongst Kachin communities living across national borders have been realised through organisational means (for example, through establishing the Pan-Kachin Development Society), as well as political ones (such as the founding of the exile

¹²⁶ Her Kachin friends, and fans, are more likely to know her by her Jinghpaw nickname 'Kaw Kaw' (Bawmwang Jaraw, 9 April 2016).

¹²⁷ Valerie is not the only family member of a jade industry dynasty to turn to popular music. Yup Seng Ing, daughter of Kachin jade businessman Yup Zaw Hkawng, has also made a successful career from pop music alongside her business activities. Like Bawmwang La Raw, Yup Zaw Hkawng has also supported Kachin cultural activity – see 1.4 'Making representations - Museum interactions with Kachin communities'.

political party, the Kachin National Organisation), Valerie may be considered to be pursuing similar agendas through her cultural activity.

Valerie was born in Myitkyina, Kachin State, in 1980. In 1990 her family moved to Chiang Mai, Thailand, and then, in 1993, to the United Kingdom where she attended school and university. Music was always an interest and like many young Kachins she sang at church, but her professional career has been in engineering and in finance. In September 2009, Valerie was called to China by her father. Foreign ownership of China-based businesses had become possible and Bawmwang La Raw wanted his daughter's help with his business ventures, which include the processing of jade sourced from mines in northern Myanmar. Today Valerie continues to move between the location of the family business in Mangshi and Guangzhou (southern China), Chiang Mai, Thailand and Bedford, England.

Having maintained an interest in music and produced a first album (*Tsawra Myit*) in 2008, in China Valerie took some time out of her business activities to work on a second album (*N Mai Byin Sai Chye Tim Tsawra Ai* ('Loving you even though I know it's impossible')), which was released in 2015. The track *Labau hte nga ai amy* ('A race with history'), which is discussed in the introduction to this thesis, as well as below, appears on this album. While less directly politically engaged than her father, Valerie acknowledged that her second album was "more political" than her first, noting that as she had been working in the jade industry she felt "more emotion" about the resumption of conflict in northern Myanmar in 2011 and its impact on the Kachin community (9 April 2016). Like JT she hoped to stimulate activism through her cultural activity. She said she aimed, through the album, to "give knowledge to the Kachin public and to outsiders" about what was happening, to make clear that, "This is happening to your country. You should wake up and do something about it" (9 April 2016). Other tracks on the album reference the jade industry (*Lung seng*), the healthcare system (*Hkamja lam pahkam*) and education (*Hpaji*). The album was distributed in DVD and CD format via music outlets within Myanmar and hand-to-hand through informal, social networks across Kachin diaspora communities, as well as via the *Jinghpaw Tingsan* website.

One of the most politicised tracks on the album, *Labau hte nga ai amy* was produced in collaboration with the Myanmar-based Kachin rapper Brang San.¹²⁸ Brang San wrote the song's lyrics and composed the music while Valerie undertook the artistic direction of the accompanying video which, as part of its engagement with ideas of 'history', incorporates

¹²⁸ Hpaujang Brang San was born in Bhamo, Kachin State, and currently lives in Yangon.

digital surrogates of images from the James Henry Green collection. Access to these was made possible by the research activities undertaken on Brighton Museum's behalf by Mandy Sadan in the 1990s discussed in 1.5. A copy of a CD with digital surrogates of images in the James Henry Green collection had found its way to the singer and filmmaker Galau Zung Ki, who maintains an archive relating to traditional Kachin culture, from whom Valerie sourced those used in the video.



Figure 38: Still from the music video for the track *Labau hte nga ai amy*, Bawmwang Jaraw and Brang San, Noah Productions, 2015.

As well as the 'history' denoted by the use of Green's images, Kachin tradition is also signified by the appearance, in the video, of two Jingpo dance troupes. A male group perform the athletic Kachin sword dance (*jau hkyeng*) on a large paved area in front of a fountain structure. A dance group of young women also perform a choreographed dance (Figure 38), wearing a modernised, midriff-exposing version of traditional Kachin dress. Film of the dance groups is spliced with studio footage of Brang San, who provides rap lyrics, and singer Valerie, who—wearing a baseball cap and black jersey overlaid by a white t-shirt (Figure 39)—sings to camera in front of a wallpaper background into which is inset a changing series of sepia images (James Henry Green's photographs).

The urban setting in which the dancers perform would be recognisable to most Kachin people as part of a large showground complex built for staging *manau* events (an iconic Kachin/Jingpo cultural performance in which thousands of dancers participate¹²⁹) in Mangshi, the largest city in Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, China. The showground was constructed with the support of the Chinese government. In contrast to what is perceived to be the steady, often brutal, erosion and repression of Kachin cultural practices by the Burmese government,¹³⁰ the Chinese government supports minority cultural activities including those of the Jingpo, as part of a national attempt to drive cultural tourism,¹³¹ an act that has not gone unnoticed by Kachins in Myanmar (Ts'ui-p'ing, 2016, p.181).

The use of the Mangshi *manau* ground as a setting for the music video sets up a number of associations for its Kachin viewers. Like the Zaiwa calendar discussed in the previous sections, such imagery helps visualise and strengthen the allegiances between Myanmar-based Kachins and their ethnic kin in China if not further afield, as Mangshi's quadrennial *manau* festival draws representatives from Kachin communities scattered around the globe. The site is also a pointed reminder of the Chinese government's validation and support of Kachin/Jingpo cultural practices in contrast to the absence of Burmese government support for the same, as well as of the positive outcomes of the intervention of Kachin elites in cultural preservation. Bawmwang La Raw (Valerie's father) for example, has funded programmes promoting Jingpo literacy in China (Ts'ui-p'ing, 2016, p.192).

¹²⁹ The 2016 Mangshi *manau*, for example, featured 18,604 dancers (*Kachinland News*, 2016).

¹³⁰ Many Kachins will point to the 1995 government destruction of a set of *manau shadung*, the iconic posts at the centre of a *manau* ground, built in Mandalay as an example of this (H.T. Sadan, 2016, p.327).

¹³¹ The *manau* dance festival was included in the first listing of intangible cultural heritages submitted by China to UNESCO in 2006. Some of the implications of the promotion and commodification of minority cultural practices in China are discussed in Yan Li and Ying Huang, 2016.



Figure 39: Still from the music video for the track *Labau hte nga ai amyu*, Bawmwang Jaraw and Brang San, Noah Productions, 2015.

The cosmopolitan associations set up by the location of the video, the inclusion of rap lyrics and hip-hop style appearance of the two musicians are productively contrasted with the changing series of 18 ‘Green’ images.¹³² However, while these might be expected to offer a window into a historical time in which members of Kachin hill tribes wore traditional dress and lived simple, unchanging lives in the remote borderlands, they too reveal a cosmopolitanism at play even in the early decades of the twentieth century. This is most evident in the image of Nga Lang La, a powerful Hkahku chief (Figure 39) who is pictured sitting on a wooden chair, holding a Shan pipe and wearing an elaborately embroidered ‘dragon’ coat which would have been made in China, illustrating his wide-ranging politico-economic connections.¹³³ Another image shows two rows of Kachin and Shan women, highlighting the cultural heterogeneity of the region, which, as Leach demonstrated (1954), led to frequent manipulations and revisions of cultural practices.

¹³² It is not known how the selection was made. On the whole the 18 images reflect the diversity of Green’s entire collection of 1600 bar the absence of any images of animist practice, perhaps not surprising given Bawmwang Jaraw’s own Christian orientation, and that of the wider Kachin community.

¹³³ Perhaps because of these cosmopolitan associations, this image has acquired an iconic status amongst Kachin communities and is frequently reproduced. Figure 15 shows it being used in a presentation being made by the General Secretary of the Kachin National Organisation.

In ways similar to the design of the calendars discussed in the preceding section, the cosmopolitanism and modernity proposed by the video sits in tension with a traditionally-framed nationalist sentiment. This is evident in the inclusion of several Green images of dramatic mountain vistas which speak to the common preoccupation with issues of homeland (*wunpawng mungdan*) and territory. As Laoutides and Ware have noted “territory is very significant to the Kachin,” and ideas of territory and nationalist identity are strongly intertwined: “Continuity of identity is seen to be linked to the control of territory, making the value of territory mostly the ability to sustain cultural identity, through self-government and control over the resources required to sustain and develop Kachin society” (2016, p.58).

This engagement with issues of history and territory are also apparent in the song’s lyrics, especially in those rapped by Brang San, which evoke an identity which is rooted in myth, homelands and kin. Alluding to *Majoi Shingra*, the mythical source of the Kachin community (thought to be the Tibetan plateau), the lyrics open: “Since *Majoi Shingra* we have a united history / we have talked to each other through the kinship system / we’re a big race / let’s remember this always”.¹³⁴ In ways typical of ethno-nationalists, Brang San also evokes the rich natural resources of the Kachin region: “Our homeland and animals / our natural resources / from a long time ago / our ancestors have protected,”¹³⁵ as well as the community’s faith, language and culture: “We have established myths / literature and culture / good faith / we speak our language, tell our stories / we owe a historical debt to no one”.¹³⁶

Unlike Valerie, Brang San has spent most of his life in Myanmar. She describes him as a more politicised artist: “his lyrics are quite heavy compared to mine” (9 April 2016). Their collaboration, which has now resulted in several tracks, thus reveals the different forces at play in the construction of Kachin ethno-nationalism and its reworking across new media and diasporic spaces. However, as much as the video for *Labau hte nga ai amy* is a call for action pitched to the global Kachin community, it is also a meditation on Valerie’s own identity project in which her outward-looking, transnational and cosmopolitan experiences and perspective have to navigate the nostalgic ethno-nationalism promoted by Kachin nationalists at ‘home’. In describing her own ethnic identifications, Valerie said, “I feel I’m

¹³⁴ *Majoi shingra kaw na labau rum hkrat wa / Mayu dama hpu nau shachyen shaga let / Myu kaba rai nga / Tut e tut dum nga ga yaw.*

¹³⁵ *Anhte buga dusat du myeng / Anhte buga nhprang sut rai / Moi moi kaw na anhte a / Jiwoi ni jiwa na makawp wa ai re.*

¹³⁶ *Ngang kang ai labau maumwi mausa anhte lu / Laili laika htunghkying hte / Makam masham hte hkrak / Anhte a ga anhte ga anhte maumwi anhte hkai / Labau hka kadai hpe mung nkap.*

lost in between somehow,” noting that this feeling was what motivated her “to want to explore my community, the current and the past” (9 April 2016).

Her father’s commitment to building and extending transnational pan-Kachin solidarities is echoed in Valerie’s founding of a media production company, Noah Productions, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2014. Focussed on “music, literature and movies” in the pursuit of enabling “Kachin youth develop their talents”, Noah Productions draws upon Valerie’s transnational network of Kachin singers, musicians and filmmakers to create media products for the consumption of young Kachins around the globe. Like JT, Valerie is forging new frameworks through which to sustain cultural continuity and a distinct Kachin identity.

2.4.2 Alternative archives: Crowdsourcing histories

The media creations of Jinghpaw Tingsan and Valerie reveal how, for diasporic cultural activists, ICTs can facilitate processes of “identity maintenance, reinterpretation, and hybridity” (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p.53). As alternative archives, these creations promote the continued use of minority languages as well as the extension of nationalist sentiments across new demographics and into new diasporic settings. Significantly, they also have a social utility in being intended to mobilise their consumers into action on behalf of communities ‘at home’.

The last example considered in this section is distinctive to the previous two in that its development was driven by a non-Kachin individual. Nevertheless, in its ambition to promote Kachin perspectives and self-conscious attempt to address the deficiencies of the colonial archive, it may provide a useful model for thinking through Kachin-centred alternatives to the kinds of “authorised heritage discourse” (Smith, 2006) promoted by mainstream heritage institutions.

#KachinLifeStories

Kachin Life Stories is a “crowd-generated life stories knowledge base” aimed at the global Kachin community which uses social media platforms, particularly Instagram, to aggregate data (Tan, 2016, p.40). Significantly, while intended for “ordinary Kachin individuals” (Tan, 2016, p.40), the project was designed and developed by a non-Kachin. However, as a collaborative endeavour which self-consciously avoids conventional Eurocentric modes of

knowledge production, engages with “Indigenous”, “decolonising”, “participative action” and “community-based” research methodologies (Tan, 2016, p.73), and foregrounds Kachin epistemologies and transnational experiences, it may offer an alternative model for promoting and developing Kachin heritage.

The project’s initiator, Stan BH Tan, is a Singaporean academic whose research originally focussed on agrarian change and ethnic relations in the upland rural regions of Vietnam. After coming into contact with members of the small Kachin community in Singapore in 2009, Tan shifted his focus to pursue an approach informed by collaborative anthropology. The goals of this new enquiry were set by Tan’s interactions with Singapore-based Kachins, most notably Dr Marip Kum Ja, a senior research fellow in Mechanical Engineering at the National University of Singapore and trustee of the Kachinland School of Arts and Sciences in Shatapru, Kachin State, Myanmar. Tan and Marip discussed the extent to which, while there was a growing body of work on Kachin histories, in Jinghpaw, English and Chinese, much of this scholarship remained inaccessible to Kachin people, also that, in their opinion, this material failed to capture “the dynamic and varied lives of the Kachin people” (Kachin Life Stories, 2018). Kachin Life Stories therefore evolved as an attempt to address this lacuna.

Between 2009 and 2010, members of the Singapore Kachin community began to record excerpts of their life stories with the help of post-graduate students supervised by Tan. This developed into a series of ‘Life Stories as a Method of Inquiry’ seminars designed by Tan for the community, held over the period September 2010 – March 2011. In seeking to establish a research framework, Tan sought to extend the methodology into “an ambitious large-scale public knowledge base of quantifiable narratives of the Kachin” (Kachin Life Stories, 2018). In 2012 the initiative was given momentum by a Japan Society for Promotion of Science (JSPS) award.¹³⁷ With grant funding in hand and with the support of the Kachin community in Singapore, the project was extended to include structured interactions with Myanmar-based Kachins through a series of organised workshops.¹³⁸

In essence, the initiative centres on the use of a hashtag—*#KachinLifeStories*—which Kachin social media users are encouraged to use when posting on social media. While intended to be

¹³⁷ KAKENHI Young Scientist “A” grant, Ref. 24682009

¹³⁸ These took place in Yangon and Mandalay (February - March 2013) and in Myitkyina, Kachin State (December 2013) (“Milestones”, Kachin Life Stories).

used across different platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Soundcloud and Tumblr), the picture-sharing platform Instagram has seen the most extensive use of the hashtag, with some 30,000 posts at the time of writing. How the hashtag is used, and the kind of imagery to which it is attached, remains entirely the choice of the individual submitting the post and the relationship between the hashtag and a particular post is not always self-evident (Figure 40).

A browse of Instagram posts tagged with the *#KachinLifeStories* hashtag reveals a wide range of content. Tagged pictures include, for example, images of college students hanging out, photos of babies and children, women in traditional dress, fashion shoots, political demonstrations, food, flowers, events, IDPs, karate classes, weddings, catwalk shows and gym sessions. While few of those posting include a geographical location in the text or hashtags which accompany the image, it is clear that the images were taken in a wide range of locations, including the diasporic settings of the United States, Singapore, Denmark and Thailand.

As with the printed calendars the tagged posts also speak to the sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity Tsagarousianou describes. Tan notes how:

Repetition is manifested in the form of routines. Like clockwork routine, we can expect entries about church services or Bible study sessions being posted on weekends ... There is also the repetition of stories on special occasions such as Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Thanksgiving and Mother's Day, organized at the churches among Kachin Christians around the world (2016, p.61).

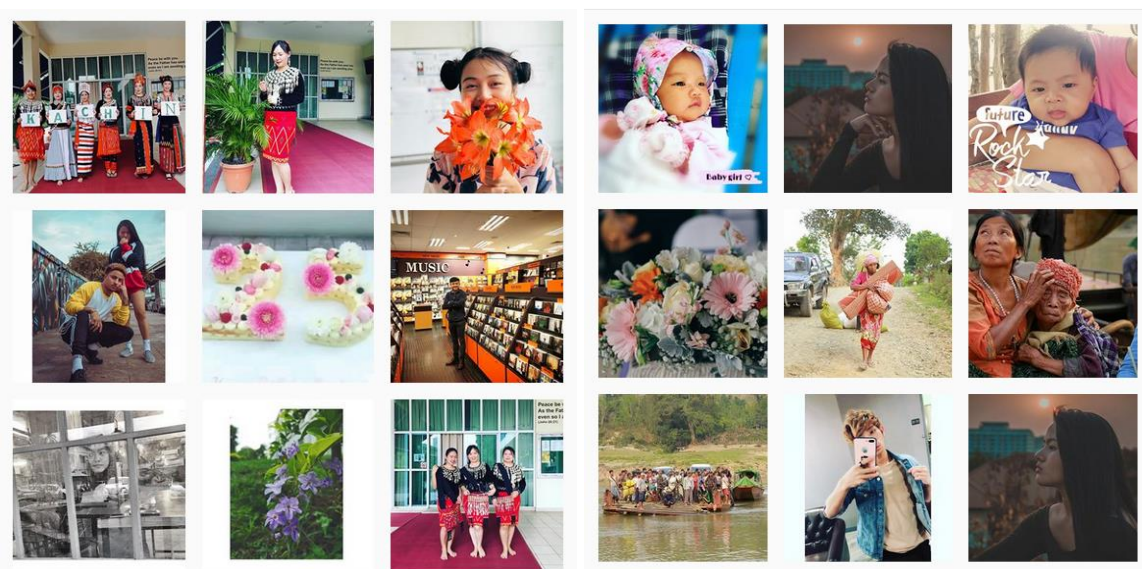


Figure 40: Series of posts tagged with the hashtag *#KachinLifeStories* on Instagram, July 2018.

For Tan, the *#KachinLifeStories* tag provides a means by which members of the Kachin community can “take back the agency to speak for themselves about their own lives” (Kachin Life Stories, 2018). He identifies an asymmetry in conventional modes of knowledge production which is evident in academic research initiatives that prioritise the researcher’s agendas over those of the research subject. He also questions the usefulness, to the subject, of the outcomes of these initiatives: “the product of such research projects could only be a textually inscribed artifact—that is, a research paper, report, book, archive, or database—for circulation among the experts but of little use to the subject” (Tan, 2016, p.43). Tan looks to new media to help resolve this asymmetry: “we have arrived at a particular juncture where advances in digital technology could facilitate a more inclusive and participatory modality of research that could give balance to this asymmetry” (ibid.).

Since the project’s inception, the hashtag *#KachinLifeStories* appears to have gained currency amongst Kachin social media users and now offers one pathway across the visual documentation of the lives and condition of this transnational community. Nevertheless, while it acts as a signpost to an extraordinarily rich visual source, a lack of accompanying contextual data or narrative limits the extent to which the data can provide anything more than a series of snapshots. Tan himself resists the urge to draw conclusions from tagged posts, maintaining that “*#KachinLifeStories* is a panorama of the mundane and the irrelevant” (2016, p.58) and that new research methodologies need to be developed which can make appropriate use of such data. He suggests that, “In such a radically different context in which knowledge is being produced, disseminated, and consumed ... we will require a different optic to ‘read’ this crowd-generated knowledge base” (p.74).

What is clear, though, is that the hashtag provides an alternative, and arguably more intuitive means through which to create cultural representations. In contrast to the representations of the Kachin community made by the Burmese government and non-governmental organisations such as aid agencies, which have tended to reduce them to “ethnic minorities, rebels and refugees” (Tan, 2016, p.53), the hashtag resists the objectification and homogenization of the Kachin experience through insisting on the individual and the singular.¹³⁹ As Tan explains, it “add[s] *textures* to an otherwise monotonous singularity, “the Christian Kachin community” (2016, p.63, original emphasis).

¹³⁹ A desire to challenge these representational tropes also sits behind the creation of @EverydayKachin, a curated Instagram feed associated with Documentary Arts Asia. Launched in June 2015 it aims to be “one of the

Like any representational strategy, the Kachin Life Stories initiative raised questions about authenticity, ownership and control:

When I told Kachin people who first encountered the project that it is not to be directed by institutional or personal agenda but instead, let individual Kachin be himself/herself/themselves, they were like...."what the hell are you talking about? That is not how Kachin people do things... They must be told what to do or nobody will do anything!" Others wanted to take control of things even at a very early stage of the project. And some of my earlier collaborators felt that such a project should be directed by a real Kachin, and in Kachin fashion (whatever that means) (Tan, pers. comm. 27 May 2016).

The appropriateness of representations about the Kachin experience being made from a diasporic perspective was also questioned: "it was as if the real Kachin could only be found in Kachinland and must practice a particular package of traditional customs that is already considered Kachin" (Tan, 2016, p.41). Perhaps as a nod to more conventional representational modes, the Kachin Life Stories initiative has also supported Kachin elders to produce memoirs and scholarly works which are shared via the project website and on the I store.

best resources worldwide to understand visually what Kachin state looks and feels like". Some 90% of the images featured on the feed are by locally-based photographers: "This project is helping to create a more complete picture of Kachin Land's people, culture & conflict, which is still a near black hole on the web."

Conclusion

The media renegotiate and represent diasporic copresence and a common past through images, which shape and (selectively) renew the contemporary collective memory and provide repertoires for the construction of new individual and communal identities (Georgiou, 2006, p.13).

As noted in 2.2, ‘Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora’, experiences of migration can engender a need for a sense of kinship, solidarity and community as well as provide the catalyst for an intensified engagement with one’s ethnic identity. Through the kinds of initiatives described above, new media can help service both needs.

In particular, ICTs offer channels, or “repertoires” to use Georgiou’s term, through which young diasporans can mediate their identity, negotiating the complex dynamic between the more primordial forms associated with the ethno-nationalist movement and their own cosmopolitan, transnational experiences. As noted in the introduction to this section, whatever the novelty of the medium—as a “futuristic kind of technology”—ICTs can be instrumental in “creating and re-creating a shared collective past amongst users” (Eriksen, 2006, p.1), one which makes keen use of the kinds of historical resources found in museum collections. But ICTs also offer a valuable platform for young diasporans searching for the “spaces and languages” through which to shape an identify position “that is both relevant to their socio-cultural situatedness and free from the hegemony of traditional sources of interpretation and authority” (Mandaville, 2001, p.170).

If we consider the kinds of interventions described above to constitute forms of ‘alternative archive’ then it is clear they differ significantly from the kinds of historical materials—and the means of organising these—typical of museums. While making a contribution to preserving and maintaining culture, in contrast to the widespread perception that ICTs are a substitute for ‘real world’ person-to-person interaction, these initiatives can be seen to have a social purpose and to engender sociability. The *Jinghpaw Tingsan* website, for example, provides music and music books to be shared in social contexts. Moreover, JT’s efforts directed towards creating an online archive of Kachin music leads him to work with a wide network of creatives on the production of new music and music videos. The *Kachin Life Stories* project methodology is shared through multiple workshops held in different locations.

As well as providing cultural products with social utility, these media producers are often motivated by a socially activist agenda. Through the football matches he organises, JT also generates new contexts for community interaction with the hope that these may help

overcome disparities between the conditions experienced by those at home and those in diaspora. Similarly, Bawmwang Jaraw hopes that her music will inspire action and her transnational music company, Noah Productions, aims to enable “Kachin youth develop their talents”. While more discreet than other forms of political protest, as Cho suggests, that these archives promote the use of a minority language (Jinghpaw) means that they may be considered a form of resistance to Burman hegemony.

Having considered the culture and identity-making practices of overseas Kachin communities, and the driving forces for these, in the next section I return to the museum to reflect on the opportunities and challenges generated through their engagements with diaspora communities.

3.1 Introduction to Part Three: Transforming the Museum

In Part One I established the contexts through which Kachin diaspora communities evolved, and considered some of the interactions between Brighton Museum and Kachin individuals. In Part Two I outlined the differing experiences of three distinct overseas communities of Kachin people and demonstrated that, whatever fears members of diaspora communities hold about the potential loss of their cultural heritage, diaspora constitutes a highly productive place for culture and identity work.

In Part Three I return to the museum to consider the ways in which museums in the United Kingdom are engaging with diaspora communities and the opportunities and threats inherent in this practice. Despite long-standing museological activity in this area, the relationship between British museums, their ‘world’ collections and diaspora communities has been rarely specifically addressed or theorised (exceptions include Peirson Jones, 1992; Shelton, 2003; Parker, 2004 and Mears and Modest, 2012, although much more work discusses the broader issues inherent in promoting ‘cultural diversity’ in museums, see below). This is in marked contrast to the attention given to the museum work undertaken in the United Kingdom with source communities based overseas (for example, Herle, 2004; Knowles, 2013; Peers and Brown, 2013; Morton and Oteyo, 2015).

Despite the widespread presumption that modes of museum practice developed in response to indigenous communities can be simply extended to diaspora communities (see, for example, Phillips, 2011, p.10), Ashley notes that, in the Canadian museum sector, these groups “have been dealt with differently” (2005, p.9). The reasons for this, she suggests, include a paucity of collections materials relating to migrant communities, as well as that these communities hold a fundamentally “different place in the Canadian imagination” (ibid). As such, “their inclusion in museum representations and institutional practices has been problematic” Ashley concludes (ibid.). Part Three explores some of the reasons why, in a British context also, inclusion has proved problematic, before proposing strategies through which this relationship might be productively recast.

3.2 How are Museums Currently Serving Diaspora Communities?

Introduction

In this chapter I present several examples of museum engagements with diaspora communities that have taken place in England within the last two decades. I do not attempt to give a survey of the field and there is much activity that I do not consider. This includes activity undertaken by social or local historians (for example, efforts made by museums and archives to record the histories of diaspora communities through oral history projects), community engagement initiatives with diaspora communities which have not made collections their focus, and museum display and exhibition projects which specifically address migration or refugee-related issues. Instead I have sought to highlight particular examples where a museum has engaged members of a diaspora community in the development and dissemination of collections-based knowledge of its ‘non-western’ or ethnographic holdings so as to be able to make comparisons with my case study. Through these examples I intend to show what can be gained from this approach, as well as the complex issues raised by these engagements.

In 2003, Peers and Brown’s assessment of the relationship between British museums and source communities found that “curatorial authority and institutional procedures [had] not shifted much at all” compared to their counterparts in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (p.4). However, in the intervening years, activity in this field has grown significantly in volume and visibility. This work has primarily been driven by national and university museums: institutions which employ specialist curatorial staff who are expected to undertake research and able to attract research funding to cover the costs of international travel and partnership working.

While national museums and galleries have also shown interest in engaging with diaspora communities based in the United Kingdom (Dewdney, Dibosa, and Walsh, 2013; Nightingale and Swallow, 2003; Nightingale and Mahal, 2012; V&A, 2009), practice in this field has been dominated by regional museums. These museums are unlikely to have curatorial staff with an area specialism (although they might have a curator of ‘world cultures’) and these staff are generally not expected to be ‘research-active’. These factors have encouraged such institutions to look to communities closer at hand, who have also often provided a focus for targeted interventions by museum learning or community engagement staff. This is especially

the case with local authority-run museum services, which have been expected to deliver on government agendas around social inclusion and to work with disadvantaged groups based in their neighbourhood (Group for Large Local Authority Museums, 2000). In these cases, work with diaspora communities has been framed by debates concerning the ability of museums to promote social inclusion (Sandell, 1998; West and Smith, 2005; Newman and McLean, 2007) and, particularly, ‘cultural diversity’, an issue which gripped the museum sector over the years 1997 to 2010 (Merriman and Poovaya-Smith, 1996; Hooper-Greenhill, 1997; Khan, 2000; MLA, 2005). Not all of this work, which sought to widen museum audiences, concerned collections. Indeed, one of its weaknesses was that it promoted a form of “boutique multiculturalism” (Fish, 1997), leading to a superficial “saris, samosas and steel drums for the well-intentioned” (Casey, 2016) approach over a deeper and more critical engagement with museums, their histories and collections (Littler and Naidoo, 2005). A more holistic concern with ‘diversity’ has been taken up by Arts Council England, who took over the responsibility for providing national policy direction to museums in 2011 (Arts Council England, 2018).

In selecting the initiatives described below I have thus included examples from museums with different governance models. My examples are drawn from practice undertaken by the Horniman Museum (an independent charitable trust), The Manchester Museum (a university museum), World Museum Liverpool (part of National Museums Liverpool), the British Museum (a national museum) and Brighton Museum & Art Gallery (a local authority-run museum service). In considering the issues raised by and impact of these museum engagements I am largely reliant on materials produced by the museums themselves (rather than by members of the diaspora community involved) although I have sought to draw on evaluation materials which recount the perspective of diaspora participants wherever possible.

3.2.1 Interactions between United Kingdom museums and diaspora communities

The Horniman Museum and Gardens

Based in the London borough of Lewisham, the fifteenth most ethnically diverse local authority area in England (Lewisham Council, 2012), and caretaker to collections of global significance, the Horniman Museum has long been engaged in programmes of international field research and collecting, and locally-based community engagement. Its attempts to span these vectors of activity, which have tended to remain stubbornly opposed in other institutions,¹⁴⁰ were first apparent in the curation and interpretation of the Museum's *African Worlds* gallery, which opened in 1999 and is discussed in an essay Anthony Shelton wrote for the Peers and Brown volume on *Museums and Source Communities* (2003).¹⁴¹ Under Shelton's curatorial guidance, as the Museum's then Keeper of Anthropology, and the advice of a specially-convened "international anthropology consultative panel" (Shelton, 2003, p.185), the gallery sought to make a feature of Africa's diasporas in its presentation of 'African' objects from the Museum's collection. Objects from Brazil and the Caribbean were incorporated, as were the perspectives of African scholars, curators and researchers in the gallery's interpretation. In particular, a 'Voices Project,' constituted "an attempt to render visible the presence of large numbers of people of African and Caribbean descent in the London area, and incorporate their views and immediate impressions of some of the objects ... represented in the gallery" (2003, p.191-2). Unlike the more empirically-based object interpretations typically offered in museum labels and text panels, these 'voices' provided an emotional perspective on the collections. The perspectives on offer encompassed nostalgia ("Now that I am working in a museum, I think back and wonder what happened to all those things of my childhood"), critique ("Many people brought many things into this part of the world, without knowing what they are") and regret for the exhibits' detachment from context ("When I look back at all these masks in the Museum, I feel very sorry they're not being used") (Shelton, 2003, p.192).

While acknowledging that *African Worlds* provided a "good example for thinking about how collaborative exhibition practices can strive towards addressing social justice," museum

¹⁴⁰ A recent discussion paper issued to the museum sector observes how "a culture of siloed working still ... artificially separates collections work from learning, outreach and audience development" (Museums Association, 2018, p.6).

¹⁴¹ The gallery and its innovative curatorial approach has been widely discussed. See, for example, Arnaut, 2000; Phillips, 2002; Shelton, 2003; Mears and Modest, 2012 and Modest, 2013.

theorist Wayne Modest has sought to complicate the relationship between museum collections and source communities proposed by the gallery (2013, p.100). In considering the very different historical trajectories taken by people of African heritage today living in the United Kingdom, Modest asks “whether everyone who sees himself or herself as part of the African diaspora can so easily be regarded as part of the source community for objects from Africa” (pp.100-101). He challenges the sector to define “what we understand the term ‘source’ to mean. Can people from the Caribbean, for example, truly represent a source for an African collection?” (p.101). In contrast, Modest’s own exhibitionary practice, when he held the role of Keeper of Anthropology at the Horniman, avoided these issues by targeting a demographic defined by age rather than ethnicity (Modest, 2013).

In the fifteen years after the *African Worlds* gallery opened, its popularity waned considerably, partly due to the refurbishment of the Museum’s onsite aquarium in 2006 and the updating of its natural history displays, both of which responded more directly to the Museum’s “strong family-friendly ethos” (Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2018a). A design brief for the proposed redevelopment of the gallery notes that while in 2003/04 67% of all museum visitors visited *African Worlds*, by 2012/13 this had fallen to just 37% (Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2014). In 2011 the Museum attracted Arts Council England funding to undertake a major review of its Anthropology holdings in order to “assess and explore new ways in which the Horniman collections could be relevant to diaspora communities in London” (Crowley, 2015, p.177). Over a three-year period ‘Collections People Stories,’ as the project was known, brought together conventional museum functions—documenting, digitising and improving collections care and storage—with collections-based community engagement initiatives, some of which involved local diaspora communities.¹⁴² The project, which was intended to demonstrate the “importance and contemporary relevance” of the collections (Horniman Museum and Gardens, n.d.), was structured around four themes, which were informed not by the interests of these communities but by the ways the stored collections had historically been organised.¹⁴³ The themes were Food and Feasting; Health and Healing (Magic and Religion); Family and Home; War and Peace-Making. Each theme formed a focus for project activity for a period of six months, concluding with a conference or workshop.

¹⁴² One project curator noted that the initiative represented a self-conscious attempt by the Museum to connect the work of curators with that of members of its community engagement team (Johanna Zetterström-Sharp, 5 April 2017).

¹⁴³ Tom Crowley, personal interview, 24 March 2017.

Project curator Tom Crowley has described the Museum's interactions with British Tibetans following the discovery of some early twentieth-century Tibetan objects associated with food preparation during the project period focussed on Food and Feasting (Crowley, 2015). Given the usual museum focus on Tibetan objects of spiritual significance (see below for a discussion of this in the context of World Museum Liverpool), museum staff were keen to see what kind of response these more quotidian objects would elicit from locally-based Tibetans. In February 2013 Crowley and two Tibetan collaborators took a selection of these objects to a *Losar* (New Year) event organised by a group of London-based Tibetans and held at Woolwich Conservative Club. Through participating in this community-led event they hoped to drive interest in a later workshop focussing on Tibetan food which was being run by community members and facilitated by the Museum. Both events generated some challenges, not least the conservation issues raised by the potential proximity of food and museum objects (Crowley, 2015). In Woolwich, the objects elicited a diverse range of responses from Tibetans present, many of whom had been born outside Tibet. Crowley has suggested that the political developments which had taken place in Tibet since the objects had been collected there in the 1920s amplified the "divide between the Tibetans who had used the objects and the Tibetans who were examining [them]" (2015, p.179). Very few of those present had seen or used similar objects although Crowley proposed that, for the diaspora community, the objects offered a "particular significance, which was not something shared by other museum visitors" (Crowley, 2014) and that the encounter "contributed to and perhaps further complicated the ways in which Tibetans in London construct and maintain their identity" (2015, p.181). While he doesn't provide more insight into what is meant by this remark it is likely that he could see the ways in which the objects, while unfamiliar, responded to the desire of second-generation British Tibetans to engage with their cultural heritage. Indeed, in conversation Crowley noted the extent to which London-based Tibetans were "exploring and engaging with [their] identity" and were "hungry for that" (24 March 2017). This observation is supported by the words of one British Tibetan man, Jamyang, who appears in a short film made by the Museum saying that "For Tibet, it's much better to display [the objects] in a museum rather than hidden somewhere or lost, because historical object, it's our identity, in some way it's symbolic of our culture and our tradition" (Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2013). Jamyang's words also attest to the symbolic importance of having the cultural heritage of diaspora groups represented in British museums.

The complex nature of diasporic identifications with the kinds of historic material culture that can be found in ethnographic museum collections, is revealed in the participation of three members of one Tibetan family in the Horniman Museum initiative. Dolma Pemba was born in Tibet and appears on the film offering specific information about Tibetan cultural protocols as well as about the museum objects and their indigenous use (Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2013). Her husband Tsewang Pemba came from the same area as some of the objects brought out from the store and was similarly able to give a precise interpretation of their use and significance. Their daughter, however, occupies a different position in her relationship to the Horniman's Tibetan objects. Dechen Pemba was born in the United Kingdom and is a Tibet-focussed human rights activist. A website she founded in 2008, highpeakspureearth.com, provides English translations of poems, songs, and other writings created by Tibetans living inside Tibet and the People's Republic of China. Unlike her parents, Dechen was not able to make a straightforward identification with the objects presented by the Museum at its workshop, however she seemed to find in them the "particular significance" that Crowley describes. She is filmed saying, "It's actually not very often that I have the chance to see objects this old from Tibet. I feel I don't really know enough about the objects and want to find out more" (Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2013). Dechen's commitment to political activism is shared with another participant, Padma Dolma, director of the United Kingdom branch of Students for a Free Tibet, who spoke at the Museum workshop and appears in the film.¹⁴⁴ The extent to which political activism frames the engagements of second-generation Tibetans with Tibetan cultural heritage is evident in the Museum's filmed footage of the *Losar* event. An image of the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetan community in exile, forms the focal piece of a display of offerings; a young man wears a sweatshirt carrying the message "Tibet is not China" on its reverse and a table of merchandise for sale includes clothing with the slogan "Take back the Yak" (Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2013).

A key driver behind the 'Collections People Stories' project was the Horniman Museum's ambitions to provide evidence of need for, as well as the generation of content and engagement necessary for, a new World Gallery to replace *African Worlds* in the Museum's South Hall. In 2016 the Museum was awarded £3.3 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund

¹⁴⁴ Crowley notes that a number of participants at the museum workshop were "active in the *Lakhar* movement, supporters of which practice non-violent resistance to Chinese rule. Among other things wearing Tibetan dress, speaking in Tibetan and eating Tibetan food is encouraged" (Crowley, 2015, p.179).

towards the costs of realising this project, which considers “what it means to be human” through a sustained reflection on people’s relationship with the world as articulated through objects (Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2018b). While Collections People Stories was intended to help establish a ‘vision’ for the new gallery, museum engagements with United Kingdom-based diaspora communities undertaken in the context of the earlier project play a more discrete role in the new gallery. The newly established connections made between the Museum’s Tibetan collections and the small but cohesive London-based Tibetan community are represented through a single case on ‘Food and the Diaspora’ in a larger display section dedicated to the Himalayas. A request made by Padma Dolma for the inclusion of a Tibetan flag or an image of the Dalai Lama, as a symbol of Tibetan nationalism, was not honoured, the museum wishing to avoid appearing “overtly political” (Crowley, 24 March 2017). Despite the extent to which political activism informed many community members’ engagements with Tibetan cultural heritage, the Museum was careful to disaggregate the political from the cultural, preferring its presentation of Tibetan food practices to be politics-free.

The Horniman Museum examples frustrate simplistic identifications of ‘source community’, instead raising questions about the complex and contingent nature of relationships between museum collections and diaspora communities. It also shows how museum engagements with diaspora communities can be used by the institution to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of historic collections thus providing justification for the allocation of resources. Nevertheless, it seems that, in making the final grade of the gallery display, diaspora communities cannot displace the cultural authority of the overseas source community, whose perspectives form the main focus, with diaspora communities providing supplementary commentary. Moreover, while political activism provides the lens through which many London Tibetans engage with their cultural heritage, it seems the Museum prefers to represent these engagements with the politics taken out.

Congo Great Lakes Initiative

Unlike the museum-driven projects with diaspora communities described in the rest of this chapter, this heritage project was initiated by a community group. The Congo Great Lakes Initiative (CGLI) is a London-based organisation established “for the benefit of the people of central Africa and those of the Great Lakes region, both in Africa and in England and, in

particular, those residing in the greater London Area” (Congo Great Lakes Initiative, n.d.). As well as promoting the integration of people of Congolese heritage into British society, CGLI also seeks to improve the lives of those remaining in central Africa, a region negatively affected by ongoing conflict. Many group members were part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s former elite and had sought exile in Britain in the 1960s. These individuals were joined by a later wave of migrants in the 1990s (Zetterström-Sharp, 5 April 2017).

In 2015 CGLI was successful in an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund *Our Heritage* funding stream.¹⁴⁵ The funded project took the starting point that there is a “wealth of collections from the Democratic Republic of Congo held in museums,” however “these collections remain largely unknown and underutilised by the Congolese community living here, owing to a lack of access or information” (Wilkins and Mercier, 2015). Also contributing to this scenario was a “perceived lack of interest amongst young British of Congolese origin in their heritage, and what these collections could mean for them” (Wilkins and Mercier, 2015). From the perspective of a curator involved in the project, it was also motivated by the desire of CGLI members to reclaim some of their lost cultural authority and status, and for the children of the community to be able to identify with their specific Congolese heritage, rather than being “simply another African Londoner” (Zetterström-Sharp, 5 April 2017).

The project involved examining Congolese objects in the collections of University College London (UCL) and the Horniman Museum. CGLI members also participated in training activities which included object packing, object research, photography, filmmaking and exhibition narrative development. Project outcomes included a co-produced display of Congolese objects which combined those from UCL’s collections and those from participants’ own collections. Entitled *Keeping the Past Alive*, the display was presented in UCL’s Ethnography Foyer (September 2015 - January 2016). A further outcome was a website intended to provide a database of Congolese objects in British museums, with interpretations added by CGLI members.¹⁴⁶

Both outputs enabled CGLI members to insert themselves and their own testimony into the interface between museum objects and public. As project leader Didier Ibwilakwingi-Ekom

¹⁴⁵ This scheme accepts applications for heritage project funding of £10,000 to £100,000 from not-for-profit organisations, private owners of heritage and partnerships.

¹⁴⁶ At the point of writing, the online database (<http://cgli.org.uk/collections/>) remains incomplete.

has stated on the project website, the display foregrounded how Congolese community members “interact with objects, [on terms which are] either personal, provocative or relational” (Ibwilakwingi-Ekom, n.d.). Johanna Zetterström-Sharp, a curator at the Horniman Museum, has observed how the Museum hoped to extract object-based information from CGLI members but found, instead, that these individuals were more interested in challenging museum knowledge such as that embedded in catalogue descriptions, as well as in critiquing the representation of Africa in British museums (5 April 2017).

In 2016 CGLI member interest in engaging with historical photographs of central Africa (which were poorly represented in UCL’s and the Horniman Museum’s collections) led the group to a further museum collaboration, this time with the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) at the University of Cambridge. As well as some 1,200 objects from the Congo region, MAA’s collections include 650 photographic images, 242 of which were taken in the 1890s by a British missionary along the Congo River (University of Cambridge, 2017). These photographs formed the basis of a co-produced display shown at MAA entitled *Carriers of Culture: Women, Food and Power from the Congo Basin* (October 2016 - April 2017). The theme was chosen by CGLI members who wished to emphasise the role of women in ensuring the continuation of tradition. In particular, selected images documented the production and processing of *kwanga* (a type of fermented bread made from manioc), which remains an important feature of community gatherings. Historic photographs were supplemented by photographs taken on commission by the project coordinator’s father, which showed similar activities being undertaken by women in more recent times.

In highlighting the “civilisation of women”, especially under the influence of Christianity, and their role in upholding culture and tradition, the narrative chosen by the (mostly male) CGLI members resisted easily alignment with the kind of critical museum practice usually adopted by MAA staff and its researchers (Zetterström-Sharp, 5 April 2017). Nevertheless, MAA, like UCL, promoted the partnership as evidence of the enduring relevance of their holdings and of their willingness to engage with communities (University of Cambridge, 2017).

For CGLI its museum collaborations were driven by a desire to build community members’ “confidence and skills” through “re-connect[ing] ourselves and our children to our heritage through museum collections” (Ibwilakwingi-Ekom quoted in University of Cambridge, 2017). These collaborations thus had a social utility which was connected to the project

coordinator's own commitment to migrant and refugee integration (Ibwilakwingi-Ekom, 2018). In inserting participants' own words, objects and images into official museum interpretations of Congolese objects, these collaborations also helped return status and cultural authority to those divested of these through the process of migration and exile. In demonstrating "*what these collections could mean*" (Wilkins and Mercier, 2015, emphasis added) CGLI members were able to reinscribe themselves and their children into the histories and potential meanings of these.

The Manchester Museum

As a university museum, the Manchester Museum's collections of human history and the natural sciences provide a focus for ongoing academic research. As part of the Manchester Museums & Galleries Partnership (with the Whitworth Art Gallery and Manchester Art Gallery), the Museum is also an important player in strategic initiatives concerning the role of culture and the arts in the city, many of which seek to leverage the support and engagement of the city's large diaspora communities.

The Museum's efforts to engage diaspora communities with its collections are longstanding. In 2000, inspired by her experience of working with indigenous communities in Canadian museums, the Museum's Education Manager Bernadette Lynch established a dedicated Community Advisory Panel, "primarily made up of Diaspora community members drawn from Manchester's many diverse communities, whose origins and journeys reflected those of the collections" (Lynch, 2011a, p.151). The responsibilities of Panel members included "to mediate and advocate between diverse communities and the museum to improve access and social inclusion" and "to refocus the interpretation of material culture so as to include non-European cultural perspectives" (Bodo, 2007). These ambitions were first addressed through a project called *Rekindle*, which resulted in short films of Panel members discussing objects from the ethnology collection. Created by Kuljit Chuhan, a local digital media artist and filmmaker and also featuring two poets, the films, which were presented in the Museum's Living Cultures gallery, provided evidence of an emotional, imaginative engagement with objects (Ashmore, 2011a).

The project's successor, *Collective Conversations*, brought a wider range of individuals and groups into the Museum to be filmed talking about objects in the collection about which they were culturally knowledgeable (Ashmore, 2011a, 2011b). Some of these films were again

presented in the Museum's Living Cultures gallery. As with *Rekindle*, the initiative was motivated by an organisational desire to evidence diasporic engagement with the collections, the feeling being that these had been "under-used by the surrounding communities, and lacked important information regarding their history and community context" (Bodo, 2007). In seeking to develop "an expanded 'community of interpretation' with participants from local (mainly Diaspora) communities" (Lynch, 2011a, p.153), Nicola Ashmore has shown how the initiative also addressed particular governmental and sectoral directives concerning cultural diversity (Ashmore, 2011a).

The influence of academic work on museum collaborations with indigenous communities in North America was evident in the characterisation of the *Collective Conversations* project as providing a kind of contact zone. Indeed, this was the title given to a studio space specially-created for the project (Lynch, 2011a, p.153). However, while anthropologist James Clifford described the work of the contact zone as "an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship* - a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull." (Clifford, 1997, p.192-3, original emphasis), *Collective Conversations* was ultimately considered to provide a superficial layer of gallery interpretation which failed to dislodge the dominant curatorial authority present in the Museum's displays. As Lynch concluded in 2011:

On the surface, the *Collective Conversations* programme in Manchester appears to offer innovative opportunities for the negotiation of collections' interpretation, but in reality it limits the access and choice of collections available for discussion, and similarly offers limited opportunity for debate and contestation with the institution (2011a, p.153).

Four years later a Conservative Party election manifesto commitment sought, again, to connect the city's cultural assets, in the form of its museum collections, with diaspora communities (The Conservative Party, 2015, p.41). This commitment was made in the implicit contexts of the more equitable redistribution of arts funding (away from London and towards the post-industrial cities of the North of England), and of developing trade with India (Bailey, 2015). It provided £5m of central government funding for a new India gallery to be developed at the Manchester Museum in partnership with the British Museum.

Drivers for the new gallery included the Manchester Museum's existing strong links with the British Museum, its connections to South Asia established through the region's historic textile industry, and the large South Asian diaspora communities living in the area. However, the initial focus on India, which was attractive to government for its potential to develop

diplomatic and trade relations,¹⁴⁷ had to be revised as local populations are predominantly from Pakistan and Bangladesh.¹⁴⁸ Careful negotiations saw the gallery re-focused to tell the story of ‘South Asia’ instead. As it is currently conceived, the gallery will comprise eight ‘chapters’ ranging chronologically from prehistoric times to Partition, the diaspora and the founding of South Asian communities in the United Kingdom, particularly Manchester.

Since 2015 plans for the gallery, which will present loaned objects from the British Museum alongside those of the Manchester Museum, have evolved to become a wider museum redevelopment project, involving the creation not only of the new gallery on the Museum’s first floor but also of extended exhibition space and a new street-facing entrance. The redevelopment has been characterised by an intention to work in ways which are “multi-lateral” (Welsh, 8 May 2017), drawing in a wide network of South Asian communities, artists and academics, amongst others. In making its relationship to diaspora communities explicit, a recent press release describes it as “the UK’s first permanent gallery to explore the stories, experiences and contributions of diaspora communities” (The University of Manchester, 2018).

The new gallery, which is due to open in 2020, has many competing agendas to fulfil. As a proxy for the British Museum, it has a responsibility to tell a national story to a potentially international audience (although the way that it will do so, one of the project curators emphasised, will be “distinctively Manchester” (Welsh, 8 May 2017)). It has also been invested with a “social purpose” and is intended to consolidate and extend the Museum’s community engagement work: “Underpinning the transformation ... will be a dynamic co-created participatory programme to imaginatively address some of the key issues of our time; climate change, ageing, migration and belonging” (The University of Manchester, 2018). In the context of the city’s multiculturalism and increasing “anxieties regarding immigration and religious extremism”, the gallery will seek to provide a space for “constructive intercultural dialogue, challeng[ing] preoccupations, and increas[ing] understandings of South Asian cultures, histories, and connections with the UK” (Welsh, 2017, p.4). It also carries, of course, a particular responsibility to South Asian communities, whom it is seeking to involve

¹⁴⁷ As a report on the bilateral trade relationship between India and the United Kingdom notes, “since 2000 there has been increasing trade in goods and services between the UK and India, both in terms of value and percentage share of overall UK exports” (UK India Business Council, 2018). The Secretary for State for International Trade recently observed that “Bilateral trade between the two countries has grown rapidly over the last 10 years, and reached some £18 billion in 2017. But it has so much further to go” (UK Government, 2018).

¹⁴⁸ The 2011 census findings indicate that the largest ethnic minority group in Manchester is Pakistani (8.5%). Those identifying as Bangladeshi constitute 1.3% of the population (The University of Manchester, 2013).

in researching and interpreting the collections, as well as in diversifying the Museum's visitor base,¹⁴⁹ and workforce, the latter initially through a volunteering scheme. It also hopes to "bring everyone in" and to offer a "multitude of voices" (Welsh, 8 May 2017).

One of the inherent challenges of the project is that despite the long history of trade between the city and South Asia and the presence of significant populations from this area, the Museum's holdings offer poor representation of the region's rich material and visual cultures. While the World Cultures collection numbers 18,000 items, fewer than 1,000 of these come from the Indian Subcontinent, most of which are "trinkets", domestic items and brass deity figures (Welsh, 8 May 2017). One of the more representative collections from the region is material associated with the Naga minority of northeastern India, which offers little opportunity to connect with a locally-based diaspora community. Nevertheless, the Naga objects will be drawn on in a narrative about the impact of British colonialism in the region, on which subject the Curator of Living Cultures, Stephen Welsh, notes the Museum hopes to offer "gentle provocation" (8 May 2017). The misalignment between the Museum's historic collections and its current aspirations in terms of the communities it wants to serve and the social, cultural and political contexts it wishes to explore, is also evident in a lack of material relating to the historical experiences of locally-based diaspora communities. Welsh noted that Museum staff were having to consider how some of these experiences might be incorporated into the gallery without using objects (8 May 2017). To undertake a collecting project which addressed this lack, he felt, would require the development of a new working methodology which would have to be "more inclusive" than usual museum modes of collections development (ibid.). He questioned to what extent museums should accept these historical omissions against the extent to which they should seek to actively address them.

The Manchester Museum example points to the ways in which diaspora communities are becoming more central to the practice of British museums. Whereas *Rekindle* and *Collective Conversations* drew on the invited participation of members of diaspora communities to provide an additional layer of gallery interpretation, the new South Asia gallery demonstrates how museum engagements with diaspora communities are being used to bolster cultural diplomacy, ameliorate anxieties about immigration, demonstrate the relevance of historical collections (evidence of which is required to access public funds) and provide an expanded visitor and volunteer base. Nevertheless, the slippage between the Museum's current

¹⁴⁹ "[P]eople of South Asian descent comprise 11% of the city of Manchester population and 9% of Greater Manchester, but only 2% of museum visitors" (Merriman, n.d.).

aspirations and its historical collections raises difficult questions about the responsibilities of museums in terms of documenting the histories as well as the lived realities of diaspora.

World Museum Liverpool

How the experiences of diaspora communities might be made manifest in museum collections and displays is a particular interest of Emma Martin, Senior Curator Ethnology at National Museums Liverpool. Martin has been working with Tibetan objects and people since 2011 and her curatorial practice has been motivated by a desire to reconcile conventional interpretations of historical objects associated with Tibet, which tend to perpetuate the idea of Tibet as a lost Shangri-La, with the lived experiences of Tibetans, many of whom have been forced into exile.

Martin's museum engagements span Tibetan diaspora communities in the United Kingdom as well as those in India and Nepal. Her work reveals how the specific experiences of these, as well as the social and political contexts they inhabit, frame their perspectives on Tibetan cultural heritage. Martin's strategies for making these divergent perspectives more visible include the re-examination and re-interpretation of historical collections materials to bring to the surface histories which may have been deliberately overlooked or obscured,¹⁵⁰ as well as the acquisition of new objects and images which reveal a "different kind of Tibet" (8 May 2017).

Moving between these different sites of engagement reveals the complex and multifarious ways in which diaspora communities connect with cultural heritage, including with the kinds of materials found in museum collections. In the United Kingdom, Martin's interactions with a Tibetan diaspora community based in the Northwest of England came to focus on a series of albums of colonial-era photographs of Tibet from National Museums Liverpool's collections. Poorly documented, with cursory captions, her hope was that, through processes of photo elicitation, the community would provide contextual information which could be added to museum documentation. However, for the most part, as second-generation Tibetans, the temporal and geographical distance between their own experiences and the social, cultural

¹⁵⁰ Martin has demonstrated how "Tibetan objects, religious in appearance and purpose, were in fact asked to do diplomatic work by their Tibetan Buddhist owners. For example, garments associated with Buddhist yogic practice known as *cham* were gifted to a British Officer as incitements to arms deals, while musical instruments played to announce the arrival of the Dalai Lama, were also gifted in the hope that the British would support Tibet's bid for independence" (Martin, 2017, p.61).

and political worlds captured in the photographs frustrated group members' ability to ascribe precise meanings or interpretations, the photographs instead serving more effectively as "general memory triggers" (Martin, 8 May 2017). In reproducing the preference typical amongst those who align with the Free Tibet movement, for images of Tibet which foreground its spiritual heritage, group members showed a preference for photographs of religious sites and figures. A similar preference for objects of spiritual significance was apparent in store, frustrating Martin's own desire to explore objects which had served as "critical actors in international relations and diplomatic encounters" (2017, p.62). She noted how there was "a huge amount of interest in touching those [religious] objects and having connection with those objects and anything else that we might consider to be politically important [was] hardly of interest at all" (8 May 2017).

The historical imaginary of British Tibetans is strikingly different to that held by Tibetan refugees in India who remain closer to the experience of exile and deeply nationalistic. Around 100,000 Tibetan refugees live in India (Routray, 2007). Many of those who followed the Dalai Lama out in the years after 1959 were put to work by the Indian government in road construction, or given uncultivated land to farm. The hardships that Tibetan refugees in India experienced provide a focus for the Tibet Museum, the official museum of the Tibetan government-in-exile (now the Central Tibetan Administration). Located in a temple complex in the Dharamshala suburb of McLeod Ganj, Himachal Pradesh, northern India, the museum "serves as a permanent memorial and commemoration site for the Tibetans who have died as a result of the Chinese occupation" (The Tibet Museum, n.d.). Despite the large numbers of Tibetans living in diaspora and the Museum's own diasporic setting, Martin notes that it "doesn't talk about the achievements of the diaspora at all ... it's very much about the hardships, the suffering of the diaspora ... but it doesn't really talk about the contemporary community at all" (8 May 2017). A similar initiative led by a group of high-profile Tibetan exiles has created an online archive which draws on photographic images held in public and personal collections to document "the story of the survival of the early Tibetan refugees, the gradual rebuilding of their lives and the reestablishment of their cultural and religious institutions in exile" (Tibet Documentation, n.d.). Also used as the basis of a glossy photobook—*Exile: A Photo Journal 1959-1989*—the images are intended to create "a rich tapestry of the lives of Tibetans in exile", albeit one that is strictly historical, as its account ends in 1989 (Tibet Documentation, n.d.).

Despite the inclination of many Tibetans and advocates of the Free Tibet movement to perpetuate the idea of Tibet before Chinese occupation as a pristine, Buddhist mountain sanctuary, Martin is using her curatorial practice to reveal different perspectives on the country and its recent history. With the support of the Art Fund, she has developed a new collecting strand for National Museums Liverpool which aims to reveal “what it means to be Tibetan in the twenty-first century; fractured personal identities, societal change, disruption and transformation” (2017, p.64). Where the stereotyped, romantic views of Tibet have influenced museum practice in terms of a bias towards objects associated with temple life and religious practices—“a curatorial preference for the shrine” (2017, p.59)—in contrast Martin has sought out secular objects including protest materials (for example t-shirts carrying the “Free Tibet” slogan), examples of invented traditions (a brass ‘singing bowl’) and work by contemporary Tibetan artists. One of the artists represented in the “blended” collection Martin is seeking to build, is Gade (b.1971), in whose practice “globalisation is ... an ongoing preoccupation” (Martin, 2017, p.65). Gade uses the traditional forms of Tibetan culture, for example *thangkas* and other classical Buddhist formats and symbols, to make contemporary works which comment on globalisation and the spread of capitalism and consumerism into Tibetan society. Martin has described Gade’s work as “strong, bold, hyper-realistic images of Tibetans stripped of every possible identifier of Tibetanness” (2017, p.65). The work of Gade and other artists whose work has been acquired by Martin, along with the historical and contemporary objects, will be brought together in an exhibition which will be shown at the Museum in 2020: *Tibetan Dreams and Realities*.

Critical to the success of the “blended” collection, according to Martin, is its ability to “ask questions of the [Museum’s] significant historical collections” (2017, p.61). Through these strategically acquired works, it is hoped, the partialities of the historical collections might become more apparent. Martin’s desire to disrupt conventional narratives regarding Tibetan history and culture is also apparent in a planned initiative which will use Augmented Reality to provide alternative interpretations for objects displayed as part of a shrine installation in the Museum’s galleries. By using a mobile phone application to draw visitors’ attention to some of the new acquisitions, Martin hopes to encourage reflection on the impact of globalization and displacement on contemporary Tibetans (8 May 2017).

While engaging with the complexities of diasporic identity formation, Martin’s work also affirms the curator’s central role in arbitrating these. Her curatorial strategy self-consciously

sits at odds with the preferences of locally-based Tibetans and those living in diaspora elsewhere for representations which emphasise the importance of Buddhism to Tibet and its erosion through Chinese occupation. Martin's work also reveals the extent to which the historical collections constitute a site of deep ambivalence when it comes to museum engagements with diaspora communities. While arguing for the importance of the new acquisitions in addressing the shortcomings of historical ones, Martin also acknowledges that the Museum's collection, in some cases, "creates barriers", noting that "We don't necessarily have the collections that we need to have those meaningful conversations with the diasporic communities that surround us now and who we hope will become advocates for the museum" (8 May 2017).

Martin's experiences of undertaking collections-based work with Tibetan diaspora communities reiterates complexities identified in other examples given here, primarily the difficulty of reconciling historic collections with the more recent experiences of diaspora communities. The work of the Tibet Museum and the Tibet Documentation project also underscore the desire of diaspora communities to engage with and document their experiences of exile in ways which support their political agendas.

The British Museum

As a national museum, the British Museum has generally prioritised engagements of an international or national character over local ones. Moreover, when the development of collections or displays has involved community engagement this has tended to be consultation-based, rather than about shared delivery (The Audience Agency, 2017, p.127). An exception was 'Object Journeys', a community engagement initiative which formed the "single most substantial element" of an Activity Plan associated with the Heritage Lottery Fund-supported development of a new World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre (British Museum, n.d.). The project, which ran over a three-year period (2015-2018), aimed to support British Museum "community partners ... to research and explore the collection and to work collaboratively with staff towards a gallery intervention in response to those objects" (British Museum, n.d.). Undertaken primarily as a "research-based project with the aim of exploring the potential for and effect of community-led work in the museum sector, and specifically the British Museum", project outcomes included three displays at the British Museum and three at partner museums (British Museum, n.d.).

Pursuing the suggestion of one of its curators, the first British Museum-based project took the Museum's little-known and poorly-provenanced Somali holdings as the starting point for one of these display projects. The specially-appointed Object Journeys Partnership Manager Kayte McSweeney, was then charged with finding a 'community' with whom to work on a co-produced display of this material (British Museum, 2016a).¹⁵¹ Several established Somali groups turned down the offer to participate with the Museum, which finally formed its own group of ten Somalis, most of whom were aged under thirty and in higher education, through call-outs made via student groups and social media. As with the Horniman's Tibetan participants, the Somalis involved in the British Museum's project had very different backgrounds and were associated with different parts of Somalia and Somaliland. Some had been born there, some had been born in Britain and some had been born elsewhere. All expressed an interest in Somali culture and heritage but felt they had had little formal access to these (British Museum, 2016a).

A motivated and critical group, the students were quick to challenge the way in which the project had been framed and the terms on which it was grounded.¹⁵² Given limited contact with one of the Museum's curators of its African collections, the Object Journeys Partnership Manager found herself having to mediate the students' frustration with how poorly provenanced and historically cared for the Museum's Somali collections appeared to be (British Museum, 2016a). The students argued that these seemed to occupy a low curatorial priority, coming under the care of the three curators responsible for the Museum's huge African holdings, and being represented by just two items on display. Despite these frustrations, participants expressed pleasure at the opportunity to handle objects; to "have a space where you're having a tactile relationship with your culture," as one participant later noted (The Audience Agency, 2017, p.112).

Asked to provide an interpretation of selected objects for a small display in Room 24 (the British Museum's *Living and Dying* gallery), participants questioned their own cultural authority. Translation—for example of images and inscriptions on coins and banknotes—was more straightforward but they remained tentative about providing other kinds of collections

¹⁵¹ This changed with the British Museum's second Object Journeys project when museum staff chose to work with members of the United Kingdom's small Kiribati community; a group who had independently approached the Museum a few years previously (British Museum, 2016b).

¹⁵² A project evaluation report prepared by The Audience Agency notes of the Somali participants that some "came to the project with complicated and, for a few, very critical perceptions of the Museum, what they saw it representing (especially in terms of the British Empire and its colonial collecting practices) and the provenance of some of its Somali collection" (The Audience Agency, 2017, p.108).

knowledge, questioning whether their comments should be double-checked by someone with more authority in this respect. Highlighting some of the complexities around the composition of ‘source communities’, one participant asked, “is my mum a source?” (British Museum, 2016a). Facebook came to serve as an important tool for the elicitation of object information. Images of objects were posted on a dedicated group page which was then shared with the wider community, who commented on these (The Audience Agency, 2017, pp.175-178).

Despite participants’ hesitancy to provide specific details about the provenance, use or meaning of specific objects, it was clear that these objects offered a sense of familiarity, the “particular significance” described by Tom Crowley in his assessment of object-based interactions with Tibetan Londoners at the Horniman Museum (2014). One participant noted that the objects offered:

Familiarity, all these things are very old and they were used by people who were thousands and thousands of miles away [but] even things that we didn’t know, in their texture, in their colour, in their tone, felt familiar in some way (The Audience Agency, 2017, p.109).

The small display opened in October 2016. Having tussled with the extent to which they wanted to expose the colonial histories of and subsequent organisational neglect of the Museum’s Somali holdings, in the end the participants chose to present a positive narrative, featuring items from nomadic communities, many of which had been historically damaged and painstakingly repaired.¹⁵³ Despite the ‘co-produced’ nature of the display, British Museum protocols regarding object display and interpretation made it hard to distinguish the Object Journeys display from the other conventionally-produced displays in the gallery, bar perhaps the atypical addition of some contextual archival images shown on a digital screen. In terms of associated events, Somali participants expressed frustration at the predetermined format of these. For participants this exemplified the extent to which the British Museum, they felt, held the reins throughout the whole process, with one participant commenting:

We are ‘community partners’ ... but what does a partner mean? What’s the relationship? Is it a reciprocal relationship? In terms of the balance of access and the costs and benefits, are those things equal?” (The Audience Agency, 2017, p.113).

¹⁵³ Susan Ashley has discussed why participants in a museum display project might choose to promote the “positive framing” of a difficult history in her assessment of a Royal Ontario Museum initiative which saw a group of African Canadians develop content for an exhibition about the Underground Railroad (Ashley, 2016, p.163). Ashley notes how group members “actively silenced dissent in their attempt to seek status within the existing social imaginary by reinforcing a superficial positive identity” (2016, p.166).

A particular point of contention was the lack of financial remuneration for skills and knowledge supplied by partners, which led them to question whether the British Museum “placed the same value on their specialist knowledge as it did for curatorial staff. This raised questions about the extent to which museums value different kinds of expertise equally” (The Audience Agency, 2017, p.114).

In positioning the group of young Somalis as intermediaries between the Museum and the wider Somali community, the project exposed both to accusations that the Museum was using their participation as a mechanism for justifying its continued possession of colonial collections (British Museum, 2017). These tensions came to the surface on the project’s Facebook page with one external member of a Somali diaspora community describing the project as an attempt on the part of the Museum to pursue “loot legitimization” [sic] and another describing a participant as a colonial collaborator (British Museum, 2016a). While the same concerns had been raised by participants themselves, several commented to the Object Journeys Partnerships Manager that they felt intimidated by this critique coming from outside the group (British Museum, 2016a).

The ambivalent position of diaspora as a valid source of museum collections and collections knowledge was underscored by the Object Journeys Partnership Manager’s attempt to use the project as the basis for developing a contemporary collection of Somali material, which would reflect the experiences of diaspora. Her proposal, which was taken to the Museum’s ‘Modern Museum Group,’ a working party of cross-museum staff intended to address issues around contemporary collecting, was turned down, with the feedback given that the working party couldn’t understand why she would want to collect from a diaspora community (British Museum, 2016a).

In reflecting on the project and their aspirations for their future relationship with the British Museum, participants emphasised the extent to which they wished to have access to the collections to use these in their own, independent research (The Audience Agency, 2017, pp.114-115). Difficulties of access limited the extent to which these ambitions could be met. Nevertheless, one participant went on to develop her own funded initiative focussed on photography and the Somali diaspora and another went on to explore the potential of immersive digital technologies to return context to museum objects (Nomad, 2018). Despite the limitations imposed by the British Museum’s structuring of the Object Journeys initiative,

the encounter between diasporic participants and historic collections was to prove an effective catalyst for further engagement.

Brighton Museum & Art Gallery

Like other local authority-run museums, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery has worked with diaspora communities in various modes, including two oral history projects undertaken through a partnership with a community history publisher: *Missing the Nile: Experiences of Sudanese People in Brighton* (Queenspark Books, 2005) and *Bangla Brighton: Voices from the Bangladeshi Community in Brighton* (Queenspark Books, 2006). In terms of its World Art collection, project work has included, amongst other things, *Twelve*, an artist-led project with several locally-based British-Chinese families which included a small amount of contemporary collecting (2005-06), and a longstanding partnership with a local Hindu Women's Group and Hindu Elders' Group resulting in the installation of a rehabilitated Hindu shrine (Parker, 2004; Ashmore, 2011a, 2011b; Rajguru and Ashmore, 2016) plus an ongoing co-hosted annual Diwali event. The World Stories Young Voices gallery which opened at Brighton Museum in 2012 (described in 1.5 'Making representations: Museum interactions with Kachin communities'), also included project work with diaspora communities: a group of young Iranians provided interpretation for a group of historic objects and helped select contemporary artworks by Iranian artists for the display (Mears, 2012) and, in 2013, a group of young Muslims worked with museum staff on a new co-curated display: *My Journey in Islam: From Brighton to Makka* (June 2013 - March 2018).

More recently an exhibition on contemporary African fashion (*Fashion Cities Africa*, Brighton Museum, 30 April 2016 to 8 January 2017), which itself had a diasporic component in capturing and incorporating testimony and images of local African fashion practices, drew curators' attention to the absence of examples of fashion and textiles from post-independence Africa from the Museum's collections. This absence is typical of British museums and is in keeping with the absence of the material culture of other formerly colonised nations as independence from colonial rule brought about the end of colonial collecting frameworks (Mears, Ojo and Stylianou, (in press)). In securing funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund to proactively address this absence, the Museum sought to pursue an alternative collecting strategy from that which had informed the development of its historic holdings. Rather than rely on its limited in-house curatorial expertise in this area, the Museum set out to devolve

decision-making to a specially-convened group of specialists. Notably these individuals could be specialists either through academic training (and the group included a professor of human geography and a professor of dress history) or through personal experience (it also included, for example, a locally-based Kenyan man who was a community activist in the field of diversity education, and a Nigerian man who combined paid work with performing the services of pastor for his community and organised community-based fashion shows of Nigerian designs).

The decision to use a collecting panel was informed by a well-established critique of the Museum made by locally-based Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) artists, cultural activists and researchers, which had been regularly articulated at public events and in museum consultation (Mears, Ojo and Stylianou (in press)). This critique highlighted the discomfort that many in BME communities felt about the means through which the World Art collection had been historically amassed and was still kept under lock and key. Moreover, it emphasised the extent to which members of these communities desired to be part of museum decision-making mechanisms.

Those diasporic individuals who agreed to contribute to the initiative brought with them not a small amount of suspicion as to the Museum's intentions and its ability to act fairly and equitably, as well as a concern that their participation might be exploited for the institution's own benefit:

Would they be fair in my relationship with them and in their process of acquiring new artefacts? Could I meet their expectation and would they meet mine? Would working with them perpetuate the cultural hegemony that exists? Could I meet the expectations I had of them – to be fair and inclusive? Was my presence and involvement on the panel (and that of other members of the panel) valid and appropriate? Questions abounded (Edith Ojo quoted in Mears, Ojo and Stylianou (in press)).

The Fashioning Africa Collecting Panel, as the group became known, met eight times over a three-year period (2015-2018) and established the framework and parameters for the Museum's collecting activities. With a budget of £140,000, it was a not-insignificant responsibility. While the process of convening the panel, and of establishing the collecting framework was relatively smooth, that of translating the framework into actual acquisitions was to prove more challenging. In some cases this was because the targeted collecting area—for example 'Pan-Africanism'—had few established links to material culture (a 'Kaunda' suit

is one suggested artefact but one which is proving difficult to source).¹⁵⁴ In others the challenge was the absence of an established market for examples of post-1960 African fashion. Further issues included the need to establish fair prices for richly-provenanced material which might be of limited cash value but of significant personal, social and cultural value, and how to capture on museum cataloguing systems the rich contextual information, including wedding videos, spoken word performances, testimony and ephemera, which has accompanied many of the new acquisitions. The process of sourcing and making acquisitions also relied to an unanticipated extent on the direct involvement of panel members, who found themselves having to solicit the help of family and friends in the pursuit of these.

While the new acquisitions will potentially help overcome the disconnect between the Museum's collection of historic African textiles (which included few pieces that dated to the post-1950 period) and locally-based people who identify with African diaspora communities, it was the process of sharing decision-making that had the most significant impact. In creating space for "democratic, culturally nuanced and politically contextualised discussions", the relationships forged between panel members have ensured a sustained and productive legacy for the project (Dixon, 2018, p.4), underscoring the productive possibilities of museum-diaspora partnerships.

Conclusion

The examples given above highlight both the opportunities and threats raised by museum engagements with diaspora communities. That the Manchester Museum should wish to foreground this aspect of the planned South Asia Gallery, which it is promoting as "the UK's first permanent gallery to explore the stories, experiences and contributions of diaspora communities" (The University of Manchester, 2018), suggests that these engagements will become an increasingly important aspect of museum practice in the United Kingdom. In particular, the Manchester example points to the perceived potential for these engagements to facilitate diplomatic and trade relations; an aspect which will be especially important in a post-Brexit economic landscape (ResPublica, 2017).

¹⁵⁴ The Kaunda suit was a short-sleeved suit worn without a tie. Popularised by former Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda, it became a popular garment amongst other African leaders during the Independence era.

The examples also show how museums are using diaspora communities to demonstrate the contemporary ‘relevance’ of their historic holdings.¹⁵⁵ As the Horniman Museum has demonstrated in using its engagements with diaspora communities to provide evidence of the “importance and contemporary relevance” of its Anthropology collections (Horniman Museum and Gardens, n.d.), these relationships can be used to lever resources, in this case a major Heritage Lottery Fund award. However, the terms on which this ‘relevance’ is constructed are poorly defined and diaspora communities are significantly less likely to be seen as a source of cultural authority than source communities who remain in or close to their place of origin. This is evident in the British Museum’s refusal to consider the creation of a collection of modern Somali objects, which might better reflect the experiences of the diaspora.

In important ways, diaspora communities provide “an expanded ‘community of interpretation’” (Lynch, 2011a, p.153), which can imbue museum interpretation with a sense of authenticity and can help mediate museum visitors’ encounters with objects from other places, times and cultural contexts. While diasporic individuals may be unable to offer precise attributions regarding an object’s original context, use or meaning, their engagement can be used by museums to demonstrate an affective response to the collections. This focus on the emotional, rather than intellectual, dimension of the encounter adds authenticity whilst leaving the museum’s position as a source of authority unchallenged. This view on the museum use of diaspora communities is apparent in the words of Tristram Besterman, former director of The Manchester Museum, in which he argues such communities provide a ‘resource’ for the re-animation of museum objects:

The presence of diaspora communities in Western society provides a *resource* for the museum to *invite participation* in a conversation in which objects from the collection act as prompts to recall narratives based on personal experience. In the process, a creative alchemy takes place, transforming the object from something mute and out of time into a vital cultural resonator...’ (2011, p.247, emphasis added).

However, despite increasing museum interest in engaging with diaspora communities and in making this engagement visible in their exhibitions and displays, the examples of practice given above reveal that there is rarely a neat alignment between contemporary diaspora communities and historic collections materials. At Manchester Museum, despite the city’s long relationship with the Indian subcontinent, this region is poorly represented by material

¹⁵⁵ See Van Broekhoven (2018) for a discussion about the ambiguous nature of ‘relevance’ in respect to museums holding world collections, and how it might be calibrated.

culture in its collections, and the historic presence and contemporary experiences of the city's large and long-established Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities remain to date largely unrepresented in the Museum's collections. Even where material from the country of origin does exist, curatorial biases may mean that it fails to reflect the experiences of those who have migrated from that country. This disparity is particularly evident in the case of Tibet, where a "curatorial preference for the shrine" has caused secular objects to be overlooked (Martin, 2017).

For members of diaspora communities, involvement in museum initiatives can provide certain opportunities but also many causes for concern. Whilst the opportunity to see and handle historic objects relating to one's own cultural heritage—to "have a space where you're having a tactile relationship with your culture" (The Audience Agency, 2017, p.112)—is often welcomed, this can come at the cost of feeling exploited for museum gain. At Brighton Museum, before joining the Fashioning Africa Collecting Panel, Edith Ojo had to ask herself, "was 'my' culture going to be 'done' to me, and not 'with' me?" (Mears, Ojo and Stylianou (in press)).

Many diasporic individuals are aware of the inherent risks of participation as a practice which is always seeking to co-opt in order to confer legitimacy (Cooke and Kothari, 2001, see also Lynch, 2011a), and of the high stakes of being seen to work with colonial-era museum collections. These risks were spelled out to the young Somalis working on the British Museum's Object Journeys project through a post on the project's Facebook page by another member of the Somali diaspora. The post by independent researcher Bodhari Warsame mentioned above sought to highlight the power relations which structured participants' relationship with the Museum:

to re-legitimize these objects (first being the forceful colonial legitimization) and make them "worthy" again, the [colonial] collector tries in various ways to seek genuine local knowledge of the original rightful owners, in which such re-establishment of collector-informant ("native") is common but probrolenatic for both sides (the "native" wants his agency acknowledged this time properly and stake in the re-appropriation of ancestral belongings, while the collector or heir wants badly to extarct local knowledge but seeks to keep the local expert/informan at arms length. [sic] (Warsame, 2016).

In less politically explicit ways, museum 'collaborations' with diaspora communities can be less collaborative than anticipated. As the British Museum's Somali participants found, the museum is quicker to invite participation than it is to devolve power. Bernadette Lynch has

warned of the “illusion of participation”, noting that “in reality consensual decisions tend to be coerced, or rushed through on the basis of the institution’s control of knowledge production and its dissemination” (2011b, p.11). For diaspora communities, then, the museum remains an “invited space” (Fraser, 1990), where they may be asked to come and perform so as to bring authenticity to its representations but where these performances will be stage-managed by the institution in ways which ensure they do not impinge on its position at the centre of knowledge-making. Even in areas of museum activity which might seem to offer greater freedoms and flexibility, for example in planning the events linked to the British Museum’s Object Journeys display, participants’ requests to include incense and food were refused for the incontrovertible reason of conservation (British Museum, 2016b).

This is not to suggest that there are not gains which can be made by diaspora communities through their participation in museum projects. For members of the Congo Great Lakes Initiative (CGLI), their interventions at UCL and at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge were in part an attempt to re-establish status lost through the process of exile. Fully aware of the symbolic power and cultural authority of museums, group members’ successful efforts to insert themselves, their objects and images into ‘official’, institutional narratives concerning Congolese culture and history, ensured that they benefited from the ‘museum effect’ through which material culture is transformed into museum object (Alpers, 1991). However, while these museum interventions were initiated by CGLI members, the tendency of the institution to seek to retain control of knowledge production is evident in a University of Cambridge online article which carries the title “Museum archive reconnects a London-based Congolese community with its heritage” (2017), thus returning agency to the Museum.

The symbolic power and cultural authority of museums can make them ideal sites through which diaspora communities can progress their political activism. As was made apparent in Part Two of this thesis, the interests of many young members of diaspora communities in their cultural heritage is motivated by, or framed by, their commitment to political activism concerning the home country. As in the case of Dechen Pemba and Padma Dolma with the Horniman Museum’s Tibet project, political activism is the force that drives their interest in being involved in museum projects. However, as the museum needs to maintain its apparent neutrality and objectivity, it rarely tolerates explicit politics which might be seen to

compromise its own legitimacy. This was apparent in the Horniman Museum's omission of the Tibetan flag requested by Dolma from the final display.

The examples given in this section to demonstrate the complex nature of museum engagements with diaspora communities point to the extent to which these are shaped and conditioned by the specific experiences of these groups. They reveal many of the benefits and the risks to museums of working with diaspora communities; including that of exposing the difficult and enduring legacies of colonial collecting frameworks. In the following, final, section of this thesis I look to the model of the distributed museum as a model through which the tensions generated by these frameworks might be mediated, if not resolved.

3.3 What Might a Diaspora-Appropriate Museum Practice Look Like?

The museum, as a site of accumulation, as a gatekeeper of authority and expert accounts, as the ultimate caretaker of the object, as its documenter and even as the educator, has to be completely redrafted (Boast, 2011, p.67).

Introduction

In this final section of the thesis I draw together my findings from research undertaken into the cultural interests and practices of Kachin people living in diaspora and into museum engagements with diaspora communities, to argue for a future museum practice which is more diaspora-centred and more ‘diaspora appropriate’ (to paraphrase Kreps, 2008).¹⁵⁶ Before setting out the terms, and very practical ways, through which such a practice might be implemented, I describe the imperatives for this shift. Having established these, I adopt the model of *acculturation*—conventionally used to describe the adjustments made by migrants to integrate into host societies—to articulate the ways through which museums might better integrate themselves into the lives of postcolonial publics. I return to my example of the James Henry Green collection and its many intersections with Kachin communities at home and overseas, to propose strategies through which a diaspora-appropriate museum practice might be implemented.

The imperatives for a diaspora-appropriate museum practice

A key driver for making diaspora communities more central to the ways museums think about their collections is the significant population shifts underway. The British population is changing and museums will have to more fully respond to these changes. In 2016, it was estimated that 1 in 7 members of the resident population of the United Kingdom (14 percent) had been born abroad (Office for National Statistics, 2016); a figure that had doubled from the 7 percent recorded in 1991. The last public census, undertaken in 2011, revealed an increasing number of people identifying with an ethnic category other than ‘White’ (the ‘White’ ethnic group accounted for 86 percent of the usual resident population, a decrease from 91.3 percent in 2001 and 94.1 percent in 1991 (Office for National Statistics, 2015)). It

¹⁵⁶ Kreps defines appropriate museology as “an approach to museum development and training that adapts museum practices and strategies for cultural heritage preservation to local cultural contexts and socioeconomic conditions. It is a bottom-up, community-based approach that combines local knowledge and resources with those of professional museum work to better meet the needs and interests of a particular museum and its community” (2008, p.23).

also reported that 7.4 percent of people in England and Wales hold a non-UK passport (*ibid.*). While these might be crude markers, they do imply a national population which is increasingly likely to hold multiple, and often transnational, cultural affiliations.

These population shifts have not been viewed uncritically by the British media and public. Recent years have witnessed increased levels of debate about the perceived negative consequences of inward migration to the United Kingdom. Attention has fallen on the apparent failure of governmental strategies to successfully integrate migrant communities into resident populations; famously characterised as the ‘failure of multiculturalism’ (Cantle, 2012). Critics have found that, despite its good intentions, multiculturalism has actually served to keep migrant communities at the margins of British society, forcing them to live “parallel lives” alongside their white British counterparts (Cantle, 2001).¹⁵⁷ This social isolation has been considered to contribute to inward-looking communities and to the cultivation of conservative values; conditions which are considered favourable to radicalisation.

These divisions have been mirrored in public institutions like museums, where decades of investment in community engagement work has failed to move this activity from the margins of the organisation to its core (Lynch, 2011b; Keith, 2012; Nightingale and Mahal, 2012). As this thesis has sought to demonstrate, despite living in close proximity, diaspora communities and museums inhabit parallel lives, sharing overlapping interests in cultural heritage and preservation but often remaining unwitting of each other. As the previous section revealed, when interactions do take place, they are generally closely managed by the organisation. That museums might do more to promote social cohesion through mutual, equitable partnerships with external agencies has been argued both in sectoral policy (Museums Association, 2017) and museological literature (Lynch, 2011a, 2011b; Sandell, 1998, 2002; Sandell and Nightingale, 2012).

That there is a moral dimension to this work is apparent in the extent to which it can be seen to ensure the fulfilment of human rights legislation. In pursuing a human rights agenda, as the museum sector is increasingly being encouraged to do (Purbrick, 2011; Orange, 2016; Sandell, 2017), a diaspora-appropriate museum practice would address two aspects of the 1998 Human Rights Act: Article 14.1, “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution,” and Article 27.1, “Everyone has the right freely to

¹⁵⁷ A counter argument has been made by Tariq Modood. See, for example Modood, 2011.

participate in the cultural life of the community”. In their seminal volume on *Museums and Source Communities*, Peers and Brown also emphasise museums’ moral responsibility to source communities (which, in their definition includes “local people, diaspora and immigrant communities, religious groups, settlers and indigenous peoples” (2003, p.2)). They argue that these communities have “legitimate moral and cultural stakes or forms of ownership in museum collections” and thus “special claims, needs or rights of access to material heritage held by museums” (2003, p.2). There is no suggestion that these claims weaken as the connection to the collections is passed down through subsequent generations, and so museums need to be more reflexive about how these claims can be recognised, especially given the tendency—highlighted in 1.3.1 ‘New contexts for old institutions: Museums under conditions of migration and diaspora’—for museums to marginalise diaspora narratives.

There is another aspect to the argument that museums have a moral responsibility to diaspora communities. Research in the field of cultural psychiatry has suggested that migrants are at risk of experiencing ‘cultural bereavement’ in the new host country (Eisenbruch, 1990; Bhugra and Becker, 2005), as a consequence of “the loss of cultural norms, religious customs, and social support systems, adjustment to a new culture and changes in identity and concept of self” (Bhugra and Becker, 2005, p.18). While the role of museums has not been explicitly addressed in this literature, potentially there is scope for such institutions to use their collections as a cultural resource which could help migrants cope with the experience of “deculturation” and the “loss of cultural identity, alienation and acculturative stress” which accompanies it (Bhugra and Becker, 2005, p.21). Living in areas of low population density in terms of members of one’s ethnic group presents another risk factor for poor mental health (Bhugra and Becker, 2005, p.22). Given the lack of space often acknowledged by Kachin diaspora communities as an impediment to gatherings, museums could do more to provide a socially relevant space for diaspora communities, the kind of “communal space of belonging” described by Anne-Marie Fortier in her analysis of the ‘belongings’ of Italian migrants in Britain (2000, p.1). Further research into the extent to which museums can use their ‘non-western’ collections to ameliorate mental health challenges experienced by migrants and their descendants is needed here.

Lastly, there is also a political and ethical imperative for this work. Museums and their collections, especially those amassed in imperial or colonial contexts, have become popular foci for discussions regarding the need to decolonize public institutions. The *Rhodes Must*

Fall campaign, which began at the University of Cape Town in 2015, has been taken up globally by campaigners seeking to progress decolonising agendas in regards to buildings, educational curricula and institutional memories (Jenkins, 2018). These debates have moved from higher educational institutions to museums (Lonetree, 2012), with the Pitt Rivers Museum recently described as “one of the most violent spaces in Oxford” (Van Broekhoven, 2018, p.73). Intersecting with concerns about cultural patrimony and cultural appropriation, the contemporary era is witnessing heightened public interest in historic objects as the symbolic embodiment of past inequities, many of which have a legacy in the present. Diaspora communities lack access to the kinds of legal mechanism (for example, the United States’ Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) and agencies (for example, Canada’s Assembly of First Nations), that advocate for the preservation and repatriation of indigenous heritage in anglophone settler nations. Yet, if they are to be considered significant stakeholders for ethnographic collections, museums need to begin the kinds of serious and sustained discussions with members of diaspora communities necessary to reconsider how conventional notions of ownership and representation might need to be reworked in complex, transnational contexts.

Having established some of the drivers for a diaspora-appropriate museum practice, in the following section I set out how such a strategy may be pursued, using the notion of the ‘distributed museum’ and a revised application of the model of acculturation.

The “distributed museum” and an acculturalist approach to museum practice

As described in 1.3.1, ‘New contexts for old institutions: Museums under conditions of migration and diaspora’, Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh have characterised colonial-era museums as contributive institutions; bricks and mortar storehouses for knowledge located in the metropolitan centre, towards which material goods flowed (2013). In this model, “[t]ribute goes to the centre, while an established set of values is disseminated to the margins” (2013, p.157). This thesis has set out to demonstrate how this model might need to be rethought to meet new postcolonial conditions and subjectivities. In Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh’s account, the shortcomings of the contributive museum lead them to advocate for a revised institutional model: that of the “distributed museum” (2013, p.158). Rather than continuing to serve as a “site of accumulation,” as described by Boast at the head of this section (2011, p.67), the distributed museum would instead be conceived of as a hub and “a platform to support the circulation of knowledge and experience established

between people globally” (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, 2013, p.158). Through this revised model, the museum would see itself as part of a network—an expanded heritage ecology—and would be better able to connect to heritage practices which take place outside its walls:

Working across multiple environments, the distributed museum links differentially located practices, centred on different subject-positions ... In this model, the conventional museum paradigm gets turned on its head: it is not about finding ways for the world and its people to participate in the museum; it is about finding ways for the museum to participate in the lives of people of the world (2013, p.156).

It is not the first time that a more process- and person-centred museum model has been suggested. The roots of the distributed museum can be traced back to Eilean Hooper-Greenhill’s imagined “post-museum”. “Where the Modernist museum was (and is) imagined as a building,” she wrote, “the museum in the future may be imagined as a process or an experience ... it moves as a set of processes into the spaces, the concerns and the ambitions of communities” (2000, pp.152-3). As noted earlier, Corinne Kratz and Ivan Karp have emphasised the potential of museums to serve as a form of “portable social technology, a set of museological processes through which ... statements and claims are represented, embodied, and debated” (2006, p.4). Similarly, the writings of James Clifford reveal his commitment to the relativizing and pluralizing of museums and museum-like activities, and a corresponding argument for the “decentralization and the circulation of collections in a multiplex public sphere, an expansion of the range of things that can happen in museums and museum-like settings” (Clifford, 1997, p.214). These revised models push the institution into a closer relationship with its publics. They expand both the site and the activities of the museum, which become decentred and relativised. In the distributed museum, knowledge production, cultural authority and notions of value are no longer located solely within the museum but are dispersed throughout the network and assembled along its nodes (Morse, 2014). Yet, despite the sustained advocacy for such a model over the last two decades, many museums continue to resist the devolution of power and authority. Their ascribed status as proxy for the nation encourages museums to hold onto their position at the centre of knowledge production and to marginalise those whose histories are not considered part of the national story.

The move towards a distributed museum practice, which endeavours to meet its communities rather than expect them to come to its doors, will require a different set of working practices. In developing a ‘diaspora-appropriate’ museum practice, this research project endorses a working practice which adopts the model of *acculturation*. This term has conventionally been

used in cross-cultural psychology to describe the adjustments and adaptations made by members of minority communities (including migrants, refugees, and indigenous peoples) in response to contact with a dominant majority (Sam and Berry, 2010). Until recently, the presumption has been that acculturation describes a process of one-way travel along a continuum, from an exclusive focus on the preservation and maintenance of the individual's culture and heritage at one end (*separation*), towards the complete absorption of the host culture at the other (*assimilation*). In this conventional model, as migrants acquired the values, practices, and beliefs of their new homelands, they could be expected to discard those from their original cultural heritage. More recently, however, researchers have suggested that acculturation should be understood as a much more complex process; one which is multidirectional, and which has effects that can also be discerned within the host culture, as well within the migrant community. Research has also looked at acculturation in more complex settings, such as that of globalisation, where exposure to the media of dominant groups is prompting cultural adaptation. Through this expanded field of enquiry, acculturation has come to be recognised as a process which is much more variable and shifting in its effects (Berry, 2008).

Nevertheless, the acculturalist model relies on the presumption that a degree of separation or distinction exists between the culture of the dominant, host community and that of the migrant community. While research on postcolonial identity-making projects has challenged any suggestion of pure identities, uncontaminated by contact with others (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1994), notions of fixed identity have historically played a significant role in the development of ethnographic collections. Such collections constitute attempts to provide descriptions of the identity of the Other in material form. The enduring and pervasive notion of people having fixed identities in fixed locations continues to permeate museum practice, resulting in situations like that at the British Museum where senior staff were resistant to a proposed contemporary collecting strand focussed on Somali material, which would document the experiences of those living in diaspora (discussed in 3.2.1, 'Interactions between United Kingdom museums and diaspora communities').

While, as Stuart Hall has demonstrated, there is no hard or secure line between mainstream and marginal identities; all identities are 'positionalities'—"a 'production' which is never complete [but] always in process" (1994, p. 222)—the museum, in contrast, constitutes a framework through which categories and identities are imposed and vigorously maintained.

Similarly, museums maintain careful distinctions between the ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ of the heritage institution. As described in 3.2.1, ‘Interactions between United Kingdom museums and diaspora communities’, the participation of museum ‘outsiders’ generally takes place on an invited basis and intellectual control remains firmly in the hands of the museum and its staff (Boast, 2011; Lynch, 2011b). Roshi Naidoo has considered the fundamentally re-envisioning of the museum necessary to remove or reconfigure the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the institution:

Imagining that the outside is in by virtue of, for example, a museum considering the views of a community group before it embarks on an exhibition, is profoundly different than the outside getting in through a reconfiguring of the boundary itself and a self-reflexive critique of how problematic it is for the inside to set the terms of the encounter (2016, p.505).

In contrast to the conventional application of the acculturalist model, which considers the adjustments and adaptations made by members of non-dominant communities in contact with dominant societies, this thesis proposes that the burden of making these changes shifts from the individual to the museum institution. Rather than being satisfied with a multiculturalist practice which is prepared to acknowledge and accommodate aspects of migrant heritage but only in ways which leave core museum practices undisturbed, an acculturalist museum practice would seek to make fundamental adjustments and adaptations to these practices to enable them to meet the needs of their postcolonial publics.

Unlike normative modes of museum practice which continue to promote boundary maintenance, an acculturalist museum practice would demand a proactive search for opportunities where the boundaries between mainstream heritage institutions and diasporic heritage agencies and organisations could be breached. It would seek to identify points of weakness and points of opportunity, slowly gathering strength and momentum from a sustained attack on the divisions between institutionalised, “authorised” forms of heritage (Smith, 2006) and the kinds of “independent heritage-making actions and projects” driven by “those ‘outside’ the authorised realm of heritage discourse” (Ashley and Frank, 2016, p.501). Fundamental to the adoption of an acculturalist practice would be a relativizing of museums and museum authority through the pursuit of the distributed museum model. Rather than maintaining an assumed position at the centre of the map, museums would view their collections and activities as part of both local and global heritage ecologies.

The move towards an acculturalist practice and a distributed museum model would enable museums to achieve Robin Boast's ambition for them to "let go of their resources, even at times of the objects, for the benefit of communities and agendas far beyond [their] knowledge and control" (2011, p.67). Through this new mode of practice, museums would seek out opportunities to share knowledge and resources with non-institutional heritage partners, and to facilitate the freer movement of objects, resources and knowledge between different nodes in the network. Relativizing their position would also necessitate engendering greater familiarity with the work of other parts of the heritage ecology. It would mean spending time with heritage partners, in both diasporic and 'home country' settings, learning about their values, philosophies and activities, before moving on to explore points of synergy and possible cooperation. Through such means the boundaries between organisations might be breached and these breachings sustained and, even, in time, expanded. This revised mode of practice would also require the museum to acknowledge how historical experiences have privileged certain kinds of heritage practices and institutions at the expense of non-authorised forms of heritage and thus to recognise its responsibility to build capacity in its partners, to provide the basis for more equitable partnership.

Those theorists who have called for the "distributed museum" (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, 2013), the museum as "process" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.153), "portable social technology" (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.4), or "multiplex public sphere" (Clifford, 1997, p.214) have rarely set out practical strategies through which such models might be realised. In providing examples of the kinds of adjustments and adaptations that could be taken by museums wishing to pursue a diaspora-appropriate museum practice, I return, in this final section, to the James Henry Green collection at Brighton Museum. Building on my findings from research undertaken into historic uses of this collection (1.5, 'Making representations: Museum interactions with Kachin communities'), the cultural practices of transnational Kachin communities (Part Two, 'New contexts for an old identity') and into recent and current museum engagements with diaspora communities (3.2, 'How are museums currently serving diaspora communities?') I outline potential strategies for adopting an acculturalist approach. I take five lines of enquiry: online collections and other content, capturing the intangible, expanded modes of record, the use of public space and contributing to the resourcing and capacity of diasporic heritage practices. The decision to focus on these as lines of enquiry is informed by their particular potential to meet the ways in which Kachin people themselves engage in heritage, as established in Part Two. In terms of online activity,

as with many other communities, Facebook is the prime medium through which the global Kachin community communicates, including about culture and heritage, and could be more embedded in museum practices of cataloguing, research, dissemination and interpretation. Similarly, as the Kachin community uses YouTube to share cultural outputs such as cultural shows, music and church sermons, so too could museums make more use of this more personalised, less institutionalised medium. As described in 2.2, ‘Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora’, traditional forms of material culture are valued by the Kachin community less for their historic or aesthetic qualities than for the role they can play in mediating social relations. In this respect, museums could do more to value the social relations which surround objects and to enable museum objects to return, if even only temporarily, to social contexts such as community events. Similarly, to consider expanded modes of record would push museums to consider their collections and activities through a wider lens, and to work collaboratively on cultural and heritage projects which are led by the interests of diasporic stakeholders. A greater generosity with the use of museum space for events and gatherings directly addresses the lack of space cited as a barrier to cultural activities by many of my Kachin respondents and the proposed emphasis on supporting diaspora-led heritage initiatives is recognition of the many such activities emerging amongst overseas communities, especially those driven by young people in contexts of limited resources. Structural and systemic change will also be required of the museum and heritage sector to better meet the needs of their contemporary publics but, in a slow-moving sector, changes to practice can be more readily implemented, help shift the terms of the debate and ensure change can be implemented from the bottom-up, as well as the top-down.

Online collections and other content

Digital technologies have been heralded as a route out of the impasse generated by the historical legacies of imperialism and colonialism embedded in museums and their collections, and a key tool for the decolonization and indigenisation of museums (Srinivasan, Boast, Becvar and Enoté, 2010). Lifted out of the hegemonic space of the museum and made universally-accessible through their reconfiguration on the World Wide Web, collections materials are able to take on new roles and have new meanings in a world of supposedly flat social relations. As noted in 1.2, Clare Harris has argued that digital technologies offer a means through which “colonial constructions of ethnographic knowledge” can be dismantled (2013). Furthermore, she suggests that the museum use of these can promote the “diminution

of cultural authority and a levelling of the unequal power balances of the past” (2013). Iain Chambers has similarly noted how digital technologies can be used to enable:

a reconfiguration of the museum’s ethnographic patrimony: deepening discussion of the “ownership” of the object in question, and problematising the right to narrate the explanation, while expanding the prospects of connecting, identifying and “belonging” in an altogether more fluid set of archives and networks (2014, p.242).

However, the Web is not a utopian space but one which is subject to state surveillance and control. Harris, for example, does not mention that access to the Pitt Rivers Museum’s *Tibet Photo Album*—an online resource of digitised colonial-era photographs—by Tibetan users based in the People’s Republic of China, is restricted by state controls on search engines and Internet content. As described in 2.4, ‘Kachin culture and new media’, until recently similar controls inhibited access to online content for Internet users in Myanmar. Even when access is unrestricted, digital technologies cannot be presumed to be free from traditional, ethnocentric structures of knowledge and authority (McTavish, 2006).

An advantage of digital technologies, especially social media, is that these are, however, a preferred vehicle for communication within and across diaspora communities. As researchers on diasporic media have demonstrated (for example, Georgiou, 2006, and Brinkerhoff, 2009), the Internet has become a key site for diaspora identity projects, providing “spaces of communication in which the identity, meaning and boundaries of diasporic community are continually constructed, debated and reimagined” (Mandaville, 2001, p.169).

Given museums’ and diaspora communities’ shared interests in cultural preservation and maintenance, digital technologies offer a useful vehicle for realising a distributed museum. Alongside developing their own platforms, tools and publications, museums pursuing an acculturalist practice would work closely with non-institutional heritage partners to identify opportunities where museum resources might, through adaptation and adjustment, be able to enter the channels, or flows, of communications within a diaspora community, and *vice versa*. In the case of the James Henry Green collection, as the author has spent the last six years following Kachin Facebook users and become deeply familiar with Kachin use of this platform (as noted in 2.4, the main channel of communication for Kachins in Myanmar and overseas), a simple step for Brighton Museum would be to create an account dedicated to sharing images from the Green photographic collection.

As Amelia Wong has argued, museum-led social media initiatives can break down the barriers which inhibit use of museums and make “traditional-seeming institutions less intimidating and more regularly present in everyday life” (2012, p.281). Wong also suggests that these can provide “a form of open storage or open exhibition space” (2012, p.285). Certainly, the release of images from the collection by this dedicated Facebook account is likely to coincide with the normative pattern of social media use by Kachin people, and facilitate the wide sharing and re-appropriation of these archival images into Kachin social worlds. Sharing digitised collections resources can also prove an effective way of soliciting source community-held information about these through added online commentary (as in the case of the British Museum’s Object Journeys project with young Somalis) although it is less clear if and how this user-generated content is transferred back into the museum database (Marselis and Schütze, 2013).

While posting collections-related content on Facebook does not guarantee universal access, it is likely that it promotes wider access than the kinds of online collections databases which are a typical feature of museum websites but which primarily meet the needs of highly motivated and specialist users. Narrative content featured on museum websites, provided it has a good level of searchability, is more likely to be located by users, the majority of whom prefer to browse using search engines (Ofcom, 2018).¹⁵⁸ Importantly, it does not require knowledge of the institutional context to make it locatable. Statistics collected by Royal Pavilion & Museums (Figure 41) reveal that none of the top 25 search terms which took web users to Kachin-related content on its website included the words “Brighton” or “Museum”. These also underline the importance of good metadata, ideally including keywords in the target language (for example, *manau*).

¹⁵⁸ As Royal Pavilion & Museums’ Digital Projects Officer argues “narratives always beat data when appealing for attention” (Kevin Bacon, pers. comm., 1 December 2017).

Channels

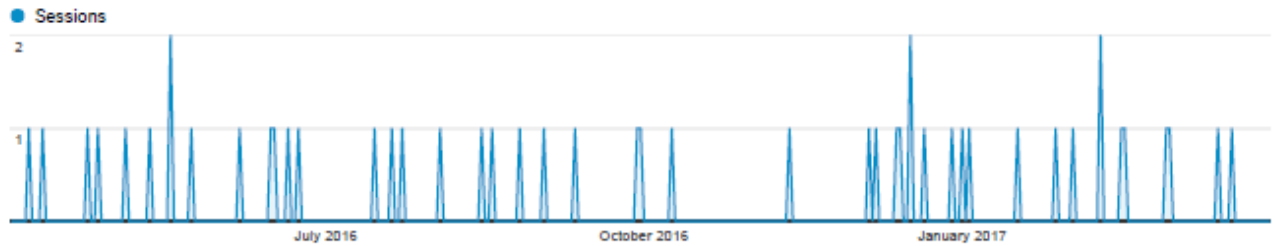
ALL » DEFAULT CHANNEL GROUPING: Organic Search

1 Apr 2016 - 31 Mar 2017

All Users
68.67% Sessions

Explorer

Summary



This data was filtered using an advanced filter.

Keyword	Landing Page	Acquisition			Behaviour			Conversions		
		Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	Goal Conversion Rate	Goal Completions	Goal Value
		45 % of Total: 0.01% (577,288)	88.46% Avg for View: 73.78% (19.90%)	38 % of Total: 0.01% (425,908)	59.62% Avg for View: 46.33% (28.68%)	1.81 Avg for View: 3.14 (-42.43%)	00:01:22 Avg for View: 00:02:13 (-38.10%)	0.00% Avg for View: 0.00% (0.00%)	0 % of Total: 0.00% (0)	£0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (£0.00)
1. kachin	/discover/2014/10/29/the-manau-a-festiva-l-celebrated-by-the-kachin-community-of-nort-hern-burma-myanmar/	5 (11.11%)	100.00%	5 (13.16%)	0.00%	2.60	00:00:44	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
2. kachin photo	/discover/tag/kachin/	5 (11.11%)	20.00%	1 (2.63%)	20.00%	4.20	00:01:32	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
3. kachin traditional house	/discover/2013/03/28/traditional-kachin-ho-uses/	5 (11.11%)	60.00%	3 (7.89%)	60.00%	1.20	00:01:05	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
4. about kachin manau how to write introduction	/discover/2014/10/29/the-manau-a-festiva-l-celebrated-by-the-kachin-community-of-nort-hern-burma-myanmar/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
5. history of kachin people of burma	/discover/2014/10/29/the-manau-a-festiva-l-celebrated-by-the-kachin-community-of-nort-hern-burma-myanmar/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
6. kachin architecture	/discover/2013/03/28/traditional-kachin-ho-uses/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
7. kachin burma	/discover/2014/10/29/the-manau-a-festiva-l-celebrated-by-the-kachin-community-of-nort-hern-burma-myanmar/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
8. kachin cultural dress	/discover/2013/10/11/kachin-day-of-solidarity-and-celebration/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
9. kachin festivals	/discover/2014/10/29/the-manau-a-festiva-l-celebrated-by-the-kachin-community-of-nort-hern-burma-myanmar/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)

10. kachin house	/discover/2013/03/28/traditional-kachin-houses/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	0.00%	2.00	00:03:13	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
11. kachin houses	/discover/2013/03/28/traditional-kachin-houses/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
12. kachin lisu models hd	/discover/2014/10/29/the-manau-a-festival-celebrated-by-the-kachin-community-of-northern-burma-myanmar/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	0.00%	2.00	00:00:09	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
13. kachin malaysia	/discover/2016/10/19/we-are-surviving-without-a-dream-kachin-refugees-in-kuala-lumpur/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
14. kachin manau dance	/discover/dmas_manau3_d01_540h450w/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
15. kachin ornament	/discover/learning/learning-themes/ancient-egypt/?cbid=btnrp_wa508684	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
16. kachin ornaments	/discover/learning/learning-themes/ancient-egypt/?cbid=btnrp_wa508684	1 (2.22%)	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
17. kachin paling wood house	/discover/2013/03/28/traditional-kachin-houses/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	0.00%	2.00	00:00:35	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
18. kachin people	/discover/2014/10/29/the-manau-a-festival-celebrated-by-the-kachin-community-of-northern-burma-myanmar/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
19. kachin people traditional dress	/discover/tag/kachin/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	0.00%	2.00	00:20:35	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
20. kachin propular man	/brighton/exhibitions-displays/willets-popular-pottery/willett-collection-of-popular-pottery?cbq=trinket island, nicobar islands, india, south asia, asia&cbp=35	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
21. kachin refugee school kuala lumpur	/discover/2016/10/19/we-are-surviving-without-a-dream-kachin-refugees-in-kuala-lumpur/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
22. kachin traditionak house	/discover/2013/03/28/traditional-kachin-houses/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
23. kachin traditional	/discover/2013/03/28/traditional-kachin-houses/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	0.00%	2.00	00:11:55	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
24. kachin traditional culture	/discover/2014/10/29/the-manau-a-festival-celebrated-by-the-kachin-community-of-northern-burma-myanmar/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	0.00%	2.00	00:00:21	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)
25. kachin traditional festival	/discover/2014/10/29/the-manau-a-festival-celebrated-by-the-kachin-community-of-northern-burma-myanmar/	1 (2.22%)	100.00%	1 (2.63%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)

Rows 1 - 25 of 33

Figure 41: Chart showing the keywords used in search engines which brought the Web-user to Kachin-related content hosted on Royal Pavilion & Museums' website.

Text and image are not the only kinds of content which can be distributed online. My conversations with Jinghpaw Tingsan, whose website is discussed in 2.4.1, ‘Alternative archives: Jinghpaw-language music in diaspora’, led to his suggestion that the Museum could promote wider access to its collections through creating short videos focussed on particular objects. These videos could then be posted on YouTube as well as embedded in the Museum’s website. These would be relatively simple to create and, as a means of disseminating collections information, much more closely aligned with Kachin-preferred means of sharing cultural knowledge. YouTube is often used by overseas Kachin communities to document cultural shows and church sermons, as well as to share pop videos.

There are, of course, risks to this approach. While generating potentially greater access to collections materials, the release of digital surrogates also risks the decontextualisation of these as they are cut adrift from the institution or collection which frames the original artefact. As was demonstrated earlier in the case of Snow City, in Lhasa’s Potala Palace, where reproductions of historic images of Tibetan aristocrats in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum were used to denounce former elites (Harris, 2013), and in the use of Green’s images in politicised presentations by KNO officers, reproduced images are also susceptible to recontextualisation and reappropriation in highly politicised ways which do not always sit comfortably with museums’ liberal mores. The successful use of digital technologies as part of an acculturalist museum practice will therefore depend on institutions’ willingness to be prepared to devolve curatorial authority and to become less protective of their assets. In particular, it will necessitate the release of digital surrogates free of copyright and intellectual property constraints, and the pursuance of Open Access policies wherever possible.¹⁵⁹ This is not to ride roughshod over indigenous protocols concerning access to cultural materials and information but to acknowledge that, where possible and appropriate, free access should be made to collections materials, especially where these intersect with the interests of diaspora communities. Museum content, in the form of collections material and information, should also be made easy to re-use or export, so as to facilitate non-museum use.

As the Kachin example has demonstrated, diaspora communities are developing a wide range of models for using digital technologies to pursue their aims of cultural preservation and

¹⁵⁹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art has set a new standard in this respect. In 2017 the Museum implemented a new Open Access policy, which makes images of artworks it believes to be in the public domain widely and freely available for unrestricted use, and at no cost, in accordance with the Creative Commons Zero (CC0) designation (The Met, 2017).

revitalisation. As well as supporting diaspora-led initiatives like those described in 2.4 ('Kachin culture and new media') through making their collections assets easy to access, export and re-use, an acculturalist museum practice would also look for digital initiatives which fulfil diasporic objectives around the visibility and preservation of cultural knowledge. The online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, offers one possible platform for equitable collaboration. Recognising the ethnocentrism of its own knowledge base, the Wikimedia Foundation has been actively encouraging diasporic activists to write and edit wikis relating to previously undocumented informational categories. Its London base is currently working in partnership with Kurdish activists, for example (Kurdish Wikipedia Project, n.d.). Access to relevant historical resources of the kind held in museums would add considerably to the profile of this kind of new content.

As well as making its existing collections materials easier to locate, share and re-purpose through the use of digital technologies, an acculturalist museum practice would also require a review and remodelling of museum collecting practices, to enable these to become more diaspora appropriate. Kimberly F. Keith has pointed to the tendency for museums to be object-oriented and community-based heritage organisations to be people-oriented (2012, p.52). What more can museums do to overcome this division?

Capturing the intangible

As this research project has demonstrated, for Kachin communities, historical visual and material culture of the kind found in museum collections gains its value from its intrinsic association with social relations. 'Culture' (*Jinghpaw wunpawng htunghking ningli*) in the understanding of those Kachin individuals I spoke, to was largely located in communal contexts and in intangible forms: coming together at church or at fundraising or cultural events, sharing faith, language and kinship, food and music. Objects were often a distinctive feature within this social environment but were simply a feature and not the 'main event'.

However, in these contexts, there was an appetite for employing authentic objects. For example, a characteristic feature of Thanksgiving (the Kachin harvest festival), is carrying traditional-style woven baskets (*shingnoi*) full of food, to make offerings at church. Similarly, the Kachin sword (*nhtu*) is carried by men dancing the *manau*. In diaspora, these objects are hard to source, having to be brought over specially by visitors from Myanmar. An acculturalist museum practice, then, would seek to return objects to context and, where

possible, to enable these to be employed within communal contexts by facilitating their loan to community gatherings. Balancing access with the requirements necessary to preserve objects is never easy but if museums are to recognise diaspora communities’ “special claims, needs or rights of access to material heritage held by museums” (Peers and Brown, 2003, p.2), then more must be done in this respect.

As well as returning objects to context, an acculturalist museum practice would also seek to return context to objects. As discussed in 2.2., ‘Making sense of Kachin culture through church and community’, members of overseas Kachin communities are interested in learning the ‘right’ way of following cultural protocols, for example in making dowries, conducting naming ceremonies (*Jahtawng Htu*), preparing certain kinds of culinary items, and leading the *manau* dance. As I note there, the correctness of these practices mattered to some communities more than others. Some efforts to meet this need are already underway. The #KachinLifeStories initiative, discussed in 2.4.2. has already tagged some short pieces of film relating to these cultural practices and a Kachin State-based cultural researcher, Marip Bawk San, has been filmed providing guidance regarding cultural protocols, for example, the correct way to tie a Kachin headcloth, how to make traditional forms of introduction and the *mayu-dama* system (Jinghpaw Wunpawng Htunghking Ningli - Kachin Culture, n.d.). As well as meeting the needs of Kachin diaspora communities, to work with Kachin agencies and individuals on the production of these kind of short films would also help recontextualise objects in the collection and develop both the museum’s, and its publics’, knowledge of these. These films would be shared in diaspora-appropriate ways, for example on Facebook and YouTube.

Expanded modes of record

An acculturalist practice would also necessitate the revision of museum collecting practices, practices little-changed from their nineteenth-century origins, being largely still based on the extraction of heritage items, the assertion of ownership over these items and presumption of the right to manage both the items and information associated with them. A diaspora-appropriate approach would expand the repertoire of museum collecting practices, facilitate the greater mobility of objects within and beyond museum spaces, and prioritise collecting initiatives which fulfil the agendas of both parties. This approach would also acknowledge the role of diasporas in cultural production: considering them cultural producers rather than

translators of cultural forms which draw their authority from an association with a putative originary homeland.

Expanding the repertoire of museum collecting practices will mean working closely with diaspora organisations and communities to find diaspora-appropriate ways of recording experiences of migration, displacement and transnationalism. This is unlikely to involve the collection of ‘things’ (experiences of displacement often being marked by a lack of things), and more likely to focus on the intangible: oral testimony, performance, music, food and dance. Moreover, in acknowledging the rich textures of diasporic lives, different, shared platforms will have to be identified through which music and sound can be brought into productive juxtaposition with objects, testimony and performance, in ways better reflective of the “dynamic forces of belonging and mobility” which characterise the diasporic experience (Wilkins Catanese, 2007, p.91).

A call for an expanded repertoire of collecting practices is not to completely negate the opportunities presented by more conventional modes of record, but it might be that—in dialogue with diasporic agencies—these take a different tack. Discussions with members of overseas Kachin communities in the course of this research project revealed a widely-held interest in recording the history of their community. The San Francisco Kachin Baptist Church webpage already carries a “brief history” of the Bay Area community (San Francisco Kachin Baptist Church, n.d.), for example, and *Kachinland News* has carried biographies of some key members of the diaspora (for example, an interview with “The first Kachin immigrant to the United States,” *Kachinland News*, 2015). Central points of interest in making these recordings are the founding of church organisations, and the progression towards community-ownership of a dedicated church building, which would indicate that the community had fully ‘arrived’ in the host country. While the recording of individual oral testimonies in a project aimed at documenting migration histories is relatively conventional, an acculturalist practice would be mindful of the agendas of the diaspora community in the collection and dissemination of data captured through such projects.

During the course of this research project other opportunities have emerged for pursuing a Kachin equivalent of the kind of ‘blended’ collection being developed by Emma Martin at World Museum Liverpool to document “what it means to be Tibetan in the twenty-first century” (8 May 2017). For example, the Museum might consider collecting the satirical illustrations of Zahkung Hkawng Gyung (‘Ko Z’), or examples of the photographic practice

of Hkun Lat and Hkun Li, whose work (discussed in 2.3.3) illuminates recent political and social contexts, many of which have contributed to outwards migration. The Museum could also consider collecting material cultures emerging from conditions of displacement—for example, knitted goods being produced in Internally Displaced Peoples camps on the Myanmar-China border and ‘Kachin-style’ garments being made by Kachin refugee women tailors in Kuala Lumpur—as well as those transnational cultural forms such as the popular printed calendar described in section 2.3. These opportunities have, on the whole, not yet been taken up as an acculturalist museum practice must also question the appropriateness of unilateral decision-making by museum curators. A revised museum practice, in contrast, will develop and implement collecting practices which are informed by collaboration and mutual understanding with the community who have historically constituted the subject of these practices.

Open up public space

While this thesis calls for the relativizing of museums, museum spaces and museum practices of preserving and interpreting cultural heritage, it does so in ways that are mindful of the enduring primacy of these organisations in public discourses about history, nation and identity. Despite—or, perhaps, in spite of—the many critiques of museums and their collections which view these as the symbolic embodiment of past inequities; the increased public empathy for repatriation requests from indigenous communities; and awareness of the political implications of cultural appropriation, museums have never seemed so central to public debate. As “essential forms through which to make statements about history, identity, value, and place and to claim recognition” (Kratz and Karp, 2006, p.4), the importance of these nineteenth-century creations seems to have little diminished and it is clear that the conventional museum space still has a utility in the contemporary era.

For these reasons, museums remain a central forum through which a “politics of recognition” (Taylor, 1992) might be enacted. For diaspora communities keen to claim visibility for themselves and their political agendas, access to museum spaces—literally and through representation—is a welcome opportunity. This was apparent in the *Kachin Day of Solidarity and Celebration* held at Brighton Museum (discussed in 2.2.1), and was a factor for many of the communities involved in the museum projects described in 3.2.1. Alongside a willingness, then, for museums to take their activities and collections into new directions and

new diaspora-appropriate flows of communication, there remains a need for them to open up their spaces for diasporic use. This might be one of the most difficult elements of an acculturalist practice for museums to enact. As has been discussed, museums regularly invite community partners into museum spaces for special events, to work on ‘co-curated’ displays or to participate in consultation exercises, but these initiatives are usually museum-driven and museum-managed. In these contexts, the museum constitutes an “invited space” (Fraser, 1990). Making museum spaces diaspora-appropriate will mean acknowledging the limitations of the public sphere as materialised through museum buildings and programmes, and creating space for what Nancy Fraser has identified as “subaltern counterpublics”: discursive arenas that develop in parallel to ‘official’ public spheres and “where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (1990, p.67). At a literal level this will involve greater flexibility on the part of the institution. For example, it may include a greater tolerance for the presence of food; food being a critical aspect of most community gatherings but generally prohibited from museum events on the basis of the conservation requirements of collections.

Contribute to the resourcing and capacity of diasporic heritage practices

As described above, non-authorized heritage agencies have been historically disadvantaged by a lack of access to the same resources as authorized heritage organisations. While diaspora communities have struggled to access arts or heritage funding and to secure the same platforms for raising the profile of the work that they do, in the United Kingdom the Heritage Lottery Fund has had considerable impact in this area. In taking a very wide view of heritage—one which encompasses buildings and monuments; landscapes, parks and nature; as well as “community heritage” and “cultures and memories” (Heritage Lottery Fund, n.d.)—and running grant schemes aimed at community-based organisations, the Fund has supported many diaspora-led heritage initiatives. Further research is required to establish the aims, scope and scale of these, as well as what the mainstream heritage sector can learn from them.

Beyond the intervention of the Heritage Lottery Fund, pursuing an acculturalist museum practice will mean acknowledging the disparity in the resources available to different kinds of heritage organisations and making a sectoral commitment to build resources and capacity within diaspora-led organisations so that future collaboration might develop on a more

equitable basis. In practice this might mean organising training and mentoring opportunities, sharing resources and providing funded commissions to undertake pieces of work or activity. While the impetus should be on boosting resources and capacity within the diaspora organisation, these opportunities should flow both ways. Developing familiarity with, and close cooperative working between mainstream and independent heritage organisations will rely on there being mentoring and training opportunities at both ends, rather than extension of the “beneficiary” model critiqued by Lynch (2011b, p.14).

In his discussion of acculturationalist strategies adopted by migrants, Eric M. Kramer uses the phrase “interaction potential” to refer to differences in individual or group acculturative processes (2010). In the museum context this potential can be heightened by close collaboration with diasporic intermediaries. Diasporic intermediaries are those activists whose perspective on Kachin culture is informed by time spent overseas and who are proactive in terms of cultural preservation and revitalisation activities. Kimberly F. Keith has advocated for the mutual benefits of partnerships between museums and community-based organisations, suggesting that this form of practice can bring together “an outsider’s perception with an insider’s access to create change in the museum’s narrative” (2012, p.49). Similarly, by establishing partnerships with diaspora-based cultural activists, the museum can benefit from working with individuals who are familiar with cultural institutions and yet able to offer insight into their heritage culture.

Diasporic intermediaries can have impact on cultural activities in both host and home country. The examples given in 2.2, ‘Making sense of Kachin culture in diaspora’, and 2.4, ‘Kachin culture and new media’, give a sense of the diverse range of cultural activities being driven by activists based in diaspora. Returning diasporic intermediaries are having a visible impact on the revitalisation of Kachin culture and heritage within Myanmar. In Kachin State this is evident in the curricula offered by the Shatapru-based Humanities Institute, which was established by the Singapore-educated Kachin man Nbyen Dan Hkung Awng, and at the Mai Ja Yang Institute of Education, which was for several years led by the United States-educated Kachin woman Maran Ja Htoi Pan. The Institute’s Pre-College Program, for example, includes the need for students to “learn the Kachin language, traditional culture knowledge and intercultural competency” (Mai Ja Yang Institute of Education, 2016).

These interactions are not without risk or challenge. The description of the interaction between the United Kingdom-based Kachin man Gumring Hkangda and Brighton Museum

given in 1.5, 'Making representations: Museum interactions with Kachin communities', reveals the increased "interaction potential" generated through the Museum's relationship with a diasporic intermediary. However, it also highlights the extent to which these interactions can expose tensions, as the diasporic intermediary has to negotiate the internal power dynamics created through the diaspora experience. While these need to be carefully worked through and considered, it is clear that there are significant benefits to be had from purposeful interactions between museums and diaspora-based cultural activists.

Conclusion

Over the course of this research project (2013-2018), migration has continued to move up the political agenda, prompted in part by the large numbers of people undertaking treacherous journeys from northern Africa to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea. Museums in the United Kingdom have already started to formulate responses to what has been seen as a migration 'crisis'. The British Museum, for example, acquired the 'Lampedusa cross', a cross made from pieces of a boat that was wrecked off the coast of Italy in 2013. The Horniman Museum acquired part of 'Boat 195', which set off from Libya in 2013, and, in 2016, The Manchester Museum collected a refugee's life jacket from the Greek island of Lesbos. Without wishing to negate the symbolic importance of these acquisitions, the conclusions of this research project point towards the benefits of a deeper and more holistic museum engagement with experiences of migration.

This, final, section has highlighted the imperatives for a shift which would move the 'burden' of acculturation from migrants and migrant communities to museums. Rather than making isolated gestures, which reinforce the notion of migration as a singular moment of crisis, an acculturalist museum practice would seek to make the fundamental adjustments and adaptations necessary to embed the migration experience. In contrast to the tendency of museums to "simplify the complex instabilities of the diasporic experience by reducing the diasporic subject to the frozen, one-dimensional identity of the 'immigrant'" (Ien Ang, 2011, pp.89-90), the kinds of sustained engagements with diaspora communities and heritage organisations generated through the distributed museum model would allow for the privileging of "differentially located practices, centred on different subject-positions" (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, 2013, p. 156). The modes of practice proposed above would enable museums to deliver the conditions, called for by Ien Ang, through which "a more

transgressive, transnational, multi-local diasporic imagination where the experience of displacement as such—the movement across different places—becomes more central” (2011, p.92). This work, which will not be without its frictions and dilemmas, is an essential strategy for those institutions wishing to better align themselves with their stakeholders and to articulate the changes in practice needed to serve an increasingly transnational public.

3.4 Conclusion: Museums and Diaspora

If cultural institutions like museums are to be viewed as sites and agents for social relevance and for democratic practices, engagement would entail less the idea of institutions reaching out and including others to ensure that visitors participate, and more of the idea that participants will assert their own agency, and make their own choices in the way they use culture and heritage as a resource (Ashley, 2014, p.263).

This thesis has addressed the intersections between museums and diaspora communities, arguing that this hitherto under-examined relationship is likely to play a larger role in the future. It has used the example of the relationship between Kachin people and Brighton Museum & Art Gallery to reflect on the opportunities and constraints generated through these engagements. As this relationship developed over a period of two decades—a period which witnessed significant demographic changes amongst Kachin populations—it has provided a useful case study through which to highlight some of the complexities of museum work with communities displaced from their territorial base.

While it was once presumed that minority cultural practices would be eroded and eventually subsumed through migrant's assimilation into a host society, this study has demonstrated that diaspora constitutes a highly productive place for culture. In particular, it has shown how young and second-generation migrants are forging new and distinctive ways of preserving and maintaining cultural practices. For these individuals—who find themselves “in-between” (KABA, 2016, 01:24)—museums can provide a unique site and resource through which to explore their relationship to their heritage culture. As Peter Mandaville has observed, “the estrangement of a community in diaspora—its separation from the ‘natural’ setting of the homeland—often leads to a particularly intense search for and negotiation of identity” (2001, p.172) and this study recommends that facilitating this search and negotiation be considered part of the mandate of contemporary museums, especially those holding ethnographic collections.

This study has also highlighted that this identity work remains for many young and second-generation migrants a compelling but complex activity; complex in that it invariably involves having to reconfigure one's relationship to those institutions which have provided the foundation stones of the community in its original location. For young Kachins, for example, this means having to establish a position “outside of the auspices of the establishment” (Kachin-American *Ramma*, 2016b) of elders and of organisations like the Kachin

Independence Organisation and Kachin Baptist Convention: those institutions which have traditionally made representations on behalf of the Kachin community. In this sense, the study's findings support James Clifford's characterisation of diaspora communities as "interpretative communities where critical alternatives ... can be expressed" (1994, p.315). As secular, public institutions invested with the responsibility to care for, and promote access to sets of cultural materials, museums can provide a socially relevant space for grassroots heritage activity which includes this kind of identity work. They can offer a place to gather, to engage with historic collections materials, to stage events and to undertake research and creative activity outside the usual structures that govern the community's representations.

As well as providing a physical location for exploratory and discursive grassroots heritage work, this study has emphasised the extent to which museums function as a symbolic space; a place where a "politics of recognition" might be enacted (Taylor, 1992). As noted, museums' historic relationship with the nation has proved hard to disentangle and while much of current museum practice strives for inclusion, access and engagement, at a symbolic level the museum remains a proxy for the nation, with all its attendant biases and exclusions. For diaspora communities seeking to progress ethno-nationalist agendas in the absence of a nation state (as in the case of Tibetan and Kachin populations), museum representation can help secure a foothold in the imagined world of nations, one helpful to their political goals. This was highlighted in the words of the Horniman Museum project participant who observed: "For Tibet, it's much better to display [the objects] in a museum rather than hidden somewhere or lost, because historical object, it's our identity, in some way it's symbolic of our culture and our tradition" (Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2013). Moreover, as the project led by the Congolese community demonstrated, the symbolic function of museums can also help return status and cultural authority to those divested of these through the process of migration and exile.

These purposes—museum as social space, museum as symbolic space—both have value for diaspora communities. This is not to say that their utilisation is straightforward. While advocating for the model of a distributed museum to be achieved through a diaspora-appropriate museum method, this study has also drawn attention to the obstacles which have frustrated progress to date. While, as demonstrated in 3.2., museums recognise and value the contribution that their engagements with diaspora communities can generate, the terms on which this contribution is made is often carefully managed by the institution. Members of

diaspora communities are welcomed by the museum for their ability to demonstrate the relevance of colonial collections; to act as ‘communities of interpretation’ which can help mediate museum visitors’ encounters with objects from culturally diverse contexts; to add authenticity to museum interpretations, and to provide evidence that the museum is delivering on its social purpose. However, the disconnect between historic museum collections and contemporary communities, and the risk to project participants of having their efforts co-opted in order to maintain the legitimacy of the collecting institution means that this work must be progressed slowly and carefully. A further obstacle is that while political activism provides the framework through which many young and second-generation migrants engage with their heritage culture, in order to protect its own claims of authority and neutrality, the museum has typically required that political agendas are left at the door.

While progress will be slow, this study concludes that there is significant opportunity for the development of long-term, productive partnerships between museums and diaspora communities: partnerships which are established on an equitable basis and which offer mutual benefits. These are a necessary complement and condition to the work that museums must do to enable diaspora-based researchers and activists to “assert their own agency, and make their own choices in the way they use culture and heritage as a resource” (Ashley, 2014, p.263). Only through enacting an acculturalist mode of practice might museums meet the moral, ethical and political imperatives for them to become diaspora-appropriate.

In conclusion, this study has made an original contribution to knowledge in highlighting the “potentialities” of diaspora (Tsagarousianou, 2004, p.58) for museums, and in setting out strategies through which a diaspora-appropriate museum practice might be implemented. In its choice of case study, it has also contributed new findings to as yet scant work on Burmese transnationalisms and advocated for greater attention to the cultural, as well as political, influence of these. Lines of future enquiry include detailed evaluations of the experiences of museum project participants who identify with diaspora communities, and of diaspora-community driven heritage initiatives. The latter should also include further research on cultural developments amongst overseas Kachin communities not considered in this thesis and on those of other Burmese minorities, so as to assess the extent to which the examples discussed here might be considered indicative of broader developments. Mindful of the recommendations of this project for developing an acculturalist practice, any future research should be planned and undertaken in close partnership with those who form its subjects.

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Appendix 1: Details of interviewees

Interviewee code	Interviewee name	Full / alternative name	Date of interview	Place of interview	M/F	Date of birth	Place of birth
M - 1	Mandy Sadan		15 December 2013	UK	F	not known	not known
UK - 1	Hkanhpa Tu Sadan		15 December 2013	UK	M	03/12/1973	Du Ka Htawng, Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
M - 2	Lisa Maddigan		4 February 2014	UK	F	not known	not known
M - 3	Elizabeth Dell		6 April 2014	UK	F	not known	not known
UK - 2	Hkun Nawng	Kyang Bawm Lagwi	4 October 2014	UK	M	27/06/1982	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
UK - 3	Zau Lahpai	Zau Sinli Lahkum-Lahpai	8 November 2014	UK	M	1973	Namhtu, Northern Shan State, Myanmar
M - 4	Louise Tythacott		20 November 2014	UK	F	not known	not known
UK - 4	Hkun Sa Mahkaw	Mung Shawng Mahkaw	22 November 2014	UK	M	1953	Pakokku, Magway Division, Myanmar
UK - 4	Hkun Sa Mahkaw	Mung Shawng Mahkaw	06 December 2014	UK	M	1953	Pakokku, Magway Division, Myanmar
UK - 5	Kai Htang Lashi		27 December 2014	UK	F	not known	Lashio, Northern Shan State, Myanmar
SF - 1	Hkangda Brawng Awng		18 March 2015	USA	M	not known	Northern Shan State, Myanmar
SF - 2	Howa Ja La		21 March 2015	USA	M	27/11/1934	Howa, Northern Shan State, Myanmar
SF - 3	Reverend Hkangda Naw San Dee		22 March 2015	USA	M	not known	Northern Shan State, Myanmar
SF - 4	Shadan Zau Awng	Hkapraw Duwa	24 March 2015	USA	M	not known	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
SF - 5	K Kai Din		24 March 2015	USA	F	1985	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
SF - 6	Lashi Bawk Lu		24 March 2015	USA	F	1957	Northern Shan State, Myanmar
SF - 7	Withheld		28 March 2015	USA	F	1990	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
SF - 8	Withheld		04 April 2015	USA	F	1984	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
SF - 9	Ja Seng Mai		04 April 2015	USA (by phone)	F	not known	not known
SF - 10	Hpaung Hkawng San	San	07 April 2015	USA	F	not known	Northern Shan State, Myanmar
SF - 11	Reverend Zauya Lahpai		08 April 2015	USA (by phone)	M	not known	Kutkai, Northern Shan State, Myanmar
SF - 12	Nu Nu N-Dawng		08 April 2015	USA	F	not known	Northern Shan State, Myanmar
UK - 6	Gumring Hkangda		10 July 2015	UK	M	1985	Lashio, Northern Shan State, Myanmar
N - 1	Brang Awng Shabau		09 August 2015	Netherlands	M	1983	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
M - 1	Ja Htoi Pan Maran		14 August 2015	UK	F	not known	not known
J - 1	Jap Bu Ra Lu		18 October 2015	Netherlands	F	1994	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
CM - 1	Bawnwang Ja Raw	Kaw Kaw / Valerie	09 April 2016	Thailand (by phone)	F	1980	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
N - 1	Withheld	Jinghpaw Tingsan (pseudonym)	27 August 2017	Netherlands	M	27/04/1982	Kutkai, Northern Shan State, Myanmar
KL - 1	Tsumhka La Seng		30 July 2016	Malaysia	M	26/04/1985	Injyangang Township, Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
KL - 2	Labang Ja Seng Pan		30 July 2016	Malaysia	F	07/04/1984	Indawgyi region, Kachin State, Myanmar
KL - 3	Rev. Lashi Brang Awng		30 July 2016	Malaysia	M	16/12/1970	Kamai sub-township, Kachin State, Myanmar
KL - 4	Withheld		31 July 2016	Malaysia	M	17/11/1987	Putao, Kachin State, Myanmar
KL - 5	Withheld		01 August 2016	Malaysia	M	25/12/1992	Waingmaw Township, Kachin State
KL - 6	Withheld		01 August 2016	Malaysia	F	01/02/1990	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
KL - 7	Withheld		01 August 2016	Malaysia	M	1985	Kutkai, Northern Shan State, Myanmar
KL - 8	Tu Mai Sabaw		01 August 2016	Malaysia	M	29/05/1989	Sin Lum Village, Bhamo Township, Kachin State, Myanmar
KL - 9	Htoi San Simpraw		02 August 2016	Malaysia	F	13/12/1990	Mogaung Township, Mohayin District, Kachin State, Myanmar
KL - 10	Nang Htu Maran		02 August 2016	Malaysia	F	01/09/1979	Bhamo Township, Kachin State, Myanmar
KL - 11	Pan Seng Kha Khrang	Chris Kha Khrang	03 August 2016	Malaysia	F	12/09/1985	Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
KL - 12	Rev. Sunlut Tang Awng		03 August 2016	Malaysia	M	26/11/1964	Kengtung, Shan State, Myanmar
KL - 13	Withheld		10 August 2016	Malaysia	M	02/02/1981	Du Ka Htawng, Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar
M - 5	Tom Crowley		24 March 2017	UK (by phone)	M	not known	not known
M - 6	Johanna Zettlers tröm-Sharp		05 April 2017	UK	F	not known	not known
M - 7	Stephen Welsh		08 May 2017	UK	M	not known	not known
M - 8	Emma Martin		08 May 2017	UK	F	not known	not known

Appendix 2: Checklist of interview topics

Example list of topics used as a prompt for discussion in interviews with Kachin individuals.

Interviewee's background

- Where and when born
- Family – family members, parents' occupations
- Family history – grandparents / conversion to Christianity
- Faith and relationship to the church / participation in church youth groups, etc.
- Memories of special occasions – Christmas, Thanksgiving, mothers' day, etc.
- Educational experiences – school, matriculation, college

Political changes affecting life in Myanmar

- Perceptions of how bigger political developments in Myanmar affected the interviewee and their family / the Kachin community
- Changes following the 1994 ceasefire agreement
- Impact of the breakdown of the ceasefire in June 2011

Leaving Myanmar

- Journeys undertaken by others in the interviewee's community / friendship group
- Motivations / plans for leaving Myanmar
- Journey undertaken

Living in Kuala Lumpur

- Access to education / employment / healthcare / accommodation
- UNHCR programme
- Role of the church for KL's Kachin community – special occasions, community events, summer school
- Role of other Kachin organisations – Kachin Learning Centre, etc.
- Cultural activities – *Ja La Ha*, etc.
- Political campaigning – including for IDPs / around recent conflict
- Communications with family and friends – Facebook / Viber?
- Contact with Overseas Kachin Baptist Convention (OKBC)

Personal perspectives on cultural heritage

- Language (*Jinghpaw*, other minority language(s)?)
- Faith
- Food – preparing traditional foods, sharing food
- Special occasions – baby naming, weddings
- Dress – wearing Kachin dress
- Music / film / other media
- Role of family / community